

# **THE DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS OF EMOTIONAL LABOUR ON BOUNDARY SPANNERS OF INTERNATIONAL BANKS IN ZIMBABWE**

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## **Abstract**

The study aimed to investigate the effect of emotional labour strategies on job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion. A conceptual framework was developed using extant literature, which led to examining deep acting and surface acting, which are the two main strategies of emotional labour. The outcome variables were emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. The research was quantitative in nature. Stratified random sampling was adopted in selecting suitable participants. Data was collected from 301 front line employees of five international banks in Zimbabwe using a structured questionnaire. The study results revealed that deep acting is an ideal strategy of emotional labour as it leads to job satisfaction and reduced emotional exhaustion. Surface acting was found to be a harmful emotional labour strategy. It was revealed, in this study, that surface acting is inversely related to job satisfaction and positively related to emotional exhaustion. The study recommended the moderate use of emotional labour to avoid long term stress-related effects.

**Keywords:** Emotional Labour, Emotional Exhaustion, Job satisfaction, Deep Acting, Surface Acting.

## **Introduction**

The concept of delivering service with an organisational face and smile gained momentum as soon as the importance of physical evidence in marketing was understood (Praveena 2015). Geng, Li, Bi, Zheng, and Yang (2018) posited that emotional labour strategies (deep acting and surface acting) facilitate promotion to focus on front-line employee creativity. Boundary spanners are expected to put on the face of the organisation. That means displaying the mood that the organisation wants according to the service blueprint of the organisation. Khan (2012) suggests that it includes smiling and engaging with the customer in a friendly manner. This type of attitude could have a desirable impact on customers' behaviour (Chuchu, Chiliya & Chinomona, 2018). Even when the customer is angry and hostile, boundary spanners are expected to remain calm, cheerful and above all, smiling.

Boundary spanner are front line employees who engage directly with customers, especially walk-in customers (Wagner, Barnes and Scott 2013). In the banking sector, these include bank tellers, clerks and personal bankers.

That strategy of exhibiting the organisation's mood leads to suppressing one's true feelings and perspective. The resulting friction is a new emerging concept called emotional labour. According

to Chu (2002), emotional labour can be defined as the degree of manipulation of one's inner feelings or outward behaviour to display the appropriate emotion in response to organisational rules or occupational norms. Hochschild (1983) was the first to coin the term emotional labour in her study of flight attendants. Frontline banking employees are sometimes asked to display an emotion by the organisation which contradicts their inner self felt emotions. That leads to emotional dissonance. Hochschild (1983) argues that emotional dissonance refers to the separation of felt emotion from emotion expressed to meet external expectations and contends that it is harmful to employees' physical and psychological wellbeing.

The justification by bank managers for emotional labour goes to the value between the service provider and customers (Rugraff & Hansen 2011). Such episodes of interactive exchange build customers' perception of quality service. Emotions are contagious. Thus, when a customer relates with a bank employee in a good mood, either genuinely or emotionally, the customer is more likely to feel the same jovial mood (Khan 2012). Once a customer is happy, Wagner et al. (2013) reiterate that his perception of the service is more likely to be favourable. That concept is called emotional contagion, which refers to the generalisability of mood from the service provider to the client. Thus, many bank managers see the idea of emotional labour as good for business.

