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Emotional labor in Academe. Challenges faced

Abstract

Interest in the study of emotions have always been present. Academic jobs are susceptible to multiple demands from various stakeholders. This paper presents the occasion to question whether academics are emotional laborers? The concept of emotional labor have been heavily investigated and researched in the customer service domain. Notably, emotional labor in higher education institutions is a relatively understudied research area. A theoretical framework of emotional labor is presented. It is essential to understand the demands that emotional labor places on academics and its impact on higher education institutions. Subsequently, the paper explores emotional labor among academic staff in higher education institutions, namely, the university system. The consequences and challenges of emotional labor are further evaluated. The paper is a meta-analysis and qualitative in nature. The study uses secondary data and reviews various literature on emotional labor, teaching and higher education institutions, and presents a conceptual paper. It considers the evaluation of academics in higher education institutions as emotional laborers. Literature was further probed to investigate academics as emotional laborers. Subsequently, the consequences and challenges were discussed. The paper further suggests that higher education intuitions need to be cognisant of the demands that emotional labor places on academic staff and the impact on their well-being. It is essential that the quality of work life of academics within higher education are addressed, as such studies are long overdue and under researched.

Keywords: emotional labor, emotions, academics, university, teaching, higher education institution.
JEL Classification: I23.

Introduction

The arena in which higher education institutions operate have been perplexed by changes over the years and such that universities have to bear the brunt of, as well as their staff complement. In South Africa, restructuring at various academic levels, mergers between technikons (vocational colleges) and universities, and the delayering of employees were among some of the radical changes to higher education institutions (Arnold, Stofile & Lilah, 2013; Pienaar & Bester, 2006). The experience of academics may present a unique set of challenges, as they are exposed to different pressures than non-academic employees. Ogbonna and Harris (2004) suggest that continuous change in university systems may directly lead to an increase in job-specific role demands of academics. Thus, the competitive nature of work in universities both locally and globally have brought upon the demands for academics to change the nature and quality of their services offered.

Over the last decade, studies of emotion in the workplace have flourished (Miller, Considine & Garner, 2007; Tracy, 2000, 2005). Emotions are indistinguishably interlaced in the workplace and within organizational processes. The concept have garnered much attention by researchers and theorists (Fineman, 2000; Miller, Considine & Garner, 2007) and hence, would not be foreign within an academic setting. However, in the past, such studies on emotions and the actual emotion displayed by employees were often ignored and overlooked as organizations were viewed as rational and emotions would hinder sound judgment and decision-making (Arvey, Renz & Watson, 1998; Grandey, 2000; Putnam & Mumby, 1993). Researchers and practitioners have over the years realized the importance of managing emotions in the workplace and hence, recognize the value thereof. Such value may contribute to determine how emotions affect individual and organizational outcomes (Arvey et al., 1998; Grandey, 2000).

The concept of emotional labor was coined by Hochschild (1979, 1983), a significant researcher in the study of emotional labor. Emotional labor can be defined as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hocshchild, 1983, p. 7). However, it is important to note that the purpose of this paper is not to define the concept of emotional labor, but to note how academics are prone to emotional labor as their counterparts face in a client-serving job. Taking this into cognizance, and the definition of emotional labor, this paper will attempt to conceptualize whether academic work falls in line with in emotional labor and examines various literature thereof. Service organizations have fallen into the category of providing emotional labor, which have been encouraged by literature (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004; Gronroos, 2000; Zeithaml, Bitner & Mary, 2003), and points out the method in which customer facing services are provided by employees by means of gaining a competitive advantage. Likewise, the concept of emotional labor has been attached to both teachers and academics alike. This paper sets out to investigate the challenges that academics face being at the front line of emotional labor, and presents recommendations and considerations needed for academics and higher education institutions.

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1. Literature review

1.1. Emotional labor. Emotional labor theory highlights the emotions employees may display in terms of how they feel, or pretend to feel to meet the requirements of the job. The growth of the service industry and the culture of the customer have placed emphasis on the emotions that employees display in the workplace (Sturdy, 1998). Emotional labor theory has been strongly rooted in service-related industries and is most likely witnessed in hospitality services (Kerr & Brown, 2015), call centres (Holman, Chissick & Totterdall, 2002), nursing (De Jonge, Le Blanc, Peeters & Noordam, 2008), and hospitality and tourism (Chu & Murrmann, 2006; Van Dijk & Kirk, 2008). Recently, emotional labor has been researched in various disciplines, and have gained attention from public administration scholars (Hsieh, Yang & Fu, 2012) and in the education field among teachers in schools and academics in universities (Berry & Cassidy, 2013; Tunguz, 2014).

