Designing and testing a model of precedents and outcomes of emotional labour in an industrial organization in Iran
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Abstract

A model of some precedents and outcomes of emotional labor was developed and tested in a sample consisted of 153 employees of an industrial organization in Iran. The variables included in the model were: openness to experience, agreeableness and consciousness as precedents of emotional labor, emotional labor (surface acting), and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBI and OCBO) as outcomes of emotional labor. Fitness of the proposed model was examined through structural equation modeling (SEM). Findings revealed that 1) openness to experience and consciousness were negatively related to surface acting, and 2) surface acting was negatively related to OCBI and OCBO. Implications of the results are presented in the study.

Keywords: Personality traits, emotional labor, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB);

1. Introduction

Emotional labor, namely employees’ emotional performance, is a partly new topic of inquiry investigated since the late 70s, started by Hochschild (1979, 1983). Grandey (2000, p. 97) defined this concept as “the process of regulating both feelings and expressions for organizational goals”. According to Grandey (2000), emotional regulation is necessary in work settings because employees are required to display emotions that are compatible with norms, or organizational rules, about the suitable emotional display for the situation. Hochschild (1983) was one of the first researchers who started the theoretical development of emotional labor. In emotional labor literature, most studies have focused on two emotional labor strategies: surface acting and deep acting. In surface acting, the “actor” is not really experiencing the showed emotion, he or she is simply portraying the emotion for the audience to see and explicate. Deep acting, on the other hand, focuses on inner feelings and implies to attempts to construct the required emotion so that the natural, unaffected display will be congruent with the role requirement (Diamond, 2005; Diefendorff, Croyle, and Gosserand, 2005). These different dimensions of emotional labor demand different resources, because surface acting involves “going through the emotions,” whereas deep acting requires “putting one’s self in another’s shoes” (Diefendorff et al., 2005). To meet work specific display rules surface acting is used by service agents to hide (suppression) or fake felt emotions. Faking emotions means expressing emotions when you really do not feel them while suppressing emotions means keeping emotions to yourself or you do not express them because you feel you should not express them (Shivy, 2010).
Emotional labor’s antecedents and outcomes have been the subject of several studies (e.g., Kim, 2008; Kiffin-Petersen, Jordan, & Soutar, 2011). Several factors that some are related to job characteristics and some to personal characteristics of workers are postulated to be antecedents of emotional labor. Personality has an important effect on emotional labor (Yalcin, 2010; Kiffin-Petersen et al, 2011; Gursoy, Boylu & Avci, 2011; Sohn & Lee, 2011). This has important implications for organizations regarding the selection of employees who interact with customers (Kiffin-Petersen et al, 2011). It can be referred to personality as constant patterns of traits, tendencies or characteristics that make the person’s behavior permanent. Costa and McCrae (1992) inserted the famous model of personality known as Five Factor Model includes: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and consciousness. According to previous research (e.g., Sohn & Lee, 2011; Yalcin, 2010; Austin, Dore & O’Donovan, 2008), openness to experience, agreeableness, and consciousness influence surface acting. The behavioral tendencies typically associated with openness to experience include being imaginative, cultured, curious, original, broad minded, intelligent and having a need for variety, aesthetic sensitivity, and unconventional values (Kumar, 2009). Diefendorff et al. (2005) and Austin et al. (2008) found no relationship between openness to experience and emotion regulation but Sohn & Lee (2011) found that openness have a significant influence on surface acting. People who are high in agreeableness are warm, likable, generally friendly, good natured, cooperative, helpful, courteous, and flexible (Abu Elanain, 2010). Some studies (e.g., Sohn & Lee, 2011; Yalcin, 2010; McKibben, 2008) showed that agreeableness predict surface acting. A person scoring high on consciousness would be one who is dependable, responsible, thorough, organized, hardworking, achievement-oriented and persevering (Diamond, 2005). Diefendorff et al. (2005) found that conscientiousness was negatively related to surface acting (McKibben, 2008). Studies of conscientious employees are somewhat mixed, suggesting they may be more desired to surface act, than deep act (Austin et al., 2008; Diefendorff et al., 2005).

In service settings, the extent to which an employee engages in surface and deep acting may influence whether they fulfill organizational citizenship behaviors (Kiffin-Petersen et al., 2011). Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) according to Organ (1988) is individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization (Aykler, 2010). Williams (1988) found a two dimensional definition of OCB: 1) benefits to the organization in general, such as volunteering to serve on committees (OCBO), and 2) benefits directed at individuals within the organization, such as altruism and interpersonal helping (OCBI). Halbesleben and Bowler (2007) expressed that, as an employee becomes emotionally exhausted from surface acting, they may increase their performance of OCBS as a way to earn social support. Salami (2007) found that surface acting negatively related to OCB and deep acting positively related to OCB.

2. The present study and hypotheses

The model that developed and tested in this study, indicates that personality traits (openness to experience, consciousness, and agreeableness) relate negatively to surface acting (H1, H2 & H3, respectively) and surface acting correlates negatively to OCBI and OCBO (H4 & H5, respectively). The proposed model illustrated in Figure 1.

![Proposed model of the relationships among personality traits, surface acting, and OCBs](image-url)
3. Method

3.1. Participants

Data were gathered from a sample of employees who were selected by simple random sampling method from an industrial organization in Iran. Anonymous questionnaires were distributed to 300 employees. Altogether, 153 questionnaires were returned and analyzed. The response rate was 51%. Of the employees in the final sample, 83% were men, and the average age was 36 years.

