

Emotional Labour: An Undervalued Human Resources Asset in Nigerian Public Sector Organizations

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Abstract

Employees in most service sector organizations utilize diverse aspects of their intangible human assets. However, emotional labour is one of such invisible human assets often utilized by employees at the workplace. Like other aspects of organizations' resources, emotions in service oriented field of human endeavor is seen as a product, yet, in most developing and underdeveloped economies, most employers and organizations often give little or no attention to its existence. Thus, this study examines the value of emotional labour in Nigerian public sectors. From the review of related literatures, the study established that the attention given and the value placed on emotional labour in the Nigerian public service organizations (especially, the police force, public schools and the healthcare services) is inadequate, as it is not fairly compensated as well as untrained and undeveloped, in spite of the enormous contributions made by employees in these institutions to the development and sustenance of the nation's economy. Thus, the need for organizations (especially service oriented public enterprises) in Nigeria, to give adequate attention to emotional labor in order to optimize its use in achieving effective service delivery.

Keywords: Emotion, deep acting, surface acting, labour, human resource.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last four decades, there is a tremendous drive among practitioners as well as scholars in human resources management and related field of study on how best organizations can effectively utilize the most important components of their resources in achieving predetermined objectives. Although, studies abound in understanding and explicating the various components of organizations' human resources, however, issues keep emerging due to the complexity characterizing humans' nature as well as their interpersonal relationships at the workplace. One of such issues that has attracted attention in organizational studies, is the complexity involving commoditization of emotion often referred to as "emotional labour" in service oriented organizations. Notably, the reason why the construct 'emotional labour', has kept attracting much attention in the field of organizational studies according to Glomb, Kammeyam-Muella and Rotundo (2004), is its pervasiveness in several fields of human endeavor, as employees frequent

emotional changes at the workplace becomes a natural occurrence.

Unarguably, all professions demand some form of emotion management at certain situations or point in time, nevertheless, the intensity of expectation of emotion often demanded and displays in some industries as well as professions goes beyond just emotion management expected from civil society to commoditizing it (Brennan, 2006). Observably, service related industry is one in which there is high intensity of emotional commoditization. Emotions in the service related professions is simply seen as a product. This is made visible in the pioneering works of Hochschild (1983) who ascertained flight attendants as one profession in the service industry that often negotiates emotion as a product. Though, not all professions found within the service industry is considered being qualified on the basis of negotiating emotion as a product, but as opined by Hochschild (1983), certain pre-conditions must be met for a profession to be seen as an emotional

labour. These pre-conditions, as stated are that: employee's duties found in such profession must include direct contact with customers; and that workers' duties must involve changing and/ or maintaining customers' emotional state; lastly, employees emotional state must be managed directly by their employers respectively. In other words, these conditions imply either the suppression or evoking of emotions necessary to fit a situation or the feeling rules required in a situation. Implicit in the professions that meet these requirements stated above are health care, teaching, social work, receptionists in hospitality, customer-care representatives in banks; police force, psychology and flight attendants, childcare workers, call-center work and other related professions found in service industry.

For instance, teachers on continual basis are often required to manage their emotions in ways similar to other professions in the service industry (Hebson, Earnshaw & Marchington, 2007). Brennan (2006) states that employees in the teaching profession are expected to safeguard the emotional well-being of their pupils as well as their physical safety. They are required to model successful emotional control at all times, treating pupils with warmth and compassion and suppressing any feelings of impatience or anger (Beatty, 2000). Thus, the teaching role is likely to involve a considerable degree of 'emotional labour', defined as 'the effort, planning and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions. Also, the hospitality sector is one, demanding intense application of emotional labour required in creating a satisfying emotional climate anticipated by customers. Extending, Eketu (2017) opines that the perception customers will have on the service quality of the overall service delivery while on a leisure trip in the hospitality industry is a function of the emotional demeanor of interface employees. Thus, the emotions of receptionists and other front as well as help desk staff becomes a vital component in the survival and growth of businesses in the highly competitive hospitality industry.

