

The relationship between emotional labor and burnout in direct sales representatives – a pilot study

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Abstract

Special attention has been paid lately to the emotional component of the job, especially concerning “people work” jobs, such as health care, social services work, teaching or sales. On the other hand, affective outcomes have been linked to burnout. Therefore, the current study seeks to investigate the extent to which emotional labor strategies result in burnout for employees who work in direct sales. The study was conducted using a survey method of 107 bank tellers. The results confirmed the fact that expressing organizationally desired emotions while interacting with customers is emotionally taxing. Significant correlations were found not only concerning the scores for emotional labor strategies and core burnout, but also between the respective subscales. The regression analysis indicated the intensity of emotions being regulated in service encounters as the best predictor for burnout in the case of the sample in discussion. Likewise, in a second model, the variety of emotions required in work settings as part of the work role together with the intensity subscale account for approximately 20% of the variance in burnout. Performance did not show the expected relationship with burnout and emotional labor. These findings represent a basis for new antecedents on the implications of emotional labor in the Romanian workplace.

Keywords: emotional labor, burnout, COR, emotional dissonance, emotional intelligence, people work, performance

Résumé

La dimension émotionnelle du lieu de travail a été récemment en premier plan, notamment en termes de professions qui impliquent des interactions directes avec d'autres personnes, comme ces du domaine médical, de l'assistance sociale, de l'éducation et des ventes. D'autre part, les effets affectifs ont été associés avec le burnout. À partir de ces questions, la présente étude essaye de déterminer comme l'utilisation des stratégies du travail émotionnel peut conduire à le burnout. L'étude a été accomplie par enquête à base de questionnaire pour 107 employés de la banque. Les résultats ont confirmé que l'affichage des émotions désirées par l'organisation dans l'interaction avec les clients est émotionnellement coûteux. Ont trouvé des corrélations significatives dans les scores pour les deux stratégies du travail émotionnel et burnout et aussi pour les sous-échelles.

L'intensité des émotions affichées au travail a été le meilleur prédicteur du burnout, comme il été révélé par l'analyse de régression. Tout, la variété des émotions avec l'intensité des émotions qui sont demandées au travail expliquent environ 20% de la variance pour burnout. Performance n'a pas montré la relation attendue avec le burnout et le travail émotionnel. Ces résultats représentent un point de départ pour des nouveaux antécédents sur les implications de l'utilisation du travail émotionnel dans l'environnement organisationnel roumaine.

Mots-clés : travail émotionnel, burnout, la théorie de conservation des ressources, dissonance émotionnelle, intelligence émotionnelle, professions impliquant des interactions directes avec d'autres personnes, performance

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Rezumat

Componenta emoțională a locului de muncă a fost în prim-plan în ultima perioadă, în special în ceea ce privește ocupațiile care presupun interacțiuni directe cu alte persoane, precum cele din domeniul medical, al asistenței sociale, educațional sau al vânzărilor. Pe de altă parte, efectele de ordin afectiv au fost asociate cu burnout-ul. Pornind de la aceste aspecte, studiul de față încearcă să determine măsura în care utilizarea strategiilor de muncă emoțională poate duce la burnout în cazul celor care lucrează în vânzări directe. Studiul a fost realizat utilizând ancheta pe bază de chestionar în cazul a 107 de agenți bancari. Rezultatele au confirmat faptul că afișarea emoțiilor dorite de organizație în cadrul interacțiunii cu clienții este costisitoare din punct de vedere afectiv. S-au găsit corelații semnificative nu numai la nivelul scorurilor pentru strategiile de muncă emoțională și burnout ci și la nivelul subscalelor. Analiza de regresie a indicat intensitatea emoțiilor reglate în cazul interacțiunilor de la locul de muncă drept cel mai bun predictor pentru burnout în cazul eșantionului analizat. În aceeași măsură, în cadrul unui al doilea model, varietatea emoțiilor cerute la locul de muncă împreună cu intensitatea acestora explică aproximativ 20% din varianță. În cazul performanței nu s-au înregistrat corelații semnificative cu burnoutul și munca emoțională. Aceste rezultate reprezintă un punct de plecare pentru noi antecedente privind implicațiile pe care utilizarea muncii emoționale le are în mediul organizațional românesc.

Cuvinte cheie: muncă emoțională, burnout, teoria conservării resurselor, disonanță emoțională, inteligență emoțională, ocupații care presupun interacțiuni directe cu alte persoane, performanță

Introduction

Emotions in work settings represented a recurrent issue in the 1930s, but from this point forward the interest towards the emotional dynamics in work and organizations diminished. Despite that, Rafaeli, Semmer and Tschan (n.d.) note that there were two exceptions from the main rationale-cognitive approach of organizational behavior: the study of job satisfaction, which was seen as an affective reaction and the research on stress at work, which was primarily related to negative emotions (Lazarus & Cohen-Charash, 2001). The end of the 20th century was marked by such a surge in the academic interest in emotions in the workplace, that Barsade, Brief and Spataro proclaimed the “affective revolution” (Rafaeli et al., n.d.).

One of the pillars of this revolution was the concept of *emotional labor*, which was first conceptualized by the American sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1979, 2003). Once launched in the “academic market” it became a privileged issue. Researchers seemed to try and determine whether emotional labor was to open new directions in understanding organizational behavior or it was “just another buzz word” (Hunter & Smith, 2007). Therefore, beginning with *The Managed Heart* (Hochschild, 1983) a wide range of studies were conducted in order to describe the concept of emotional labor and its

outcomes, among which the most frequently approached were burnout or job satisfaction and performance (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Grandey, 2000, 2003; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Pugliesi, 1999 etc).

Emotional labor was initially studied in the service context, which was seen as the “prototypical emotional labor work” (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Adopting Goffman’s dramaturgical perspective, Hochschild considered service encounters as a performance directed by the organization (Grandey, 2003). This performance implies impression management in order to achieve organizational goals, such as client satisfaction and return business. Since the interpersonal aspect of the job is taken into consideration (the customer-client relationship) and as emotions are an important part of communication, the “management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” urges (Hochschild, 2003, p. 7). The main difference between emotion work – the term proposed by Hochschild in a first stage of her study (1979) and emotional labor is the fact that the later has exchange value, since it is sold for a wage, while the former is used in private life and therefore has use value.