Emotional labour may be deemed extreme by the general populace. However, research in developed nations have confirmed that emotional labour leads to customer satisfaction (Akhter 2016; Chu & Murmann 2006). Thus, banks justify their use of emotional labour. For years, international banks in Zimbabwe have been known for offering quality services in the host country, Zimbabwe. There are five international banks in Zimbabwe namely Standard Chartered Bank, Ecobank Bank, Nedbank, Barclays Bank and Stanbic Bank (RBZ 2017). From an insightful exploratory research done by this researcher, all international banks prioritised employee-customer interaction. Emotional labour is an existing concept which cuts across all international banks operating in Zimbabwe. For example, Standard Chartered Bank Zimbabwe has a service charter that states that it is committed to quality customer service engagement. Employees are expected to behave in a manner which mimics the organisation's requirements. Barclays Bank's mission and core values clearly show that they have the customers at heart through enhanced quality service. Stanbic maintained its home country culture of organisational warmth and environmental friendliness. Employees are expected to perform emotional behaviour which is friendly with a smile throughout the service interaction period. Though it has recently entered the Zimbabwean market, Nedbank's competitive advantage is differentiation. Thus they uphold the People strategy (Marketing mix) and are also engaged in emotional labour strategies. Ecobank is the fifth (not in any order of superiority) international bank in Zimbabwe. It also encourages front-line employees to "put on a happy face," regardless of their actual underlying feelings.

Udeagha (2012) argues that banks should focus more on employee motivation not emotion suppression. His arguments were seconded by (Khan 2012) who reckons that time has passed when the adage was a rule of thumb... "*customer is king*". Rather than placing all emphasis on satisfying the customer at the expense of employees' satisfaction, Khan (2012) recommends the reverse, starting by satisfying employees, not suppressing them. The same concept was upheld by Lee, Azizi, Sidinc and Salehd (2014) who say the new emerging concept should be "*an employee is the first customer*". The concept borders on the theory that a happy employee is a productive employee.

## **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of the study was to uncover the effect of emotional labour on front line employees. To achieve that, the following literature-based objectives were developed:

- To determine the impact of emotional labour strategies on emotional exhaustion.
- To uncover the impact of emotional labour strategies on job satisfaction.

## Literature Review

### 3.1 Emotional labour strategies

According to Hochschild (1983), the pioneer of emotional labour, and other contemporary researchers (Rugraff&Hansen 2011; Khan 2012, Lazányi 2014, Lee *et al.*, 2014) there is a consensus that two main emotional labour strategies are deep acting and surface acting.

### 3.2 Deep acting

According to Chu (2002), deep acting occurs when employees change their physical expressions and their inner feelings when dealing with customers. This generally occurs due to the effect that customers have on an organisation's employees (Mashele& Chuchu, 2018). Furthermore, Eduegha (2012) also contributes that deep acting occurs when employees' feelings do not fit the situation, they then use their training or past experience to wake up appropriate emotions. There is consonance between inner feelings and outward actions. Hochschild (1983) tie it up by discussing how emotions are manipulated in deep acting. According to Hochschild (1983), in deep acting, emotions and feelings are changed from inside out. Therefore, deep acting emotional labour involves changing inner feelings by altering the feeling more than outward appearance. Deep acting can be done through imagining or recalling similar emotional experiences (Chu, 2002). It can also be done by developing genuine empathy for the customer. Several studies have confirmed that deep acting always almost displays the required emotions (Rugraff and Hansen 2011; Khan 2012, Hochschild 1983). Contrary to many researchers who suggest that deep acting naturally occurs and leads to genuine display of emotions, Prati, Liu, Perrewé and Ferris (2009) as quoted by Eduegha (2012), found out that deep acting might require a great deal of mental energy in the form of motivation, emotional intelligence, engagement, and role internalisation and might therefore be even more psychologically demanding than other forms of emotional labour such as surface acting. Thus, Liu *et al.* (2008) disapprove of the effortless regulatory ideology of deep labour.

### 3.3 Surface acting

Surface acting is the end of deep acting on a continuum of emotional labour strategies. According to Lee *et al.* (2014) surface, acting implies temporarily suppressing or masking the felt emotions which are inappropriate for the job and expressing the appropriate ones. It involves changing the outward appearance of an employee or service provider by simulating emotions that are not being felt (Huang, Chiaburu, Zhang & Li, 2015). To engage themselves in surface acting, front line employees may put on a welcoming and friendly outside appearance like a warmly facial expression, welcoming gestures or a calm voice tone; when in fact, they do not feel that way.