Notably, emotional control in the police force becomes of utmost importance to its effectiveness as well as the maintenance of high level of professionalism. As observed, the job of police officers often required them to regulate emotion while interacting with the public. Substantiating, Bhowmick and Mulla (2016) states that the force requires its officers to possess the ability of changing emotional expressions quickly as required in different situations. For instance, negative emotions such as anger, bitterness and so on are often required to tackle negative situations of aggression, conflict and manipulation, while positive emotions like sympathy, empathy and the likes are needed to be displayed in circumstance requiring compassion for victims of crime or violence, illness as well as death and emotion of neutrality in ensuring order as well as professionalism in its conduct (Van Gelderen & Bik, 2016). More often than not, seesawing emotions from a negative to positive state

as well as maintaining a neutral state, becomes a source of stressors as well as burnout. This results in health related issues, poor judgment, substance abuse, lower level of tolerance, deteriorating relationships with one's family and friend, low productivity as well as excessive application in dealing with other individuals.

Notably, emotions are recognized as one of the social determinants of workers' health within an organization (Miller & Considine, 2007); however, most worker within the service profession are to some extent aware of the personal costs attached to their service, but do not yet recognize the professional and personal costs of their emotional labour. The fact that emotional labour is not acknowledged, and is thus undervalued by the majority of employers in service organizations, may probably limits the understanding of emotional exhaustion and professional burnout within the service oriented organization, especially in Nigeria and most parts of developing and underdeveloped economies. Substantiating, Wharton (1993) found that employees in occupations classified as those in which emotional labor is performed have lower income than do employees in occupations in which emotional labor is not performed. This undervaluation of human intangible assets (emotional labour) negates the adjusted net present values approach proposed by Lev and Schwartz (1971), in which employees' salaries are used in the computation of human asset valuation. As observed, the salaries of most employees engaged in the service profession in Nigeria, especially in the public sector in which there is great display of emotional labor is seen to be abysmally adequate.

This, revealed in the living standards of most junior and middle level public sectors' workers in service organizations in Nigeria. For instance, most teachers in public schools after long years of expending their emotional labour ends up receiving poor remuneration at the end of each month and poor gratuity as well as pension at the end of their years in service, thus, subjecting most of them as beggars as well as destitute, unable to build houses their own or afford conducive accommodation. Buttressing, teachers according to Garba (2015) is the least remunerated workers in the Nigerian economy and are privileged to benefit from some of the non-salary benefits like subsidized accommodation, travel and health insurance. Similarly, it has been observed that the government in Nigeria gives inadequate attention to officers of its police force, insufficient annual leave and poor remuneration (Rose & Unnithan, 2015), despite putting their lives at risk in protecting lives and properties within the country. Accordingly, while trying to discharge their duties, some law enforcers experience stress, cynicism, and job burnout. Buttressing, Rose and Unnithan (2015) averred that ninety-one percent (91%) of police officers in Nigeria are confronted with psychological illness and injuries as a result of occupational stress. Extending, Andrew, Ebiekpi, Inameti and Udo (2022) affirms that

Nigeria police is the least paid among corresponding security agencies in Nigeria and majority of the officers receive some of the poorest pay in the West African sub-region, a factor culpable of encouraging extortion and abuse of power, and also inadequate payment makes some officers reside in squalid neighborhood within and outside the barrack.

Of note, several attempts have been made in the field of accounting to recognize the value of human assets while trying to reports information on financial statements. This, according to Erhijakpor, (2003) results in the development of human resource accounting. Although, Sverby (1994) attempts utilizing indicators like growth, renewal, efficiency and stability to determining the value of human assets; Flamholtz (1971) identified determinants of conditional value of an individual as skills, activation level, role as well as reward, and translating these into components of conditional value like ‘promotability’, productivity, transferability as well as satisfaction as value of human assets; while Roos, Roos, Dragonetti, and Edvinsson (1998) integrates and aggregates various intellectual properties and its elements into a single index in the valuation human assets, however, two variables (developmentality’ and versatility) among the theoretical model put forward by Erhijakpor, (2003) in the valuation of human asset, becomes relevant in examining emotional labour in the Nigeria workplace.