Furthermore, Hochschild proposed two main ways of managing emotions in the workplace in order to meet the specified display

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rules: *surface acting* (regulating the emotional expressions) and *deep acting* (modifying inner feelings) (Hochschild, 2003). These processes are effortful and, when organizations get to control something as personal as employees' emotions, the commoditization of emotions intervenes and it can lead to unpleasant consequences (Hochschild, 1979).

As one can see from the discussion above, Hochschild's conceptualization of emotional labor mainly refers to the management of feelings. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), in exchange, are more concerned about the expressions. They define emotional labor as "the act of displaying appropriate emotions with the goal to engage in a form of impression management for the organization" (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993, p. 89). Hence, the focus moves on the observable behavior.

Morris and Feldman (1996) moved even further and approached the concept of emotional labor taking into account the characteristics of the job. From an interactional point of view, they described emotional labor as "the effort, the planning and control needed to express organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions" (Morris & Feldman, 1996, p. 987). Emotional labor was seen as consisting of four dimensions: the frequency of interactions, attentiveness (intensity of emotions and duration of interaction), variety of emotions required – representing the organizational expectations for employees in their interactions with clients, and emotional dissonance (an internal state of tension due to the demand of performing emotional labor regardless of what the employee truly feels).

Morris and Feldman's description of the dimensional structure of emotional labor was contended by Kruml and Geddes (2000), who claimed that some dimensions, such as the frequency or the duration of service interactions are rather job characteristics and not emotional labor as such. Instead, Kruml and Geddes supported in their study (2000) a two-dimensional structure of the construct, viewed as emotive dissonance and emotive effort. In fact, the multidimensional structure of emotional labor was posited even earlier, by Wharton (1993). Brothridge and Lee, in their conceptualization and

scale development (1998), viewed emotional labor as consisting in six dimensions: duration and frequency of service encounters, variety and intensity of emotions displayed and deep and surface acting as emotion regulation strategies.

Considering all the theories on emotional labor presented up to now, Grandey (2000) notes that, despite the differences in defining the process, there is a commonality: the assumption that emotional labor involves regulating one's emotions and emotional expressions in order to be consistent with organizational display rules. On this basis, Grandey (2000) formulated an integrated model of emotional labor, as the process of regulating both feelings and expressions in order to meet the organizational goals. In doing so, she started from Gross's model of emotion regulation (1998b).

Since in most theories on emotion, the term is usually associated with a physiological arousal and cognitive appraisal of the situation, Gross (1998b) identifies two strategies of emotion regulation: antecedent-focused emotion regulation and response-focused emotion regulation. The first strategy implies that individuals can regulate the antecedents of emotion, such as the situation or the appraisal. But, as in service jobs there are no options such as choosing or modifying the situation, Grandey suggests that changing the focus of personal thoughts and changing external appraisals of the situation (attention deployment and cognitive change, in Gross's terms) are antecedent-focused emotion regulation types that are similar to Hochschild's deep acting. In the same manner, response-focused emotion regulation, understood as modifying expression either by faking or by enhancing nonverbal signs of emotion, corresponds to Hochschild's surface acting.

Grandey (2000) also emphasizes that the perception itself of the organizational expectations regarding certain emotional displays will lead to a higher degree of management of emotions by the employee. And there are three distinct types of emotional work requirements, as shown by Jones and Best (1995) and Wharton and Erickson (1993): integrative emotional work requirements (it is the case of front-line workers who have to "service with a smile"); differentiating emotional work requirements

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(bill collectors or law enforcement officers, for example, have to display negative emotions); masking emotional work requirements (controlling emotions such as in the case of judges or therapists).

From the very beginning, there was a clear distinction between genuinely felt emotions and surface acting and deep acting as emotional labor strategies. Hochschild (2003, p. 36) suggested that “feelings do not erupt spontaneously or automatically in either deep acting or surface acting. In both cases the actor has learned to intervene either in creating the inner shape of a feeling or in shaping the outward appearance of one”. That is why, later on, Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) characterized the two processes as “faking” mechanisms. There is though a difference in terms of “faith” between deep acting (seen as “faking in good faith”, since the intention of the actor is to seem authentic) and surface acting (described as “faking in bad faith”, since what motivates the actor to conform to display rules is not helping the customers or the organization, but rather the personal goal of keeping the job). Furthermore, Zapf (2002) referred to a third way of performing emotional labor, which he named automatic regulation (when the employee automatically displays an organizationally desired emotion deriving from an emotion that is spontaneously felt). The expression of naturally felt emotions as a distinct strategy for displaying emotions at work was also acknowledged by Diefendorff, Croyle and Gosserand (2005).

Totterdell and Holman argued that “not all emotion regulation at work is done in the service of emotional labor” (2003, p. 71), but as Grandey and Brotheridge posited (2002) whether one uses job-focused emotional labor or employee-focused emotional labor, the effort of regulating emotions is still meeting workplace demands.

Further, theorists were also interested in determining the direction of emotion regulation. From this point of view, emotion amplification and emotion suppression were identified as the core paths in managing emotional displays in order to be consistent with organizational display rules (Hochschild, 2003; Levenson, 1994b). While emotion amplification consists in initiating or enhancing public displays of emo-

tion, the suppression implies reducing or eliminating the displays of emotion. However, Diefendorff and Greguras (2009) offered a critical view of this approach, contextualizing emotional display rules on the basis of the assumption that these are more complex and nuanced than it has been considered in prior research. Their findings supported the hypothesis that most employees characterize their display rules as involving something other than complete expression or suppression, such as qualifying, masking or amplifying (which differ in terms of intensity of the emotion expressed).

Regardless of the strategy used or the direction of this strategy it is certain that employees invest a certain amount of emotional effort in their jobs trying to meet the requirements of displaying the appropriate emotions. Therefore, the expression of emotion, once a personal decision, has become “a marketplace commodity with standards and rules dictating how and when emotion should be expressed” (Morris & Feldman, 1996).

