Putting On A Happy Face: How Emotional Labor Impacts Frontline Service Employees

Anita H. Whiting
Putting On A Happy Face: How Emotional Labor Impacts Frontline Service Employees

Anita H. Whiting
Clayton State University

ABSTRACT

This study investigates emotional labor and its impact on frontline service employees (FSE). Emotional labor is defined as the stress of regulating one’s emotional displays in response to display rules (Diefendorff and Gosserand 2003). FSE experience emotional labor as they regulate their inner or felt emotions in order to display the appropriate emotions to the customer. Displaying appropriate emotions to customers is very important to service organizations because it affects customer affect and evaluation of service quality (Pugh 2001).

Unlike previous research which focuses mostly on the customer’s experience during a service encounter, this paper focuses on FSE and their performance during the service encounter. In particular, this study looks at emotional labor and its impact on (1) customer service, (2) job performance, and (3) job satisfaction. This study attempts to explain the important role that emotional labor plays in the performance of FSE.

Data was collected by students in a services marketing course at a southeastern university. A total of one hundred and eighty-nine service employees participated in the study Smart PLS (Ringle et al 2005) was used to assess the measurement model and the structural model. The results from the survey show that surface acting has a negative impact on customer service and job satisfaction and deep acting has a positive impact on customer service, job performance, and job satisfaction.

This paper contributes to the marketing literature by demonstrating the effects of emotional labor on FSE job outcomes. Managerial implications of this study are that (1) organizations should consider recruiting and selecting FSE who use deep acting and (2) organizations should consider evaluating FSE on deep acting rather than surface acting because of the many benefits of deep acting, and (3) organizations should consider training their current employees on how to perform deep acting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anita Whiting is an Associate Professor of Marketing at Clayton State University. She received a Ph.D. in marketing from Georgia State University. She has published in The International Journal of Research in Marketing, Journal of Service Research, Journal of Services Marketing, and International Business: Research, Teaching, and Practice. Her expertise and research interests are in Services Marketing.