Accordingly, the value of human assets increases with the level of development through exposure, experience, training and self-development. More so, Erhijakpor, (2003) views versatility as the ability of the employee to understand and deal with problems within the organization, which require a wide matrix of knowledge. However, it has been observed that most organizations (especially public sector) in the Nigerian workplace barely give little or no attention in training and developing employees’ emotional labor, thus, undervaluing its potential benefits to the organization as well as the issues encountered by employees as they constantly utilize various emotions to use. Buttressing, Morris and Feldman cited in Eketu (2017), reveals that research on emotional labour management as the case with physical and intellectual labour, and association with its criterion value- quality service delivery is lacking. Against the background, the study intends to examine the concept of emotional labour and its value in the public sector organizations in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Emotions in Organizations

Emotions in the workplace represent a relatively new focus in organizational research (Lord, Kanfer & Klimoski, 2002). In other words, since the beginning of the period of the industrial revolution, organizational researchers ignored the topic of emotions in the workplace, perhaps because emotions were viewed as the antithesis of the orderliness and rationality of

organizations. Emotions which ranges from anger, sadness, shame, and guilt, to joy and elation are considered to be powerful enough to either diminish or uplift the degree of employees’ performance of employees at the workplace. In spite of the fact that emotion is an inevitable part of organizational life, the role of emotions has been neglected in the organizational studies and, instead, it has been replaced by a focus on formal economic efficiencies (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995). Similarly, emotions were thought of as irrational, unstable, and biased influences on workplace decision making; they were therefore unwanted in business persons who are expected to be objective and stable (Muchinsky, 2000). However, of recent, scholars as well as researchers have begun to realize that emotions should not be excluded from theories of organizational phenomena and that, if acknowledged, they can be used in ways that will beneficially contributes to organizations, ss such, researchers found new merit in the study of emotions in organizations. For instance, research on job satisfaction has adopted a more affective focus. Dispositional affect has been found to be an important predictor of a person’s job satisfaction over time and across jobs (Staw, Bell, & Clausen, 1986). Additionally, new interest in the effects of mood on work behavior has been influential in turning attention to the more emotional side of workplace experiences (Fisher & Ashkanasy, 2000).

Emotional Labor

Notably, a new line of research on emotion at the workplace organization emerged with the pioneering work of Hochschild’s (1983) book, titled “The Managed Heart”. In her book, Hochschild introduced the idea that individuals often get paid for controlling their own emotions, emotional expressions, and the emotions of others. However, drawing on Goffman’s work, on the concept of ‘impression management’ and ‘presentation of self’, which describe workers’ efforts to adopt an outward appearance of expected emotions, as if on stage, while their real emotions remain hidden, Hochschild (1983) became credited as the first to develop and refine the emotional labour concept from her study of flight attendants. She named this phenomenon emotional labor and defined it as the regulation of emotions as part of the work role. Specifically, Hochschild (1983) view emotional labour as the “exchange value of work which is sold for a wage” and involves “the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display. However, since her early work, several definitions have emerged in explaining the construct “Emotional labour”.

For instance, Ashforth and Humphrey cited in Yang and Chen (2020) view emotional labor as the process of expressing emotions socially required during service transactions. Grandey (2000) view emotional labor as the process of regulating both feelings and expressions with emphasis on surface acting as well as deep acting, aimed at achieving organizational goals. In

other words, it is conceptualized as the process of improving, faking, or suppressing emotions to alter one's emotional look and comply in displaying organizationally desired rules. In addition, Morris and Feldman cited in Yang and Chen (2020) defines emotional labor as the effort as well as planning and control required to express emotions demanded by the dictates of one's duty (task) in the process of interpersonal transactions. Extending, emotional labor as identified by Morris is made up of four dimensions and include: frequency of appropriate emotional display, attentiveness to required display rules, a variety of emotions to be displayed, and emotional dissonance. Although, several definitions exist in explaining the construct of emotional labour, however, the general idea behind the construct (emotional labour) rest on the behavioural outcomes that satisfies organizational needs and expectations, as well as the dynamic process involve in managing emotion. Thus, the management of emotion by the individual, as a prerequisite for job/task performance agreed upon employers, makes it a tradeable product (commodity) at the marketplace.