Up to this point one can see that emotional labor cannot be discussed as a dichotomous variable (in terms of presence/absence), but it has to be considered in its multiple dimensions and with focus on the different strategies of emotion regulation available, the direction of the emotional expression or even the specific emotions that are being regulated. These issues influence, further on, the study of the consequences of emotional labor, since the above-mentioned aspects (taken together or not) may have distinct impacts on workers (Pugliesi, 1999). Considering the individual variable, there are people who self-select occupations that require particular types of emotional labor (Shuler & Sypher, 2000).

In analyzing the possible outcomes of emotional labor, we shall infer, together with Tolich (1993) that emotional labor can be both alienating and liberating. Hence, regulating emotions in work settings in order to meet specific organizational display rules can have either negative or positive consequences for employees.

The major tendency in research was to determine the extent to which emotional labor is taxing in people work. A comparison between the emotions generally experienced in the workplace

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and those experienced in private life revealed that people tend to feel more often negative emotions at work than at home (Rafaeli et al., n.d.). Consistent with these findings, emotional labor was mainly related to negative attitudinal, psychological and behavioral outcomes for employees. That is why special attention has been paid to the relationship between emotional labor and burnout, as a specific form of job stress.

The association of the two variables was first suggested by Hochschild (2003). Further on, Hochschild's view that organizational control of emotional displays is inherently stressful has received mixed support in both qualitative and quantitative studies (Morris & Feldman, 1996; Pugliesi, 1999; Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, Fisk & Steiner, 2005). Morris and Feldman (1996) similarly found that emotional labor and emotional exhaustion correlate positively among debt collectors, military recruiters and nurses. In another study, Pugliesi (1999) showed that emotional labor was significantly and positively related to job stress and increased psychological distress. Therefore, the main hypothesis of the current study is:

H1. Emotional labor, namely the two emotion regulation mechanisms that it implies (surface acting and deep acting) will positively correlate with core burnout in the case of a sample of Romanian bank tellers.

Kruml and Geddes (2000) showed that individuals experience stress when they fake emotion, rather than genuinely expressing what they feel, since there appears the so-called emotional dissonance process. In fact, emotional dissonance was associated from the very beginning with emotional labor, more precisely with surface acting, being described as an aversive psychological state which implies experiencing a sense of discrepancy between "the real self and the socially presented self" (Hochschild, 2003, p. 90).

Whether it is seen as a discrete dimension of emotional labor (Kruml & Geddes, 2000) or an independent process resulting from the clash between authentic and required feelings (Hochschild, 2003; Zapf, 2002), emotional dissonance represents a key factor in exploring the relationship between emotional labor and

burnout. In this respect, Bakker and Heuven (2006) argued that the equivocal evidence for the relationship between emotional job demands and burnout might be attributable to the fact that emotional dissonance plays a mediating role in this relationship. Their findings showed that as a result of the emotionally charged interactions with patients and civilians, nurses and police officers experience a discrepancy between felt and displayed emotions which, in turn, leads to emotional exhaustion and cynicism.

In field studies emotional dissonance was correlated with surface acting, but not with deep acting (Glomb & Tews, 2004; Holman, Chissick, & Totterdell, 2002). Further on, this means that emotional dissonance predicts a positive association between surface acting and strain and, accordingly, no association between deep acting and strain. Self-reports of emotional dissonance were related to burnout, anxiety, depression, and job dissatisfaction, as shown by Abraham (1999), Glomb and Tews (2004), Holman et al. (2002), Kruml and Geddes (2000), Morris and Feldman (1996), Zapf et al. (1999), but also job involvement (Kruml & Geddes, 2000) and personal accomplishment (Zapf et al., 1999).

Morris and Feldman (1996) supported that emotional dissonance is also determined by positive and negative affectivity. That is, when the organizationally desirable emotions conflict with employee's affectivity (positive or negative), emotional dissonance may occur. Brotheridge and Lee (1998) argued that affectivity influences emotional labor through the range and intensity of emotions displayed, meaning that individuals with high levels of affectivity may find it more difficult to surface act or deep act, compared to low-affect intense individuals. Later on, Johnson (2004) acknowledged that positive affectivity moderates the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion, meaning that individuals with high scores at positive affectivity tend to experience emotional exhaustion to a greater extent when engaging more in surface acting.

But Johnson's study examined the influence of affectivity in the case of service jobs that required only the expression of positive emotions (integrative emotional work requirements,

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in Wharton & Erickson's (1993) terms). In a series of studies (Diener & Larsen; Higginson; Larsen & Kettalar as cited in Elfenbein, 2007) it was reported that individuals high in positive affectivity are more focused externally on promoting positive outcomes, whereas those high in negative affectivity are more focused internally on preventing negative outcomes. Hence, the prevalence of positive, respectively negative affectivity determines the regulatory strategy used (promotion or prevention).

Mikolajczak, Menil and Luminet (2007) introduced the construct of negative consonance to describe another form of discrepancy – that between felt and expressed emotions and organizational display rules. To put it otherwise, there are situations when employees choose to ignore the emotional work requirements and express their true feelings. Furthermore, the authors found evidence that negative consonance and burnout are positively associated, the same trend being specific to the relationship between negative consonance and somatic complaints (as physiological components of job-related stress).

Other researchers used moderating variables such as job resources (de Jonge, le Blanc, Peeters & Noordam 2008), personal control (Grandey, Fisk & Steiner, 2005) or gender and emotional intelligence (Johnson, 2004) in exploring the relationship between emotional labor and burnout. So, burnout (in terms of its core dimensions – emotional exhaustion and depersonalization/cynicism, as acknowledged in a series of studies: Bakker, 2009; Bussing & Glaser, 2000; Demerouti & Bakker, 2008; Shirom, 2009; Taris, Le Blanc, Schaufeli & Schreurs, 2005) was shown to be a response to emotionally demanding tasks; the results supported a stronger relationship when particular job resources such as emotional support were absent (de Jong et al., 2008). In fact, these findings are consistent with Hobfoll's theory of conservation of resources (1998, 2002).

