

## EMOTIONAL LABOR & BIG FIVE PERSONALITY

### Emotional labor & big five personality model

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### ABSTRACT

Exhibit of emotions has become a topic of great interest for sociologists and psychologists during the last few years. The main reason of this attention is due to the changes in the structure of economy, as the economy has shifted from the manufacturing to the service industry and more jobs are being offered in the areas of CRM. As a result of which employees are under a considerable stress to hide their emotions and state of mind hence exhibiting a false sense of gregariousness with their customers or in other words to increase the level of their emotional labor. Not all people respond to this challenge similarly. Therefore the main purpose of this study is to expose that a personality plays a pivotal role in understanding and describing the phenomena of emotional labor. Examination of the role of personality in relative to emotional labor may assist us to foresee which individuals are best able to perform emotional labor on the job.

## INTRODUCTION

In various occupational roles, especially service occupations, employees face emotionally charged encounters and work rules requiring specific emotional displays. According to Tews & Glomb (2003), despite the pervasiveness of emotional experiences on the job, research has recently begun to examine the role of emotions on the job. Grandey (2000) and A. R. Hochschild (1998) reported that emotional labor is one area that has witnessed increased research focus since a very long time. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1986) used the concept of emotional labor for the first time to analyze the jobs of flight attendants. It is usually conceptualized as the degree of discord between emotions that are actually felt and those that the job requires to be expressed Zapf et al., (1999). According to Brotheridge & Lee (2003); Grandey (2000); Morris & Feldman (1996) up-till now, the main focus of emotional labor research was on theoretical issues, construct validation, and consequences of emotional labor. Examination of personality differences is one way to extend emotional labor research. For instance, personality may influence the extent to which employees execute emotional labor and the extent to which adverse outcomes may result from such labor.

The big five personality model is a useful framework for examining the relationships between personality and emotional labor. This model reflects some consensus toward classification of personality traits, comprised of the subsequent dimensions: extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, agreeableness, and openness to experience. Warrick & Mount (1991) and Tokar, et al. (1998) debated that the model has extensive applicability and associated to a variety of workplace phenomena, such as employee attitude job performance, and employee's well-being. Likewise, the big five model can be theoretically linked to emotional labor.

The objective of this study is to expose that a personality plays a pivotal role in understanding and describing the phenomena of emotional labor. First of all this paper will give the overview of emotional labor, and big five personality model. That leads toward the conceptual framework and propositions. Finally the paper will highlight the implications of this study in academic and practical perspective, along with future research implications.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Emotional Labor

Emotions are a constant and indivisible part of the human experience and play a significant role in organizational life. It is recognized that effective management of emotions has instrumental worth. For instance, service workers are usually required to exhibit positive emotions to endorse benevolence and patronage (Peter & Austin, 1985). Based on emotion management,

Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) defined emotional labor as “the act of displaying the suitable emotion.” Service providers and customers have some expectations about the nature of emotions that would be exhibited during the service interaction. These anticipations or expectations are a function of organizational, occupational, and societal norms; these norms are termed as display rules. Display rules basically deals with that which emotions have to be expressed or suppressed as explained by Chu (2002). The service industry implements display rules to standardize employees’ behavior. “Illustrate a positive attitude at every table” or “Put energy and keenness into every guest interaction” are generally found in employee’s instruction manual. In accumulation, organizations use policies, symbols, stories and myths to teach, reveal, and reinforce these display rules. Based on these rules, service providers are expected to act friendly and optimistic and to suppress disgust and anger, even towards annoying and frustrating customers as studied by Paules (1991). In contrast to service workers, to attain desired goals, other occupational groups may need different types of emotional expression. For example, Stenross & Kleinman (1989); Sutton (1991) suggested that the exhibit of negative emotions may be required for police interrogators and bill collectors to gain compliance from suspects. Further study by Podsakoff, Ahearne, & MacKenzie (1997) explains that social functioning of the organization may also be facilitated through occupational roles, in the form of the expression and non-expression, and may be similar to engaging in pro-social behaviors or not engaging in anti-social behaviors.