Cote (2005) suggests that emotions are essential to social interaction and puts forth the need for understanding and feedback by the interaction of partners and, hence, creates a dual social process. The expression of workplace desired emotions during interpersonal transactions would require employees to exert emotional efforts (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Organizations that set goals implicitly and explicitly establish the desired and required emotional display rules (Diefendorff, Richard & Coyle, 2006; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

Such emotional display rules are characterized as organizational expectations for expressing appropriate emotions in the workplace (Gosserand & Diefendorff, 2005). Mann (1999a) noted that employees may supress their emotion or even fake their emotion due to the demands of the job. Such demands have become widely accepted as a condition of one's job during interaction with stakeholders, customers or clients. Emotional display rules that are expressed by employees and meet the underlying organizational goals are said to perform emotional labor. Cheng and Peng (2008) suggests that the display of positive emotions in the workplace are related to improve social interactions, namely, promote co-worker trust, job support and affective rewards.

1.2. Perspectives of emotional labor. Over the years, there have been various perspectives of the concept emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996). Hochschild (1983) argued that service level agents faced or performed jobs that had high emotional labor and needed to express socially desired emotions as part of their job. Pugh (2001) rendered such jobs as 'service with a smile' and attributed such jobs as being friendly towards clients and customers alike. Moreover, organizations defined feeling rules which suggested the way in which employees should feel. Hochschild (1979) argued that the management of emotions required effort by employees and relates to burnout and stress due to the unpleasant nature to the employee. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) noted that the basis of emotion labor exists in various occupational roles by the act of expressing any socially desirable emotions. Morris and Feldman (1996) provided and interactionist perspective of emotional labor and noted that emotional labor is seen as an effort to express organizational desired emotions during social interactions. Thus, this perspective is similar to that of Ashforth and Humprey (1993), and Hochschild (1983).

1.3. Characteristics of emotional labor work. Emotional labor can be seen as the management of feelings especially those in the human service professions. Typically, emotional labor intensive jobs are performed in various work settings where there is a need for certain emotions to be displayed. At first, the concept of emotional labor was first linked to the nature of work within the service sector. However, it has now been examined extensively in higher-level professional groups (Wharton, 2009). Notably, there are positive and negative consequences of performing emotional labor. The most often cited negative outcomes and consequences of emotional labor have been associated with job dissatisfaction (Hochschild, 1983; Kahn, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996) and burnout (Hochschild, 1983; Kahn, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996). Other outcomes include the impact on employee's psychological well-being (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Fineman, 1993; Tolich, 1993; Wharton, 1993). According to Mann (1999), an inconsistency exists amid the emotional demeanor that is displayed by an individual and the genuinely felt emotions that would be unsuitable to display are regarded as the state of emotional labor. Notably, such a scenario are common in two-thirds of all interactions in the workplace. Furthermore, it is essential that work standards are maintained and work targets attained in an attempt that employees the job in hand, and the way in which it should be performed.

The emphasis of emotional display have been largely emphasized in the research of emotional labor (Diefendorff and Richard, 2003; Ekman & Friesen, 1982; Grandey, 2000; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). Emotion display rules influences emotional labor and dictates the types of behavior that employees are required to display in their jobs. It is suggested that employees resort to various strategies to regulate their feelings with display rules (Grandey 2000, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). Research has proposed that employees may perform emotional labor through three types of acting mechanisms (Hochschild, 1983; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), namely:

- Surface acting – this type of acting entails simulating emotions that are not actually felt. It is with this type of acting that employees would change their outward appearance and display emotions that are not actually felt.
- Deep acting – this type of acting arises when employee feelings do not fit the situation. Employees would use their previous training and experience to provoke the appropriate emotions.
- Genuine acting – this type of acting involves displaying emotions that requires very little prompting.

1.4. Emotional labor in academia. Higher education institutions are operating in a paradigm of managerialism (White paper, 2003). This asserts that such institutions perceive their students to be customers and hence, the role of academics can be advocated as that of a service provider (Gaan, 2012; Gibbs, 2001). Thus, academic institutions are categorized as a service provider, with customers, means of production and service deliverers. Such an approach demands that academic staff perform emotional labor. This presents the need to ensure that negative emotions are controlled and expect their performance at the time whilst executing of duties, thereby ensuring effectiveness towards teaching and learning activities being experienced by the customers (students). Gibbs (2001) noted that academic staff, in higher education, are expected to perform emotional labor in order to achieve the dual outcomes and hence, the generated outcomes are perceived as customer satisfaction, and profits for the institution. Notably, the effect of emotional labor on academic staff can also be extended to teaching effectiveness (Gaan, 2012).