According to this approach, people have a basic motivation to obtain, retain and protect that which they value. Things that people value were generically called resources and they were described as material, social and energetic resources. Hobfoll (1989, 1998) claimed that

stress at work is due to threats with resource loss, loss of resources or failure to regain resources after they were invested. From this point of view, energetic resources are specifically taken into account, such as emotional robustness, cognitive ability and physical vigor (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001; Shirom, 2003). Moving further, burnout appears as “the end state of a long-term process of resource loss that gradually develops over time depleting energetic resources” (Hobfoll & Freddy, 1993, p. 117).

When the employee experiences a large discrepancy between felt emotions and demanded displays, the possibility for spontaneously expressing what one feels reduces and the necessity to act (whether deep or surface) increases consequently. Hence, emotion regulation will deplete employee's emotional resources, which, in turn will result in more burnout complaints (physical fatigue, emotional exhaustion, cognitive weariness) as supported by Bakker and Heuven (2006). Therefore, individuals who lack resources are the most vulnerable to further losses, whereas those with greater resources are less vulnerable to resource loss and more capable of resource gain (Gorgievsky & Hobfoll, n.d.). Forth, this variation can be partly explained by the fact that people generally experience differently loss and gain, as they are more concerned about avoiding loss than achieving more resources.

Up to now we can conclude that in most of the studies the findings supported the claim made by Richards and Gross (2000) that from the two core emotional labor strategies, surface acting seems to be more taxing, since it implies both the effortful suppression of emotions and the production of appropriate, organizationally desirable ones and this is the reason why the first secondary hypothesis of the present study entails that:

H1.1. Surface acting will positively correlate with emotional exhaustion in the case of a sample of Romanian bank tellers.

In the same manner, the next secondary hypothesis seeks to explore the relationship between surface acting and depersonalization, a positive correlation being expected between the two subscales, as well.

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HI.II. Surface acting will be positively related to depersonalization in the case of a sample of Romanian bank tellers.

Of course that, as Ashkanasy, Hartel and Daus (2002) point out, the findings of the studies previously mentioned should be taken into account considering the individual characteristics of employees, where some may be better equipped or skilled when it comes to performing emotional labor effectively and without adverse personal consequences. And this observation leads to the question whether “managing the heart” in the workplace must be necessarily stressful or not.

Although the approach of positive emotional labor outcomes was underexplored, there were some studies that acknowledged emotional labor as a social dimension which connects employees and makes their work more enjoyable (Schuler & Sypher, 2000). In the same manner, in examining the relationship between emotion regulation and work strain, Côté (2005) formulated an interpersonal model of emotion regulation, suggesting that the extent to which managing emotions in the workplace can result in strain depends upon the receiver’s response to the sender’s emotion regulation and display, the form of emotion regulation and the emotion being regulated. Even Hochschild (2003) admitted that deep acting, as an emotional labor strategy, may have potential benefits for employee outcomes, but warned of the commoditization of employees’ feelings by the organizations. There are also differences in the affective experience concerning the reaction to workplace events: individuals high in positive affect are more reactive to positive workplace events and less reactive to negative events (Miner, Glomb & Hulin, 2005).

Taken into account those inferred above, mainly the fact that emotional labor can also lead to positive outcomes, especially when employees are acting in “good faith”, a positive relationship is expected between deep acting and personal accomplishment (the self-evaluation component of burnout):

HI.III. Deep acting will show a positive association with the dimension of positive accomplishment from the burnout scale.

As the main interest in the current study was to explore the relationship between emotional labor and burnout in direct sales representatives, the conceptualization of the later term urges. Job burnout was seen as a “psychological syndrome in response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001, p. 399). The research on this syndrome is rooted in caring and service occupations, since these kinds of jobs are based on the relationship between provider and recipient (Maslach et al., 2001). Therefore, due to this interpersonal context of the job, burnout was studied in terms of an individual’s transactions in the workplace rather than as an individual stress response. A specific service occupation is that of bank tellers. They are considered the “front line” in the banking business, as they promote the financial products of the institution they work for. Thus they deal directly with customers and have to “service with a smile”, regardless of their true feelings, which may lead them to experiencing burnout.

But how the experienced burnout can be measured? It was described as a tri-dimensional response, consisting in *emotional exhaustion* (the individual dimension), *depersonalization* or *cynicism* (the interpersonal dimension) and reduced efficacy or *accomplishment* (the self-evaluation dimension) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). In the initial research and scale development, *involvement* was proposed as a fourth factor, but subsequently it became optional.

Theoretically it was inferred that emotional exhaustion and cynicism represented the core dimensions of burnout (Green, Walkey & Taylor, 1991; Schaufeli, 2003; Schaufeli & Enzman, 1998; Schaufeli & Taris, 2005), and this assumption is supported by a series of empirical findings (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Toppinen-Tanner, Kalimo, & Mutanen, 2002; van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, & Buunk, 2001). Despite this, Boersma and Lindblom pointed out that “very little is actually known about how and when these variables interact over time in the process towards burnout” (2009, p. 266). Therefore, two studies examined the hypothesis that there are different pathways to burnout for different individuals.

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Demerouti, Verbeke and Bakker (2005) identified five possible burnout configurations, based on the necessity to simultaneously take into account the three basic symptoms of burnout syndrome, using cluster analysis: a non-burnout cluster, a burnout cluster and three clusters with what they called, “incomplete” burnout, characterized respectively by exhaustion only, cynicism only and reduced efficacy only.

Maslach and Leiter (2008) continued the work of Demerouti et al. (2005) by exploring the trajectories of change over time for individuals with different scoring patterns. They used the two core dimensions of burnout (emotional exhaustion and cynicism) and created two subgroups with congruent patterns (burnout: high exhaustion, high cynicism and engaged: low exhaustion, low cynicism), respectively incongruent patterns (exhaustion only: high exhaustion, low cynicism and cynicism only: low exhaustion, high cynicism).

The factors leading to burnout were widely categorized as situational and individual. Job characteristics – both quantitative (such as workload or time pressure) and qualitative (such as role conflict or role ambiguity) and organizational characteristics (such as organizational values) represent typical situational factors that affect employees’ well-being. On the other hand, demographic aspects (age, gender, and education), personality traits or job attitudes are individual factors that relate to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

Since the current study was conducted in the Romanian service work context, it is important to note that comparative studies emphasize a difference in terms of intensity of experienced burnout between European and North American emotional laborers (Maslach et al., 2001).