Even though the potential benefits accrued to organizations, employees may experience adverse outcome from regularly managing their emotions on the work. According to A. Hochschild (1986) what people express may not necessarily be what is truly felt, and what people truly feel may not be what is expressed. Such a mismatch between felt and expressed emotion leads toward emotional labor.

Emotional labor corresponds to an unstable state within the individual that may result into unfavorable outcomes, such as division between self, true feelings and job-related stress as studied and explained by Wharton (1993). These outcomes may lead to, emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction and turnover as revealed by Maslach & Jackson (1981). Thus, while individuals may be articulating what is appropriate or suitable, faking and restraining may not be without cost. Emotional labor presents a dilemma for organizations. How can organizations assist to ensure that appropriate emotions are expressed, while reducing possible adverse outcomes? The personality of employees may give some insight.

However some have argued that emotional labor should only include dissonant emotional displays, excluding truly felt displays. Mann (1999) argues that emotional labor is present only where faking and suppressing are present due to the discrepancy among what is felt and expressed. While Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) argue that emotional labor is performing

according to the display rules. Under this argument, employee who genuinely feels enthusiastic and properly articulates this as a part of his job requirements is not experiencing dissonance. In this case, it can be argued that there is a good match between the employee and the emotional demands for the job.

#### Big Five Personality Model:

For understanding on-the-job behavior and job-related outcomes, a number of situational and individual difference variables are available. However, personality may be particularly relevant in the investigation of emotional labor. Funder (1997) explains that there exists some uncertainty as to what accurately constitutes personality, but it may be portrayed usually as an individual's characteristic patterns of feelings or emotions, thoughts and behavior. Personality shapes how individuals recognize, interpret, and respond to stimuli, which may influence which emotions are expressed or suppressed. Personality in contrast with traditional performance behaviors may bear a stronger relationship with emotional labor behavior, because it's more interpersonal in nature as the management of emotion is not controlled by technology. According to Bandura (1982) and Mischel (1977) person job fit theory, personality of individuals and their characteristics have significant effect on decisions. Different people are suitable for different types of jobs; it depends on their personal characteristics which were explained by Ickes, Snyder & Garcia (1997). Further person job fit theory suggests, if worker's characteristics matched with job, it will increase workers performance Dawis & Lofquist (1984). So, different people are suitable for different types of jobs according to their personal characteristics.

In the field of psychology there is tremendous research on what personality is? According to Almlund, et al. (2011 "personality is a tactic for responding to life situations". According to Roberts (2009) personality is "the comparatively enduring patterns of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that reflect the propensity to respond in certain ways under certain circumstances." There are a number of theories in the domain of personality research, e.g. humanistic, social learning, psychoanalytic, cognitive, behavioral, and trait theory. From these theories one of the most documented and generally accepted is trait theory. According to trait theory, individuals can be explained on the basis of certain number of traits (Prentice, 2008). The emergence of the big five model has significant implications for the field of psychology, which is derived from the work of Raymond Cattell (1946). It demonstrates that personality consists of five dimensions, which gives us a comprehensive classification to study the individual differences (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Prentice, 2008). It is widely agreed that the first dimension is Extraversion (Digman & Takemoto-Chock, 1981; Botwin & Buss, 1989; Hakel, 1974; Norman, 1963; Howarth, 1976; Smith, 1967; Hogan, 1983; John, 1989; Krug & Johns, 1986; McCrae & Costa, 1985; Noller et al., 1987;). Traits commonly associated with it contains being expressive, sociable, talkative, confident, and active. The second dimension is Neuroticism