3.2. Measures

**NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI).** 36 items of 60-item questionnaire (Costa & McCrae, 1992) were used for assessment of three dimensions of personality include openness to experience, agreeableness, and consciousness. Respondents were asked (1, strongly disagree, to 5, strongly agree) to demonstrate how much they were open to experience, be agreed and conscientious. In present study Cronbach’s alpha for openness, agreeableness and consciousness dimensions of this scale were .68, .71 and .80, respectively.

**Discrete Emotions Emotional Labor Scale (DEELS).** Two of three subscales (genuine expression, faked expression and suppression of emotions) of the questionnaire designed by Glomb & Tews (2004) were used to assess the frequency of emotional labor strategies used by employees. Each of the subscales asked participants to consider 14 distinct positive and negative emotions relative to their interactions with others. This measure used a 1-5 response scale (1, never, to 5, many times a day). Glomb & Tews (2004) reported a range of Cronbach’s alpha from .80 (genuine) to .87 (faked) for the positive emotion subscales, and .86 (genuine) to .94 (suppression) for the negative emotion subscales. In the current study Cronbach’s alpha for faked expression and suppression of emotions were .84 and .82, respectively.

**Organizational Citizenship Behavior Questionnaire.** Organizational citizenship behavior was measured with the 14 items (7 items for OCBI and 7 items for OCBO) of 21-item scale developed by Williams & Anderson (1991). Participants responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale from “1” (strongly disagree) to “5” (strongly agree). Williams & Anderson (1991) reported Cronbach’s alpha of .61 to .88 for OCBI and .70 to .75 for OCBO. In this study Cronbach’s alpha for OCBI and OCBO were .81 and .76, respectively.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Before all proposed relationships were tested simultaneously, a correlational analysis was conducted among all variables included in this study. The correlations of variables, means, and standard deviations are reported in table 1.

4.2. Structural model

Structural modeling results suggested that the hypothesized model fit the observed data adequately, \( \chi^2/df=1.4, \) GFI=.97, CFI=.98, TLI=.97, NFI=.96, and RMSEA=.05. All of the hypothesized relationships except one path, that is, agreeableness→ surface acting, were supported based on the structural modeling results. Fit indices of the proposed model after eliminating non-significant path were: \( \chi^2/df=1.1, \) GFI=.98, CFI=.1, TLI=.99, NFI=.1 and RMSEA=.03. As expected, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 were supported, openness to experience and consciousness were related negatively to surface acting (\( \beta=-.36, p < .001; \beta=-.66, p < .001, \) respectively). Consistent with hypotheses 4 and 5, surface acting was negatively related to OCBI and OCBO (\( \beta=-.78, p < .001; \beta=-.65, p < .001, \) respectively). But hypothesis 3 was not confirmed; agreeableness was not related to surface acting.
Table 1. Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations for study variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.Openness</td>
<td>42.41</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.Consciousness</td>
<td>47.04</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>.63*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.Agreeableness</td>
<td>43.26</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>.56*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.Surface acting</td>
<td>67.66</td>
<td>16.57</td>
<td>-.45**</td>
<td>-.75**</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.OCBI</td>
<td>27.06</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>.63**</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>-.80**</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.OCBO</td>
<td>27.78</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.41*</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>-.71**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P<0.05 ** P<0.01

5. Discussion and implications

The aim of the present study was developing and testing a model of precedents and outcomes of emotional labor (surface acting). Precedents of emotional labor include openness to experience, agreeableness, and consciousness. Outcomes include OCBI and OCBO. The model, which had received support from previous studies, was examined with data from employees in an industrial organization in Iran. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Sohn et al., 2011; Diefendorff et al., 2005; Halbesleben et al., 2007; Salami, 2007), openness and consciousness were found to have negative effects on surface acting and surface acting was found to have negative effects on OCBI and OCBO. But contrasting with previous studies (e.g., Sohn et al., 2011; Yalcin, 2010), the relationship between agreeableness and surface acting was not significant. Cultural differences can be reason of this lack of relationship. High score on openness and consciousness lead to reduce using of surface acting and therefore lead to increase partnership in OCBs.

This study has practical implications for individuals and organizations. Perhaps the most obvious practical implication is for personality traits. Although our results point to the potential benefits of selection for employers and job seekers, they also suggest that the “emotional labor problem” will not be fully solved by focusing on individual differences. Even holding individual differences constant, engagement in surface acting was associated with reduced organizational citizenship behavior. Although organizations are unlikely to abandon standards for emotional expression due to the difficulties they may pose for employees, they can contemplate actions that may increase employees’ emotional resources (Zapf, 2002). Organizations might train employees to increase their emotional resources by, for example, showing them how to frame customer demands as challenges rather than threats (Schneider, 2004). Alternatively, organizations could persuade employees that it is in their own interests to attempt to actually experience the expected emotions (which, of course, is true in the sense that deep acting appears to generate less negative reactions than surface acting). Because of the relatively detrimental effects of surface versus deep acting, perhaps organizations should emphasize “feeling rules” (Salmela, 2005) over “display rules”—in short, to encourage employees to actually experience the expected emotions. Although, of course, organizations cannot control the actual emotions experienced by employees, they can strive to increase the concordance between expected and felt emotions (Judge, Woolf, & Hurst, 2009).

It is important to highlight some limitations of the present study which can guide future research. First, given the cross-sectional design of this study, causal relationships among the variables cannot be established. Longitudinal studies should be employed to test the hypotheses. Second, the use of self-report measures may have inherent limitations (e.g. inability to recall, social desirability). A combination of self-report questionnaires and objective assessments would be ideal. Finally, future research is needed to further understand the other possible precedents and outcomes of emotional labor.

References