Important findings regarding the extent to which emotional labor can set employees in people work jobs “on fire” and make them burn out were reported by Brotheridge and Grandey (2002). Focusing on the quality of experiences in service encounters, the authors established that surface acting or faking emotional expressions at work was related to feeling exhausted and detached, whereas deeper emotion work

was related positively to personal accomplishment.

When it comes to the intensity of the provider-recipient interactions, it seems that employees who had less emotionally charged interactions with clients reported less emotional exhaustion than did those whose interactions were more intense (Maslach, 1978a). In another study, the variables of duration, frequency and intensity of interactions were not confirmed as predictors for employee burnout (Cordes, Dougherty & Blum, 1997).

Job performance emerges as a constant variable in the study of both emotional labor and burnout. As mentioned from the beginning of the current study, job performance was identified as one of the most common outcomes of emotional labor (Grandey, 2000, 2003; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Pugliesi, 1999). Although for the individual emotional labor can be taxing, as seen in the previous section, in terms of customer service and task effectiveness emotional labor was proven to have a positive impact (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 2003). However, as there are different emotional labor strategies, some may be more effective when it comes to improving job performance: for instance, when employees engage in deep acting they are more likely to be perceived by customers as authentic, than when they surface act, since they act in “bad faith” (Grandey, 2000).

On the other hand, Wright and Bonett (1997) supported in a longitudinal study the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and job performance. This relationship was proven to be the opposite when job performance was determined through supervisory ratings (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). In fact, Keijsers, Schaufeli, Le Blanc, Zwerts and Miranda (1995) had already acknowledged that burnout has different effects on performance depending on how one operationalizes the later, the tendency being that self-reports of job performance are negatively associated with burnout, while objective assessments of job performance positively relate to burnout. Irrespective of the directionality of the associations, emotional exhaustion was constantly identified as the only burnout dimension that correlated

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with job performance (Wright & Bonett, 1997; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998; Parker & Kulik, 1995).

As for the possible relationships between emotional labor, burnout and performance, Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke (2004) found that the relationship between job demands (including emotional demands) and in-role performance is mediated by feelings of exhaustion. This relation was further supported by Bakker and Heuven (2006), who showed that emotionally demanding interactions with recipients leads to emotional dissonance, which, in turn, leads to job burnout and impaired performance. Equally, displaying positive emotions at work in emotional demanding interpersonal interactions was proven to be beneficial for the organization, since the frequency of emotional labor was positively associated with client satisfaction and return of business (Tsai, 2001).

Based on these associations, the last secondary hypothesis of the present research is:

H1.4. Performance will negatively correlate with the experienced burnout and positively correlate with emotional labor in the case of the sample investigated.

Although there is an increasing interest in emotional labor and burnout, as they emerged as core concepts in recent organizational behavior studies, these concepts are still in their pioneer state in the Romanian context. That is why the objective of the present research was to determine whether there is a relationship between emotional labor, more precisely between the two emotion regulation strategies (surface acting and deep acting) and burnout in the case of Romanian direct sales representatives (bank tellers), as they represent “prototypical emotional laborers”. Furthermore, we aimed to identify those emotional labor subscales which can best predict burnout, as well as the effects that regulating emotions in order to be consistent with emotional work requirements and/or experiencing burnout can have on the job performance of bank tellers from our sample.

Method

Participants

The instruments used for assessing the two constructs were administered on a sample consisting of 107 bank tellers, of which 87 were females and 17 were males. The questionnaires were administered to employees ($N = 107$) of a financial institution from Bucharest. They were all with a bachelor’s and/or master’s degree and they had between 2 and 12 years of service in the banking industry ($M = 6.8$ years, $SD = 1.56$); ages were between 23 and 47 years ($M = 32.15$, $SD = 5.32$).

Procedure

The instruments were administered online, via e-mail to all employees from six agencies of a financial institution from Bucharest. Among these bank tellers, 107 of them responded to the questionnaires, generating a 75% response rate. The collection of data lasted three weeks. In order to ensure anonymity of the respondents, they were not asked to provide their names, although data regarding the sample’s demographic features were collected separately.

Measures

Emotional Labor. The Brotheridge & Lee Emotional Labor Scale (Brotheridge & Lee, 1998) consists of 14 items, scoring in six subscales, measured on a five-point frequency scale (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*). The six subscales, which determine distinct dimensions of emotional labor, are: the *duration of customer interaction* (a single free response question, yielding a number); the *frequency subscale* (three items; e.g. “on an average day at work, how frequently do you interact with customers”) addresses the frequency of the display of organizationally prescribed emotions; the *intensity subscale* (two items; e.g. “on an average day at work, how frequently do you express intense emotions”) describes how often employees express strong or intense emotions at work; the *variety* of emotional displays at work (three items; e.g. “on an average day at work, how frequently do you display many different kinds of emotions”); the *deep acting* subscale (three items; e.g. “on an average day at work, how frequently do you try

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to actually experience the emotions that you must show”) determines how much an employee has to modify his inner feelings in order to be consistent with the organizational display rules and the *surface acting subscale* (three items; e.g. “on an average day at work, how frequently do you pretend you have emotions that you don’t really have”) measures the extent to which one has to express emotions that are not really felt and therefore modifies only the outward appearance of the emotion. The authors (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002) report good combined alpha coefficients for both role characteristics (frequency, intensity and variety) subscales ($\alpha = .71$), and deep acting and surface acting subscales ($\alpha = .89$, $\alpha = .86$).