(Borgatta, 1964; Hakel, 1974; Lorr & Manning, 1978; Norman, 1963; Conley, 1985; Noller et al., 1987; John, 1989; McCrae & Costa, 1985; Smith, 1967). Traits linked with this dimension include being depressed, nervous, embarrassed, angry, insecure and emotionally, worried. The third dimension is Agreeableness (Borgatta, 1964; Norman, 1963; Hakel, 1974; Goldberg, 1981; Hogan, 1983; Conley, 1985; McCrae & Costa, 1985; John, 1989; Smith, 1967; Tupes & Christal, 1961). Common traits associated with this dimension being flexible, courteous, friendliness, good-natured, cooperative, trusting, soft-hearted, and tolerant and forgiving (Guilford & Zimmerman, 1949). The fourth dimension is Conscientiousness (Norman, 1963; Hakel, 1974; McCrae & Costa, 1985; Noller et al., 1987; Botwin & Buss, 1989; John, 1989), traits associated with this dimension are organized, hardworking, responsible, and persistent and achievement oriented (Peabody & Goldberg, 1989; Prentice, 2008; Smith & Canger, 2004). The last dimension is Openness to Experience (McCrae & Costa, 1985). Traits generally associated with this dimension consist of being, cultured, imaginative, original, curious, artistically sensitive, broad-minded and intelligent (Barrick & Mount, 1991).

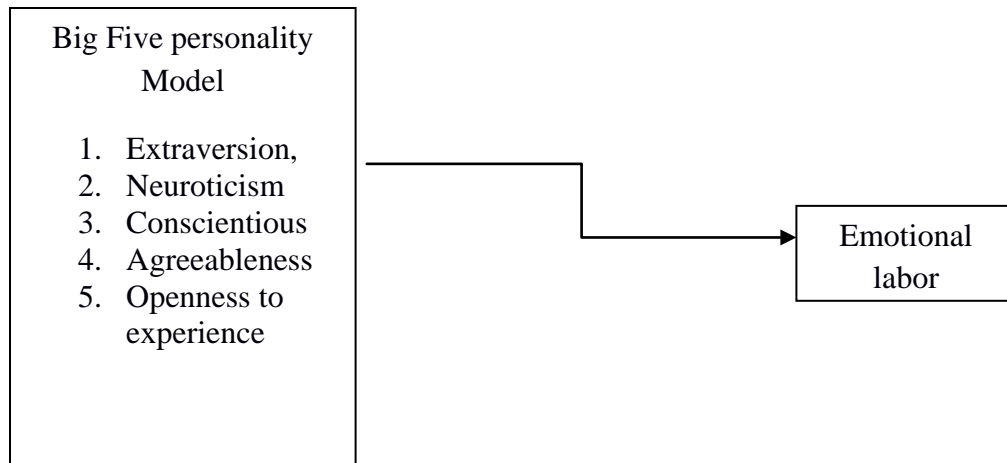
While no consensual classification of personality currently exists, the big five model reflects some convergence in establishing a parsimonious classification of personality dimensions. Its dimensions hypothetically represent super ordinate, orthogonal traits believed to cover the assortment of normal personality. The generalizability, comprehensiveness and robustness of the big five model has generally been acknowledged (Goldberg, 1993; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997).

The big five model is also a useful framework for investigating emotional labor, as it has been utilized to investigate a wide range of workplace phenomena, such as vocational interests, organizational citizenship behaviors, job performance (Tokar et al., 1998).

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As illustrated in the research objective, the intention of this paper is to foresee that personality or individual characteristics play a vital role in understanding and describing the phenomenon of emotional labor. Deriving from literature on personality, emotional labor, sociology and organizational psychology, this paper proposes following conceptual framework. Based on personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientious, neuroticism, and openness) of big five model propositions are being made on how it will impact the emotional labor that workers will feel during interpersonal transactions.

Figure 1



### Extraversion

Extraversion refers to positive activity, which influences optimistic mood state resulting in greater social activity, and more rewarding interpersonal relations. Costa & McCrae (1980) found that extraversion narrates to satisfying affect. It relates to the traits of being cheerful, talkative, active and outgoing (Block, 1961, Zellars et al. 2000; McCrae & Costa, 1991). Characteristics of extraverted individuals are being socially capable, optimistic and person-oriented. Individuals who scored high in extraversion may not need to fake their emotions while interacting with the customers (John, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1991).