### 3.4 Emotional Labour Outcomes

Several theories and researchers suggested that emotional labour, either deep acting or surface acting, may lead to emotional exhaustion or job satisfaction, depending on how it was administered. The Interactionist Theory (Morris & Feldman 1996) explained emotion building and development and suggested that emotional dissonance may arise due to emotional labour. Similarly, the Dramaturgical Theory (Kruml & Geddes 2000), which largely borrows from Hochschild's dramaturgical perspective of emotion management, suggested that employees may be satisfied with their jobs if they deep act and maybe burnt out if they surface act. The Emotion Regulation Theory (Grandey 2000) analysed emotional labour from the emotion regulation perspective. It indicated that the individual wellbeing outcome variables of emotional labour are job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion.

**3.5 Job satisfaction**

Job satisfaction refers to the feeling of contentment and gratification by an employee of his/her work (Lazányi 2014). It is a positive indication of a favourable working environment. Employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to be motivated to do more at work (Akhter 2016). Ghalandari, Mortazavi, Abbasi and Jogh(2012) found out, in a study, that deep acting positively correlates with job satisfaction, whilst surface acting negatively correlates with job satisfaction. The same conclusion was reached by some researchers too (Chuang et al.,2014). More extraordinary business performance is dependent on job satisfaction (Mgxaji, Chinomona&Chuchu, 2016;Nana, Tobias, Chiliya& Maziriri, 2019).

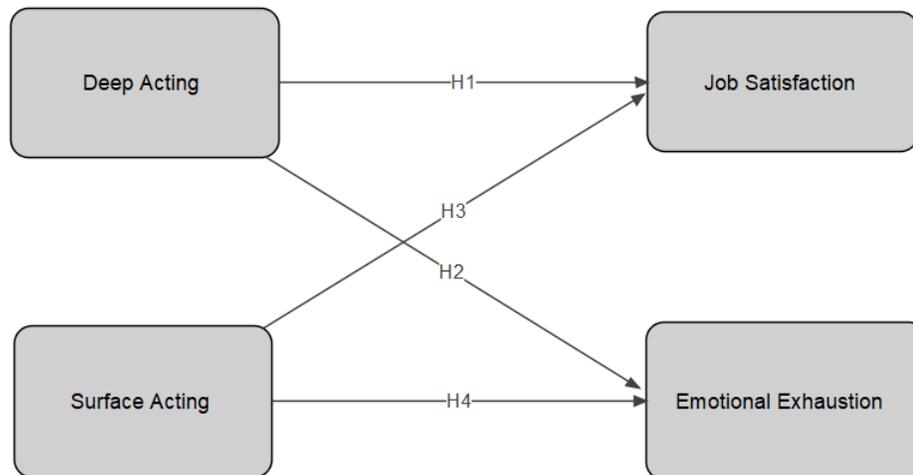
**3.6 Emotional exhaustion**

Emotional exhaustion is a core dimension of emotional burnout (Udeagha 2012). According to Johnson (2004:11), emotional exhaustion is “the state of depleted energy caused by excessive emotional demands made on people interacting with customers or clients and involves feelings of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one’s work” Akhter (2016) relate emotional exhaustion by way of an example. For instance, an employee may put on a grin and happily welcomes customers even though she or he is feeling down thereby faking feelings that are not genuinely experienced. At the back of their mind, they are emotionally exhausted because of the pressure from their superiors.

**The conceptual framework and hypotheses**

The relationship between the variables investigated in this study is described in a conceptual framework (Maziriri, Chuchu, & Madinga, 2019). Maziriri et al. (2019) add that a conceptual model schematic diagram helps the readers to visualise the theoretical relationships between the variables in the model and formulate a quick idea of how the problem can be solved. In the conceptual framework two emotional labour strategies were identified as deep acting (DA) and surface acting (SA). Two extreme outcomes on a continuum were established as job satisfaction (JS) and emotional exhaustion (EE). The emotional labour Conceptual Framework (ELCF) is thus presented below in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Emotional Labour Conceptual Model**



The following were the hypotheses for the study

- H1: Deep Acting has a positive impact on Job Satisfaction.
- H2: Deep acting has a negative impact on Emotional Exhaustion.
- H3: Surface Acting has a negative impact on Job Satisfaction.
- H4: Surface Acting has a positive impact on Emotional Exhaustion.