Burnout. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) is grouped in four subscales which are measured on a seven-point Likert scale in terms of intensity (from 1 = *very mild, barely noticeable*, to 7 = *very strong, major*) and frequency (from 1 = *never*, to 7 = *every day*). The subscales are: *Emotional Exhaustion subscale* (nine items; e.g. “I feel emotionally drained from my work”) which describe feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by the work; *Depersonalization subscale* (five items; e.g. “I don’t really care what happens to my recipients”) refers to unfeeling and impersonal response towards the recipients of one’s care or service; *Personal Accomplishment subscale* (eight items; e.g. “I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job”) taps feelings of competence and successful achievement in “people work”. While high scores on the first two subscales indicate high degrees of experienced burnout, the latest is negatively related to experienced burnout. That is why, subsequently a series of studies have acknowledged *Emotional Exhaustion* and *Depersonalization* as core components of

burnout (Green et al., 1991; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Schaufeli, 2003; Schaufeli & Enzman, 1998; Schaufeli & Taris, 2005; Toppinen-Tanner, Kalimo, & Mutanen, 2002; van Dierendonck, Schaufeli, & Buunk, 2001). The fourth subscale, *Involvement with people*, did not obtain high scores in the factorial analysis. However, as it moderately correlated with Emotional exhaustion, this scale was retained as an optional factor of the MBI. The authors (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) report good reliability for the MBI subscales: $\alpha = .89$ (frequency) and $\alpha = .86$ (intensity) for *Emotional Exhaustion*, $\alpha = .74$ (frequency) and $\alpha = .74$ (intensity) for *Personal Accomplishment*, $\alpha = .77$ (frequency) and $\alpha = .72$ (intensity) for *Depersonalization* and $\alpha = .59$ (frequency) and $\alpha = .57$ (intensity) for *Involvement*.

Performance. The performance scores used in the current study were provided by the

human resources department according to the annual performance evaluation sheets, consisting in performance evaluation scales with behavioral anchors designed according to internal criteria and procedures.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the variables included in the study. Means and standard deviations for the core burnout and the two emotion regulation strategies are important indicators, since, as advanced by Wharton (1993), it is not emotional labor itself that results in burnout, but how it is performed.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation for core burnout, and emotional labor strategies

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Core burnout	3.37	.48
Deep acting	2.75	.70
Surface acting	2.94	.68

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Table 2. Mean and standard deviation for the ELS

Emotional labor scales	M	SD
Frequency	3.98	.81
Intensity	2.82	.78
Variety	3.00	.78
Deep acting	2.75	.70
Surface acting	2.94	.68

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation for the MBI scales

Burnout scales	M	SD
Emotional exhaustion – frequency	4.03	.61
Emotional exhaustion – intensity	3.74	.55
Personal accomplishment – frequency	5.09	.49
Personal accomplishment – intensity	4.71	.43
Depersonalization – frequency	2.72	.50
Depersonalization – intensity	2.86	.49
Involvement – frequency	3.04	.70
Involvement – intensity	2.95	.73

From the two emotional labor strategies surface acting is more frequently experienced by bank tellers from our study ($M=2.94$, $SD=.68$).

Further on, taking a closer look to all the subscales of the two processes it can be seen that, in terms of means, the values are not homogeneous (Table 2).

Thus, the items that compose the *frequency* subscale in the ELS (*how often do you adopt certain emotions as part of your job*) were reported to have the highest mean value ($M=3.98$, $SD=.81$) in the work settings taken into account, compared to the items in the remaining composite scales – two expressing rather role characteristics and the other two emotional labor mechanisms (*intensity* and *variety*, respectively, *deep acting* and *surface acting*).

The same tendency can be noticed in the means distribution for the other investigated process (Table 3). *Personal accomplishment*

(*PA*) seems to be the most frequently and intensely experienced burnout subscale ($M_f=5.09$, $SD_f=.49$; $M_i=4.71$, $SD_i=.43$), while the lowest means in terms of both frequency and intensity were reported for *Depersonalization (DP)* ($M_f=2.72$, $SD_f=.50$; $M_i=2.86$, $SD_i=.49$).

Tests of the Hypotheses

In order to meet the objectives assumed for the current study and test the hypotheses formulated in the previous section the correlations between emotional labor and burnout scales and subscales, as well as the job performance scores were further determined. The findings offer relevant insights. As it can be noticed from the correlations matrix (Table 4), emotional labor (in terms of its two emotion regulation strategies: surface acting and deep acting) and burnout (core burnout, calculated by determining the mean between emotional exhaustion and depersonalization in terms of frequency) significantly

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Table 4. Bivariate correlations of emotional labor subscales and core burnout

	core burnout
Emotional Labor Scale – frequency	.38**
Emotional Labor Scale – intensity	.41**
Emotional Labor Scale – variety	.36**
Emotional Labor Scale – deep acting	.38**
Emotional Labor Scale – surface acting	.28**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

correlate in the case of the sample of Romanian bank tellers examined and thus, the main hypothesis of the current study (*H1*) is confirmed.

As was mentioned earlier, bank tellers represent a specific emotional labor as well as burnout occupation. Working in a bank implies having face-to-face and voice-to-voice interactions with the customer, meaning that bank tellers engage in job-relevant interactions which demand them to feel, or at least project the appearance of positive emotions (thus to “service with a smile”). Furthermore, their emotional expressions are somewhat controlled by the employer, for instance through training, policies or supervision. And the notion of prescribed and supervised emotions is what distinguishes emotional laborers from other employees, as noted by Hochschild (2003).

Emotions appear to be important “facets of the products the service industry sells to clients” (Bakker & Heuven, 2006, p. 425) that is smiling bank tellers emerge as assets of great importance for the public’s perception of the profession and the client satisfaction. As emotional laborers, bank tellers invest a certain amount of emotional effort in their jobs in order to meet the organizationally display rules. This emotional effort requires both the physical and mental management of one’s emotions and it may result in strain.

From the two emotional labor strategies (deep acting, respectively surface acting) the attempt to modify the inner shape of the feelings in order to be consistent with the organizational display rules seems to be more taxing for bank tellers from our sample ($r = .38, p < .01$) than having to shape only the outward appearance of

feelings ($r = .28, p < .01$). From this point of view, a series of previous studies support Richards and Gross’s claim (2000) that from the two core emotional labor strategies, surface acting seems to have a greater impact, since it implies both the effortful suppression of emotions and the production of appropriate, organizationally desirable ones. In the case of the sample analyzed, the findings do not support this claim, although, as shown in the descriptive statistics section respondents report using the two emotional labor strategies with approximately the same frequency in service encounters (deep acting – $M = 2.75, SD = .70$, surface acting – $M = 2.94, SD = .68$).