Notably, it is a common belief among employers that displaying organizationally desired emotions will result in customer satisfaction and increased ratings in performance (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). This results in creating rules for emotional display that would benefit organizations. The rules control what type of behavior the employees should or should not display. However, the appropriate set of emotion required in any given situation often begins with the identification of need. Observably, need recognition varies among individuals, nevertheless, organizational norms stand as guideline upon which emotional are expressed. Buttressing, Hochschild (1983) states that the existence of "feeling rules" and "display rules" (that is, organizational norms regarding which emotions are appropriate for employees to feel and express) reflect the effort that organizations put forth to regulate employees' emotional expressions, because most display rules are implicit in nature, they may not be recognized by employee. Of note, employees regulate their emotions and/or emotional expressions in response to display rules that specify which emotions are appropriate in work situations and how those emotions should be expressed to others (Hochschild, 1983). Implicit in the emotional expressions employed by individuals, as expected by organizational rules, lies the strategies identified by Hochschild (1983), referred to as surface acting and deep acting. Extending the views, Chu, Baker and Murrmann (2012) categorized emotional labour into surface, or superficial acting, deep acting, and effective, or honest acting.

Surface Acting

This refers to regulating expressions, or "faking" the emotion. In other words, the individual simply "puts on a mask" and displays the correct emotion, regardless of what that person may actually be

feeling (Grandey, 2000). It is a situation where employees simulate emotions that are not actually felt, by varying their external manifestations, facial expressions, voice tone, or gestures when demonstrating the necessary emotions (Chu, 2002). It is more probably stimulated or triggered at the stage of flexible pattern of action (that is, it does not often involve a conscious process but rather seen as a part of routine process). For instance, teachers sometimes while having no feelings, may automatically beam. This action or smiles displayed by the teacher, automatically occurs without any conscious process or feelings. Surface acting can lead to feelings of inauthenticity or emotional dissonance, thus discouraging employees from reciprocating in the form of positive attitudes and behaviors. However, surface acting strategies that result in dissonance and exhaustion mean lower levels of satisfaction of individuals' basic psychological needs at work, which are themselves known to predict impaired work functioning. Corroborating, Hülshager and Schewe (2011), and Jung and Yoon (2014) reveals that surface acting produces negative outcome in employees like burnout and well-being, eventually leading to turnover intention as well as stress.

Deep Acting

On the other hand, deep acting takes place when the individual consciously tries to modify his or her feelings so that they are consistent with the desired emotional expression (Grandey, 2000). As opined by Hochschild (1983), individuals applied deep acting by either trying to feel and experience desired emotions or relying on memory or imagination to evoke similar emotions. Notably, deep acting is positively associated with job satisfaction and personal accomplishment, as it requires less energy and resources so are less emotionally exhausting. This strategy, requires manifest behaviour to be suppressed and also expects the inner feelings to be controlled accordingly, as they attempt to feel the emotions they want to display. As observed, deep acting is not only about outer but inner expression, which employees evoke by recalling past joyful circumstances to create appropriate emotion, the strategy appears authentic to the audience because it requires the actor to be empathetic.

However, Grandey (2000) suggested that deep acting is equivalent to antecedent focused emotion regulation and surface acting is equivalent to response-focused emotion regulation. Gross (1998) divided these two general ways of regulating emotions into five categories, four of which are antecedent-focused and one of which is response-focused. Antecedent-focused regulation includes situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, and cognitive change, while response-focused regulation refers to response modulation. Observably, most studies have highlighted the strategies of deep as well as surface acting and view them as compensatory strategies which assist employees in expressing emotion, without

including the analysis of genuinely felt emotion, thus, Diefendorff and Gosserand (2003) view genuine emotion as the display of emotion in which employees spontaneously experience and present the organisationally required emotion. This strategy requires no effort in regulating one's emotion. Notably, studies indicate that the display of genuine emotions is a distinct construct from both deep and surface acting and that it plays a key role in employee emotional presentation when interacting with customers (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005).