## Research Methodology

### 5.1 Target Population and Sampling Method

The research followed a positivism research philosophy to investigate the effect of emotional labour on boundary spanners. Lose, Tengeh, Maziriri and Madinga (2016) are of the view that two methods can be followed when conducting research, namely, qualitative and quantitative research. The research was quantitative in nature. Data was collected from 301 front line employees who worked at five international banks in Zimbabwe using a structured questionnaire. A - cross-sectional survey was carried out, which focused on the emotional labour activities of boundary spanners of international banks operating in Zimbabwe. Stratified random sampling was used to select international bank’s front-line employee respondents proportionally as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Determinants of stratified random sampling**

International bank	Frontline employees	Stratum size	% Contribution
Barclays Bank	489	142	33%
Eco Bank.	110	32	7%
Nedbank	101	29	7%
Stanbic Bank	415	120	28%
Standard Chartered Bank	371	108	25%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1486</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>100 %</b>

### 5.2 Instrument Design and Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was the instrument used to collect data. The questionnaire design was governed by previous scales obtained from literature (Chu 2002; Johnson 2004; Khan 2012; Akhter 2016) to effectively cover constructs for deep acting, surface acting, job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion. A five-point Likert-scale questionnaire was used with a continuum which ran from ‘Strongly Agree’ to Strongly Disagree’. The study was an email administered survey that found its richness in the readily available emailing list of all boundary spanner respondents in the sampling frame obtained from the organisations under study. The sampling frame consisted of Bank tellers, Customers services employees, Personal bankers, and Bank clerks. 431 questionnaires were administered and 301 were returned and usable, giving a response rate of 69.8%

### 5.3 Validity and Reliability

The extent to which the questionnaire was internally consistent was measured using the Cronbach’s alpha Test, and the results are shown in Table 2.

**Table:2: Reliability Statistics**

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Surface Acting	5	0.819
Deep Acting	5	0.834
Job Satisfaction	5	0.888
Emotional Exhaustion	5	0.848
Supervisory support	4	0.809
Coworker support	4	0.822
<b>Overall Cronbach’s Alpha</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>0.837</b>

Table 2 shows that all the variables under study were statistically consistent and reliable. The Cronbach’s alpha of the variables under study ranged from 0.809 to 0.888, indicating a good level of reliability (George and Mallery, 2003). Internal validity was satisfied by adhering loosely to the research objectives. Adaptation of the instrument used, from previous emotional labour studies, helped in ensuring concurrent validity of the study. External validity was met by using a large sample size of 431 respondents that could be generalised to all front-line employees of the target population.

**5.4 Data Presentation and Analysis Procedure**

SPSS 25 was used to analyse data from the questionnaires. Questionnaires were pre-coded, cleaned and post-coded for input into the statistical application. Correlation and regression tests were performed to ascertain the impact, strength and direction of emotional labour on job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion.

**Results of the Study**

Out of 301 respondents surveyed, 164 (54.5%) were females whilst 137 (45.5%) were males. Of the boundary-spanning job categories, Bank Tellers (39.9%) were the majority, followed by the Customer Services Officers (21.6%) and the minority was Bank Clerks with a representation of 18.3%. Most boundary spanners had experience between 4-6 years (38.5%). Employees’ general disposition during a service encounter showed that they were generally “Smiling” (58.2%), ‘Cheerful’ (38.5%), ‘Moody’ (3.3%). This shows that respondents were generally friendly when dealing with customers.

**6.1 Correlation Analysis**

The Spearman Correlation Test was computed to ascertain the level of association between emotional labour strategies and emotional labour outcome variables. Table 5 shows the results of the analysis.