A possible explanation of the fact that trying to actually feel the emotions required leads bank tellers from our sample to experience burnout to a greater extent than having to fake the outward appearance of feelings could be the relationship between deep acting and the intention to seem authentic. In other words, when bank tellers try to reduce the clash between their spontaneous feelings and those required, as part of their work-role, they choose to reduce this dissonance by spontaneously feeling and expressing what they are required to express in the given interpersonal service transactions as they want to seem authentic. Therefore, trying to be authentic in terms of emotionality seems to have a more negative impact on the employees’ wellbeing, especially when the service encounters are intensely charged. In fact, in an exploratory analysis we found that, from the five emotional labor subscales assessed by the ELS, the intensity of emotions being regulated showed the most significant positive relation-

The relationship between emotional labor and burnout in direct sales representatives – a pilot study**Table 5.** Bivariate correlations between the subscales of emotional labor and the subscales of burnout

	EE _f	PA _f	DP _f	IN _f	EE _i	PA _i	DP _i	IN _i
ELS_DA	.30**	.38**	.24*	.46**	.43**	.33**	.31**	.32**
ELS_SA	.16	.31**	.26**	.38**	.37**	.13	.12	.17
ELS_intensity	.28**	.49**	.32**	.43**	.55**	.28**	.37**	.23*
ELS_variety	.24**	.34**	.28**	.44**	.46**	.34**	.31**	.50**

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

EE_f = emotional exhaustion – frequency;
 PA_f = personal accomplishment – frequency;
 DP_f = depersonalization – frequency;
 IN_f = involvement – frequency;
 EE_i = emotional exhaustion – intensity;
 PA_i = personal accomplishment – intensity;
 DP_i = depersonalization – intensity;
 IN_i = involvement – intensity.

ship with core burnout ($r = .41, p < .01$). These findings are consistent with those of Maslach (1978), who supported that employees who had less emotionally charged interactions with clients reported less emotional exhaustion than did those whose interactions were more intense.

Moving further, these relationships could be better explored by taking into account in future research dispositional factors, such as emotional intelligence or dispositional affect (positive affectivity, respectively negative affectivity).

In order to better understand the findings presented up to this point and as well as to test the secondary hypotheses formulated, the bivariate correlations between the subscales of both emotional labor and burnout were calculated. The results are reported in Table 5.

Concerning the first secondary hypothesis (H1.1), which implied that surface acting positively correlates with emotional exhaustion, it was also acknowledged by the results reported in Table 5 ($r = .37, p < .01$), the findings being supported by previous research (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). This means that, the more bank tellers try to show positive emotions at work, the more overextended and exhausted they feel. And that is because “painting on” a smile when not really feeling like smiling can be quite emotionally taxing, in terms of intensity (since surface acting is positively related only to the emotional exhaustion – intensity subscale).

As for the next secondary hypothesis (H1.2), regarding the relationship between surface acting and depersonalization, it was also validated by the findings, which show that the two subscales are positively related, but only in terms of frequency ($r = .26, p > .01$). Thus, the more a bank teller tries to change the outwardly emotional display, the more he or she will treat customers like objects, showing a detached attitude.

However, consistent with the results presented above, regarding the relationship between core burnout and the two core emotional labor strategies, deep acting significantly correlates with all the subscales of the burnout syndrome. Although trying to actually feel what one should feel as part of the job role was previously proven to diminish the tendency of “unfeeling” (detaching oneself not only from his/her own feelings, but also from others’ feelings) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), the current findings suggest the opposite relationship ($r_f = .24, p < .05, r_i = .31, p < .01$). Grandey claimed that it is more likely that “payoffs of deep acting, such as reduced emotional dissonance or positive feedback from customers may restore the employee’s emotional resources” (2003, p. 93), but a possible explanation for the reverse effect that resulted in our analysis could be the fact that energetic resources that are used to a greater extent in deep acting cannot be easily restored. That is why a closer look to the individuals’ capacity to over-

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come the loss of resources, as well as to engage in regaining them could further tone this association, since people experience differently gain and loss (as a general tendency, people are usually more focused on avoiding loss, than on achieving more resources).

As expected according to the third secondary hypothesis (*HI.III.*), the dimension of personal accomplishment is also positively related with deep acting ($r_f=.38, p>.01, r_i=.33, p<.01$) and this relationship has already been demonstrated by Brotheridge and Grandey (2002).

When it comes to determining the impact of experiencing burnout on *performance*, which emerged in field studies as an important organizational outcome, no associations were found. Instead, regarding the positive association between emotional labor and performance as entailed by the last secondary hypothesis (*HI.IV.*), the intensity of the emotions required in service interactions in order to be consistent with emotional work requirements determines a decrease in the level of performance of bank tellers from the sample analyzed ($r=-.27, p<.01$).

An exploratory analysis was also undergone, which revealed other interesting findings (Table 5). For instance, the intensity subscale from the ELS seems to have an important role when it comes to strongly feeling worn out, depleted, fatigued ($r=.55, p<.01$), whereas the intensity of emotions being regulated positively correlates with the depersonalization subscale ($r=.37, p<.01$) – in fact, from the five subscales of the ELS, the intensity subscale shows the most significant relationship with experiencing negative or inappropriate attitudes towards clients.

On the other hand, having to display “*many different kinds of emotions*” (item 6) and doing it frequently, also influences the extent to which bank tellers from our sample experience each of the four subscales used in assessing burnout, as shown in Table 5.

The results presented up to now are considerable evidence that emotional labor can be stressful in the case of bank tellers, since expressing socially appropriate emotions as a form of role demand undermines employees’ wellbeing. As it can be noticed, emotional labor and burnout significantly correlate through

almost all of the respective subscales, the same tendency not being identified in the case of performance in terms of its relationship with emotional labor and burnout (performance is significantly related only with the intensity of emotions being regulated in service interactions). Thus, in order to meet the objective of the present research the next step of the analysis consisted in identifying the exact set of variables that can best predict burnout in the case of the sample under consideration thorough the multiple regression analysis.