Public service organizations in Nigeria

Public service also used in place of public sector, is seen as the sum of services organized and controlled under the authority of government. In other words, it is an institution of government that provides service to citizens as well as other inhabitants in a country. Public service, as enshrined in the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, section 277 (91), amended in section 169 of the 1999 constitution, comprises statutory corporations or parastatals, educational institutions, civil service, judiciary, legislature, the Armed forces as well as the Nigerian Police force, government owned health institutions, central bank and other relevant organizations owned and controlled by the government. The public service is made up of employees in government ministries, parastatals and agencies who are capable of running the operations of government through the implementation of government policies. It keeps and safeguards public interest as well as treasury from manipulation of the ruling class, and also ensure the continuity of government.

Accordingly, public service prevents the exploitative and discriminative tendencies of the private sector service delivery, it ensures constant service delivery, avoids private monopoly of services by the private sector in the provision of essential services, and helps in economic development by attracting local and foreign investors as well as fastening the economic development of the state (Nwizu & Nwapi, cited in Egugbo, 2020). Although, public sector organizations are set up to prevent the exploitative tendencies characterizing the private sector and provide services the private sector may not delivered to all or to those who cannot afford the cost of the service, however, it is obliged to render quality services in the most cost effective, convenient, timely, transparent and courteous way. Of note, citizens and other public service consumers alike in Nigeria often expects courteous, friendly, receptive and helpful relationship from public sectors worker in the process of public service delivery and anything falling short of these expectations places a questionable mark on the contractual relationship existing between the populace and the public institution(s) rendering the service in terms of evaluation of quality service delivery.

Emotional Labour and its value in public service organizations in Nigeria

Observably, among the assets (tangible and intangible) possessed by organizations in Nigerian public sector, emotional labour constitute one of the most crucial resource of them, although, it is not directly observed but found in the dimension of intellectual capital often referred to as relational capital. Relational capital viewed, as knowledge placed or hidden on organizations' relationships with its stakeholders (customers, investors, competitors, employees just to mention but few), ensures customers' satisfaction, loyalty, goodwill (Georgewill, 2019). Unlike, the private sector organizations which pay much attention to its asset (both tangible and intangible), as it aims towards efficient and effective use of its resources in making profit, the public sector organization as a non-profit maximizing entity in Nigeria pay little or no attention to the use and maintenance of its asset. Of note, the attention given and the value placed on emotional labour in the Nigerian public service organizations (especially, the police force, primary schools and the healthcare services) continue to diminish, in spite of the enormous contributions made by employees of these institutions to the development and sustenance of the nation's economy.

Notably, most intangible asset like intellectual capital (by extension emotional labour), have been excluded on the balance sheet of organizations as part of financial reporting rules from time immemorial up till this period. This, does not mean that they have zero value as a resource because according to Fulmer and Ployhart, (2013), the stock market's valuation of an organization includes the value from all income streams, including those from intangible assets which the market has information; although, 'Goodwill' has been capture. However, with, training and development being among the most important investment related to human capital, recognizes human capital as the most valuable form of capital investment. Despite this, service organizations in Nigerian public sector have failed to recognize the value of emotional labour, as it gives little or no attention to its training and development need at the workplace. For instance, hardly does the government or administrators in public primary schools organize symposium, colloquium, seminar and other training programs in educating teachers on the proper way of managing their emotional labour while interacting with pupils in the school environment and off the school premise.

Like other physical or tangible assets which are prone to rapid depreciation, ageing, emergency repair and breakdown, ineffective performance and reliability; inadequate maintenance of teachers emotional labour through training and development, makes them prone to occupational burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and low level of task achievement. This is because teachers in most public schools are faced with enormous amount of task

workloads like marking and grading of students' script, time pressure, children's disruptive behaviors, poor psychosocial work condition, role ambiguity, limited resources, just to mention but few. Eventually, these leads to various forms of physical illnesses, mental challenges, cardiovascular diseases, depression and so on, with devastating effects on the organization (educational institutions), as there may be high level of absenteeism, turnover, low productivity as well as performance. Thus, it will be most appropriate for the government to include training and development programme of emotional labour, as part of its training programmes for teachers in order for them to have adequate knowledge about how to properly manage their emotional labour.