**Table 5. Correlation Analysis: Emotional Labour Strategy versus Emotional Labour Outcome variables)**

<b>Construct or Dimension</b>	<b>Surface Acting</b>	<b>Deep Acting</b>
Surface acting Significance (2 tailed)	1	
Deep Acting Significance (2 tailed)	0.252 0.000	1
Job Satisfaction Significance (2 tailed)	-0.858 0.000	0.714 0.002
Emotional Exhaustion Significance (2 tailed)	0.769 0.000	-0.421 0.000

Table 5 shows that there is a statistically significant, high positive correlation between surface acting and emotional exhaustion ( $r = 0.769$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $N = 301$ ) and deep acting and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.714$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ,  $N = 301$ ). A strong inverse statistically significant association was found between Surface Acting and Job Satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of -0.858,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $N = 301$ . The correlation between deep acting and emotional exhaustion was statistically significant ( $p<0.05$ ) with a moderately strong inverse correlation of -0.421.

**6.2 Regression Analysis**

To ascertain the impact of emotional labour on boundary spanners, regression analysis was performed. The study variables had two dependent variables, namely job satisfaction and emotional exhaustion. Regression analysis was performed separately for each dependent variable and the models' summaries are shown in Table 6 and 7.

**Table 6: Regression Analysis results for Job Satisfaction**

Determinants of Job Satisfaction	Dependent Variable: Job Satisfaction				
	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.001	0.107		9.369	0.000
Deep Acting	0.810	0.027	0.581	29.668	0.000
Surface acting	-0.097	0.024	-0.120	3.999	0.000
R = 0.866 R <sup>2</sup> = 0.750 Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.748 F = 446.543 *Sig p<0.05					

Table 6 shows that the model summary had an adjusted R squared of 0.748, meaning that emotional labour strategies in the study account for 74.8% of boundary spanner's job satisfaction. The F value of 446.543 with a p-value of 0.000 indicates that the model is statistically significant.

**Table 7: Regression Analysis results for Emotional Exhaustion**

Determinants of Emotional Exhaustion	Dependent Variable: Emotional Exhaustion				
	Unstandardised Coefficients		Standardised Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.945	0.021		234.180	.000
Deep Acting	-1.123	0.005	-0.104	207.943	.000
Surface acting	0.703	0.005	0.656	146.092	.000
R = 0.813 R <sup>2</sup> = 0.662 Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = 0.646 F = 2.631 *Sig p<0.05					

Table 6 shows that the model summary had an adjusted R squared of 0.646, meaning that emotional labour strategies in the study account for 64.6% of boundary spanner's emotional exhaustion. The F value of 2.631 with a p-value of 0.000 indicates that the model is statistically significant.

**1. Discussion of Results**

The **first hypothesis (H1)** predicted that deep acting has a positive impact on Job Satisfaction. This hypothesis was accepted (B = 0.581 t = 29.668, p =0.000), signifying that boundary spanners are more satisfied with their jobs if they deep act. The strength of the correlation coefficient (0.714) showed that deep acting in inciting job satisfaction of front-line employees was also high. Yoo andJeong (2017) found out that deep acting predicted positive influence on employee work engagement.

The **second hypothesis (H2)** predicted that deep acting has a negative impact on emotional exhaustion. This hypothesis was accepted (B = -0.104, p = 0.000, r = -0.421) showing that front-line employees will be less emotionally exhausted if they deep act. A negative Beta shows that emotional exhaustion should decrease by 10 percentage points if deep acting is increased by one. Boundary spanners should, therefore genuinely act during a service interaction. In a related study,

Huang et al.,(2015) revealed that deep acting was less emotionally exhausting for service providers when they perceived their jobs as challenging. Similarly, Bursalı, Bağcı, and Kök (2014) found that private bank employees prefer to act naturally rather than acting roles and express their feelings as they come from deep inside.