As de Vaus (2002) pointed out, in doing multiple regression analysis the general principle of explanation is to seek the simplest powerful model (parsimony), and to avoid including variables that add virtually nothing to the predictive value of the model. Therefore, one must limit the number of variables included in the analysis, since increasing the number of variables artificially inflates the R^2 especially in small samples. Another important aspect in deciding how many variables to include in the model is the size of the sample. The variable to case ratio helps identify the sample size required to accommodate the number of variables one wishes to include. When all variables are entered into the model in a single block the ratio of cases to variable should be at least 20:1, and the minimum suggested sample to variable ratio is 5:1 (de Vaus, 2002).

Taking into consideration the above mentioned conditions, it was decided to include in the analysis only the variables which correlated significantly with the core burnout and the respective subscales. The analysis was undergone using the hierarchical strategy, that is starting with the variable with the highest correlations (ELS intensity), then adding one by one the all the other subscales of the ELS. Table 6 presents only the models that accounted the most in predicting burnout.

The first model shows that the intensity of emotions that bank tellers are required to display at work accounts for 17% of the variance for the level of burnout that they are experiencing ($R^2=.171$). The model is significant with $F(1,105)=21.59 (p<.01)$. When adding the second predictor – the variety of emotions being regulated – in Model 2, R^2 slightly increased

The relationship between emotional labor and burnout in direct sales representatives – a pilot study**Table 6.** Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting burnout (n = 107)

Variable	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.	B	β	t	Sig.
Model 1	.171	.163	21.59	.000				
<i>ELS_intensity</i>					.216	.413	4.64	.000
Model 2	.209	.194	5.07	.026				
<i>ELS_intensity</i>					.165	.316	3.24	.002
<i>ELS_variety</i>					.114	.219	2.25	.026

($R^2=.209$) and not just as an effect of the integration of another variable, since the adjusted R^2 increased as well (from .163 to .194). This second model is also significant with $F(1,104)=5.07$ ($p<.05$), which means that having to display many different kinds of emotions during emotionally charged interactions in work settings leads bank tellers from the sample under consideration to experience burnout to a greater extent.

In sum, the attempt to determine the set of variables which could best predict burnout in the case of the sample analyzed was valuable, the results acknowledging the intensity of emotions that bank tellers are required to display as the key element in assessing the negative outcomes of serving with a smile, as it emerged from the very first level of the analysis. In addition, bank tellers from the sample included in the current study are more likely to feel worn out at work (not only physically, but mostly emotionally) if they have to display different intense emotions (as shown by model 2).

Furthermore, it was considered appropriate to include background variables (age and gender) in the models that validated the best predictors for burnout for the participants in the present research, in order to obtain new insights regarding the causal relationships revealed by the regression analysis. This final step entails, since women were proven to be more interpersonally sensitive than men. In other words, women seem to be more accurate in perceiving the personal, interpersonal and social environment (Knapp & Hall, 1997), ability that

emerged in the literature both as a trait and as a more specific skill, which refers to judging non-verbal cues (Briton & Hall, 1995; Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1975 as cited in Hall & Schmid, 2008). In the same manner, studies have identified women as “the more emotional sex” (Grossman & Wood, 1993), meaning that they report more intense experience and expression of emotions, as well as a greater emotional responsiveness than men and these differences are not just due to normative expectations that result from the social role interpretation, but are also proven by physiology.

On the other hand, age differences in emotional experience, expression and control were also investigated. For instance, Gross et al. (1997) found across four studies a consistent pattern of age differences: control of emotions increases with age, while emotional expressivity decreases and it seems that aging is positively related to experiencing to a greater extent positive emotions.

Therefore, taking into account the role of age and gender in affective processes an analysis was undergone that sought to investigate whether these two categorical variables moderate the relationship between burnout, as a dependent variable and ELS-intensity, respectively ELS-variety as independent variables. The results of this investigative approach did not confirm the fact that gender or age further tone the relationship between the dependent and independent variables identified by the regression analysis.

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Discussion and conclusions

The current study has implications for the research on the emerging role of emotions in the workplace. Not only do the findings acknowledge the existence of emotion regulation strategies in the Romanian work settings, but they also explore the impact of emotional labor on typical service agents in terms of outcomes such as burnout and performance. Of course, that the present results should be discussed in terms of strengths and limitations of the study. As a first limitation, we note that the present research is an explorative pilot study. Hence, the results cannot be seen as generally valid in the Romanian workplace, as they express the relationship between the two organizational aspects in a specific form of “people work” – that of bank tellers and on a distinct sample (employees of a financial institution from Bucharest). Another limitation is that the sample used in the conducted survey was quite reduced ($N=107$) and it was quite imbalanced regarding the gender of the participants (mainly females). Furthermore, though the present results show that emotional laborers experience negative affective outcomes future research should examine the extent to which emotional job demands can lead to positive outcomes. And that is because the results regarding the subscales of emotional labor that correlate with the personal accomplishment dimension from the MBI support this antecedent.

This research also provides preliminary support for using emotional labor as an independent variable in explaining other aspects of organizational life, such as job satisfaction, counterproductive behaviors at work, engagement or health. Future work should replicate these findings in the case of organizational roles beyond service roles, since as already stated by Ashforth & Humphrey (1993, p. 109) “it is difficult to imagine an organizational role to which display rules would not apply at various points”.

Likewise, taking a closer look to dispositional factors (emotional intelligence, positive or negative affectivity, interpersonal sensitivity, knowledge of nonverbal cues) and their role in performing emotional labor could further tone the associations of this variable with other

important constructs in the study of organizational behavior.

As for the practical implications of the current findings, it is important for organizations to acknowledge the role of emotional labor in the workplace, since understanding the social relations in work settings allows service based companies to develop and implement policies that meet the needs of both internal and external customers. That is because emotional labor was proven a key determinant of quality of service and of organizational performance (Hsieh and Guy, 2009). On the other hand, special attention should be paid to the psychological effects that portraying emotions has on the actor.

To conclude, there are still many questions to be answered regarding the “story behind service with a smile” (Johnson, 2004), but the current study represents a milestone in exploring the phenomenon in the Romanian context.

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