In situations like personal interaction, extraverted individuals are considered as good performers (Mount, et al., 1998; Smith & Canger, 2004). As discussed in the previous sections service providers face the problem of emotional labor. Extraverted, sociable, friendly and ambitious individuals are suitable for jobs where interpersonal interaction is involved. These individuals are optimistic. So, they need less effort to exhibit positive emotions like cheerful friendly energetic etc during service transition. Thus it is proposed that extraverted individuals face less emotional labor as they are social and ambitious.

**Proposition 1:** Individuals with extraverted personalities would be less liable to undergo emotional labor

### Neuroticism

Neuroticisms' are characterized as annoyed, anxious, depressed, insecure, emotional (Prentice, 2008; Smith & Canger, 2004). It relates to negative mood resulting in depression, anger and irritability. It is also related to unpleasant affects because its relationship with recurring affective states neuroticism may be related to dissonant emotional labor. Individuals who are

high on neuroticism are more likely to experience negative emotions and feelings of stress and anxiety. Therefore they require more psychological effort to exhibit positive emotions and restrain negative emotions on job which lead towards emotional labor.

Because of frequent experiences of fear, repeated stress, and frustration, neurotics are assumed to be depressed, insecure, and use futile coping strategies when faced with problems. Individuals who having low neuroticism are considered as calm and comfortable (Costa & McCrae, 1987; George, 1989; McCrae & John, 1992). While individuals with neurotic personalities experience negative emotions more frequently, they may need effort to suppress these negative emotions during customer interactions. Austin, et al. (2008) found that there is a positive relationship among neuroticism and emotional labor. Individuals with neurotic characteristics are not suitable for service sector. They require more effort to regulate the organizationally required display emotions to fulfill the job tasks. Thus this is proposed that they will face more emotional labor to manage expressions and emotions.

Proposition 2: Individuals with neurotic personality are more prone to emotional labor.

#### Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness relates to being responsible, self-disciplined, and acting dutifully (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Conscientious individuals are also characterized as being competent, hardworking, good at problem-solving and organized (Block, 1961, Digman, 1990 Zellars et al., 2000;). Conscientious individuals are careful and responsible (Diefendoff et al. 2005). They may illustrate greater devotion to display rules and may meet organizations expectations by trying to be more honest and authentic. Conscientious individuals are careful in carrying out their job tasks and may thus be more appropriate to adhere and display rules for emotional expression. Whereas display rules typically support the exhibit of positive emotions and the repression of negative emotions. Therefore individuals with conscientious characteristics are hardworking organized and careful. Thus, results support the argument that these individuals are good in interpersonal transactions. They need less effort to express positive emotions and suppress negative emotions. It is proposed that conscious individuals perform less emotional labor after proper training.

Proposition 3: Individuals with conscientious personalities are less prone to emotional labor

#### Agreeableness

Characteristics of Agreeable individuals are being, tolerant, cooperative, forgiving and caring (Barrick & Mount, 1991). Agreeableness mostly refers to an interpersonal orientation; such individuals are likable and good natured. Agreeable individuals may be more likely to express positive emotions and suppress negative emotions on the job, consistent with their



interpersonal disposition as they are not aggressive. According to McCrae & Costa (1991), such individuals try to develop and maintain positive relations with others. Agreeable individuals are greatly motivated to get along with others and establish honest and respected relations (McCrae & Costa, 1991). These results show that individuals, who score higher on agreeableness, were more likely to less engage in emotional labor. By recognizing the fact that agreeable individuals try to attain some degree of sincerity and closeness in their interactions with customers, they express positive emotions easily because of their sincere disposition. So it is proposed that individuals with agreeable personalities face less emotional labor in management of emotions.