As earlier stated, one of the means in which the value of an asset is being assessed is through employees' salary. However, in spite of the emotional labour expended by teachers in the course of discharging their duties, public school teachers (especial at the primary school levels) earn a meagre amount of pay as salary. Buttressing, Obialo (2023) reveals that on an averages, the federal government of Nigeria pays its teachers monthly a salary between the range 40,000 – 66,000 naira. Alhabisi (2013) states that teachers in Nigeria are poorly motivated and dissatisfied with their living and working conditions. This revealed through the low wages received in comparison with other professionals, low status in the society, inadequate fringe benefits and irregular payment of salary. Considering the amount of emotional labour expended the course of teaching and other academic activities during the period of active engagement and its negative effects on teachers, and the amount of pay received as salary, it will be inferred that the emotional labour of teachers are undervalued in Nigeria, as they do not receive additional pay for constantly putting their emotion to work neither do they receive better pay package to compensate for their emotional labor at work.

Also, the Nigerian Police force is another public sector organization whose officers expend considerable part of their emotional labour while ensuring adequate protection of lives and properties for citizens and other inhabitants in the country. As observed, personnel of the force often expend large part of their emotional labour while dealing with problematic criminals, and numerous occupational stresses. These stress results in emotional weakness, mood fluctuation, depression and anxiety. The junior officers, often referred to as the constables are the most affected by these issues due to the nature of their operations and thus, requires proper management of the their emotional labour. However, it has been observed that the government has not been given proper attention to training and development of the emotional labour of officers of the Nigerian police force in spite of its constant usage in combating crime. This indicates that emotional labour frequently exercised by police officers

is not being recognize by the government, thus, becomes an undervalued human capital asset.

As observed, any asset (both physical and intangible) not often maintained, rapidly depreciates, aged, undergoes emergency repair and maintenance as well as becomes ineffective and unreliable. This can be seen in the operations of officers of Nigerian police (most especially the constables) when conducting investigation or executing arrest of suspects. Most of them were not trained to suppressed their emotion and act the desired emotion required in the particular situation in which they are conducting the investigation or arrest. Similarly, the payment made to officers (especially the constables) as monthly salary, do not compensate for the amount of emotional labour put in use by these foot-soldiers, thus, made it an unrecognized and undervalued aspect of human capital asset.

In addition, it has been observed most other public sector organizations (especially, service oriented organizations) like health care, hotels and tourism, prisons, judiciary and so on, in Nigeria do not recognize and value the emotional labour of employees. For instance, in the health sector, especially in nursing profession, emotional labour is highly vital, as nurses are organizationally required to display suitable emotion in showing support and reassurance, gentleness and kindness, sympathy, cheer, humor, pleasantness, patience, compassion, to client (patients) to help solve their problems, as well as to eliminate inappropriate expression of emotions, such as anger and irritation. In spite of this, it has been observed that hardly do management of public health care institutions in Nigeria or the government, organize training and development programmes on how best employees can manage their emotional labour while taking care of patients in order not to go through occupational stress as well as burnout. Although, health care professionals in Nigerian public sector are fairly compensated in terms of their monthly remuneration, however, their emotional labour is been undervalued due to inadequate training.

CONCLUSION

Employees in public sector organizations in Nigeria especially service oriented institutions like educational institutions, police force, health care, prisons, hotels and tourism just to mention but few, are seen to have been utilizing various emotions (happiness, surprise, fear, sadness, anger and disgust) while executing their task. Emotional display by frontline employees is viewed as one of the perceived component of service quality in most service oriented organizations, hence, the application of organizationally desired emotion. Utilizing situational or organizational desired emotions becomes a source of occupational burnout or stress, as individuals often display various emotions in satisfying clients or customers in order to accomplish organizational set objectives. Although, it is within the ability of individuals to regulate their emotion in

situation/job specifics, nonetheless, the development of desired emotion, rest within the responsibility of management. For this, lies the emphasis on deep acting and surface acting, as strategies often utilized by employees, set out by organizations in achieving desired response towards customers (clients). However, in spite of the relevance of emotional labour to performance of service oriented institutions in Nigeria's public organizations, it is observed to be an unrecognized and undervalued human capital asset, as it is not fairly compensated, untrained as well as undeveloped.

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