The **third hypothesis(H3)** posits that surface acting has a negative impact on Job Satisfaction. The study results confirmed this hypothesis ( $B = -0.120$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $r = -0.858$ ), implying that the more boundary spanners surface act, the less likely they become satisfied their jobs by a factor of 12%. A study by Grandey, Fisk and Steiner(2005) showed that surface acting might lead to impaired self-evaluation by employees who use it. The long-run effect of it could be depression, reduced motivation and high employee turnover. Huang et al., (2015) also suggest that surface acting can lead to net loss in resources since the “inauthentic display of emotions is less likely to yield an upswing in positive resources”.

The **fourth hypothesis(H4)** hypothesised that surface acting has a positive impact on emotional exhaustion. Regression analysis table 7 shows the hypothesis is accepted at  $p = 0.000$ ,  $B = 0.656$ ,  $r = 0.769$ . This means that the more boundary spanners surface act, the more they become emotionally exhausted. This highlights the need for managers and companies to desist from emotion suppression as it causes emotional burnout. The previous studies by other researchers also found consistent results with the current findings. For instance, Giorgi Arcangeli, Perminiene, Lorini, Ariza-Montes, Fiz-Perez and Mucci (2017) studied emotional labour in the banking sector in Rome. They found out that workplace stress was a critical banking sector issue with potentially negative effects on workers’ and organisations’ psychological and physical health. Their study also brought out the idea that there was a gradual increase in mental health problems in the banking sector due to stress at work.

#### **Managerial and Policy Implications**

Managerial and policy recommendations proposed in this section are based on the findings that emotional labour strategies may lead to a favourable outcome (job satisfaction) and an unhealthy outcome (emotional exhaustion). We recommend training and retraining boundary spanners to appreciate the management’s need to develop a friendly customer engagement. As employees become conscious of that, they cease to surface act but engage in deep acting closely tied to genuine acting. The study has shown that deep acting promotes job satisfaction.

Through employee engagement, surface acting will be reduced and deep acting will be enhanced. Employees would know where the organisation is coming from and going to. Through that collaboration, employees would feel they are part of the organisation. That is more likely to loosen Surface Acting whilst promoting deep acting, associated with job satisfaction in this study.

The study also recommends a relaxed policy to allow boundary spanners to switch to back office when they are emotionally distressed, where they would not be interacting with customers. Mandatory boundary spanning even when the employee is not feeling well may force employees to surface acting. According to the current study findings, as they Surface Act they become dissatisfied with their jobs. This is detrimental as that may cause high labour turnover in the long run.

The study has shown that emotional labour has health effects that affect the cognitive ability of employees. Such effects were found to be stress-related and depression as caused by excessive emotional suppression. The research therefore recommends the instigation of wellness programmes to subject front-line employees to health check regularly. Such programmes will also help employees to be conscious of their need to moderate emotional suppression and long run stress-related effects.

## **Limitations of the Study**

Different policies of emotional labour among all banks in Zimbabwe poses a limitation of comparability. It was difficult to compare the impact of emotional labour on all banks in Zimbabwe because they were at different levels of emotional labour policy implementation. To counter that limitation, the researcher restricted himself to a homogeneous group of international banks who were at the same wave length regarding emotional labour practices and policies. The target population of all front-line employees of international banks was too large for the researcher to carry out a census, thus the researcher resorted to probability sampling. The researcher used a large sample that was representative at 95% confidence interval and 5% margin of error.

## **Conclusion and direction for future research**

Future researchers may study the relevance of emotional labour given employee emotional deterioration due to surface acting. The scope of the study may also be broadened to study even the hospitality industry where emotional labour and emotional contagion are equally topical issues today. As more and more companies engage in display rules through emotional labour, the study found out that surface acting leads to emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction by boundary spanners. Contrary to suppressed emotions, the study concluded that if employees genuinely act through deep acting, they are more likely to enjoy their work, reducing emotional burnout. Therefore, companies responsible for managing front-line employees should promote empathy and compassion, which promotes deep acting.

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