Proposition 4: Individuals with agreeable personality face less emotional labor

#### Openness to experience

Characteristics of openness individuals are intelligent, creative, broad minded, and original. McCrae & Costa (1991) argue that open individuals are characterized "by a broader and deeper scope of awareness and by a need to examine and enlarge experience". Openness to experience is not manifestly related to interpersonal relations. Individual who scored high in openness is not suitable for interpersonal transactions. The characteristics attained by openness individuals are not appropriate for service providing, because most of the time they are unable to hide their original feelings (Prentice, 2008; Smith & Canger, 2004). Above arguments predicts that these individuals face more emotional labor, because they are unable to regulate the needed emotions during the interpersonal transaction.

Proposition 5: Individuals with openness personalities face more emotional labor

## DISCUSSION

Competition among service providers is increasing day by day. They compete on the basis of quality of services, which lead towards customer satisfaction. In service sector services are mostly intangible. Customers make perception about quality of service from the behavior of service provider (Bowen, et al., 1989). In the service industry most managers assumed that friendliness and good cheer of service agents increase the loyalty, satisfaction and commitment of customers (Bowen, Siehl, & Schneider, 1989). So, the main focus of the service organizations is on the delivery of the quality services to gain customer satisfaction. To retain the satisfaction level of the customers, organizations put pressure on employees. Under this situation employees face the problem of emotional labor during the regulation of organizational required emotions which is not necessarily genuinely felt inside (Hothschild, 1983). In the above section, depicting from the preceding argumentations of the propositions, individuals who are friendly, cheerful, social, talkative, enjoy gossip with people are best for jobs in which interaction with customers are involved on regular basis (Smith & Canger, 2004). These individuals don't need to put effort in managing emotions in fact they enjoy their tasks. According to big five personality model, extraverted individuals, agreeable individuals, conscientious individuals, are best for the jobs in which interaction with people is on regular basis. They require less effort to manage their emotions and expressions because of their personality characteristics. On the other hand neuroticism individuals and openness individuals are not suitable for jobs in which interpersonal transaction involved. Characteristics of openness individuals are not suitable because they tend to be creative and original (Prentice, 2008; Smith & Canger, 2004). Therefore, they are incapable to conceal their true feelings. According to Ashforth & Humphrey (1993) at one side, emotional labor can help workers to facilitate their tasks by regulating lively and evolving transactions with customers which lead towards increased self efficacy. On the other side if there is difference between felt emotions and displayed emotions, this difference between feelings and actions may lead towards, depression, self-esteem and distrust etc. If one's personality is optimistic, joyful or cheerful, then this is unproblematic for that person to be friendly with customers. It is possible that the person with these characteristics enjoy his job, because it is easy for him to interact with different types of people. In other situation if there is mismatch between individual personality and job requirement, most likely that individual will face problem of emotional labor.

## IMPLICATION OF RESEARCH

In terms of academic perspective, this study will contribute to the theoretical debate of existing literature in the domain of emotional labor, personality, organizational psychology and service management literature. As well as this study will contribute in emotion management literature, how personality traits of employees affect their management of emotions.

Going towards practical contribution this study will be helpful for service industry to understand the phenomena of emotional labor in frontline workers. It will be valuable for service organizations to understand that every individual is not suitable for the jobs in which face to face interaction is involved. As well as this study is helpful for service firms that, they should consider the phenomena of emotional labor and personality characteristics of individuals during the job assignments.

#### Limitations & Future Research:

In future research these propositions should be empirically tested. For further research researchers should empirically tested this conceptual model by including moderators like situational factors such as frequency, attentiveness and variety of emotions and demographic variables for example age gender etc. Future research should also scrutinize emotion related variables other than the big five mode, including, emotional intellect, emotional expressivity and self-monitoring. These and other variables might be more approximate to emotional labor issues.

### CONCLUSION

Workers in service industry are paid to be nice, polite, and humble with customers. It requires a continuous effort to be nice with different types of customers. While such effort succeeds, it is a significant achievement. The phenomena of emotional labor should seriously be considered because it has an effect on customer's loyalty and customer's contentment which ultimately leads toward organizational performance. Hopefully this study will give better understanding of, what emotional labor is, and how personality of individuals associated with this phenomenon will be affected.

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