1.5. Academic work and emotional labor. Until recently, the relationship between management and academics has changed. Mostly, academics feel powerless in the face of the changing nature of their job. The autonomy that once defined their job has been eroded, and an increase in work intensity prevails. Webster and Mosoeta (2001) illustrate that ill-equipped student's place significant demands on the time and emotions of lecturing staff. Ogbonna and Harris (2004) noted that academic staff are burdened with various demands, which are sometimes conflicting. In South Africa, Rothman and Viljoen (2009) noted that academics face stressors that are associated to the transformation of education. Barkhuizen and Rothman (2006) validated that the academic profession is a stressful occupation. Academic work is divided into teaching, research, and leadership with a high administrative workload (Barkhuizen & Rothmann, 2006). However, it has become apparent that academic work can be characterized as specialized and complex (Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield & Stough, 2001). Higher education institutions have been plagued by radical changes, namely, mergers of universities and technikons, downsizing and restructuring, an increase competition and a decrease in in staff morale (Kovner & Neuhauser, 2004). Higher education institutions are dependent on the intellectual capital and the commitment of their employees (Martin, 1999, Oshagbemi, 2000; Rowley, 1996). The career of academics in South Africa and around the world are under great pressure, as their image and status of their careers are declining, and are marred by increased work stress, job dissatisfaction, and a decline in commitment to the organization (Anderson, Richard & Saha, 2002). In addition, academics are struggling with increased volumes of students and an increase in administrative duties. Kinman (2008) validates that the stress levels experienced by academics are due to the aforementioned reasons.

As part of academic work, lecturing forms a great part of the job function. Teaching or lecturing is largely considered as rhetorical and rational, and relational in the communication process, whereby, academics could strategically utilize messages and relational cues to influence their students and their behaviors (Mottet & Beebe, 2006). However, in creating a positive teaching environment, academic staff are involved in an emotional process, and are seen as a front-line profession (Schmisseur, 2003). Thus, in order to achieve teaching effectiveness, academics need to ensure they are able to regulate, manage and monitor their emotions. Thus, academic staff would be able to create, foster and enhance a positive teaching and learning environment (Boyer, 1987; Gates, 2000).

Yin and Lee (2012) noted that, in the context of teaching, there may be attempts whereby teachers inhibit, generate and manage their feelings, and express their emotions according to normative beliefs or emotional display rules held about the teaching profession. Lecturing warrants unpredictable displays of emotion over lengthy periods, and may exaggerate some emotions (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). Ogbonna and Harris (2004) identified that academics experience discontent and dissatisfaction and are being masked by emotional labor. Academics carry out a wide range of disparate tasks. Emotional labor may occur in the classroom among academics when stimulating and nurturing young minds. One's teaching repertoire, and communication skills mediate the classroom experience and hence, demands emotional labor (Bellas, 1999). Emotional labor also occurs outside the classroom when maintaining student interactions in terms of student advisory and counselling (Bellas, 1999). Moreover, academics involved in committee work are faced with the demands of emotional labor when generating ideas and maintaining collegial relationships. Among other activities, academics are

involved in research activities. Researchers become involved in their subjects' lives, mainly when there is continuous contact between them both. Collaboration among researchers and the aforementioned research role may place further emotional demands on academics. According to Wharton (1993), there are job demands that are unique to occupations which involve emotional labor and are likely to be viewed as a specific source of occupational stress. Frequent requirements to express or display certain emotions not felt, or which is unsuited with emotions experienced. Consequently, this can be damaging to the overall well-being of an employee (Hochschild, 1983; Mann, 1999a). Studies have noted that academics face high levels of occupational stress. Factors such as stress and burnout account for teaching staff to leave the profession within a period of five years (Archer, 1999; Boreen, Niday & Johnson, 2003).

1.6. Consequences and challenges faced. Emotional labor is described as a double edged-sword (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). The pressures placed by emotional labor can be functional for the organization and dysfunctional for the employee and hence, expose employees to challenges. The role of academics are fast becoming demanding and stressful, both in South African and UK higher education and globally, and, hence, leading to work-related stress (Bradley & Eachus 1995; Kinman 2001). A strong association exists between occupational stress and emotional labor (Mann, 1999a), and is likely to have negative effects on the health and well-being of individuals. Notably, the consequences of emotional labor are dependent on the characteristics of the job and organization and, hence, lead to emotional exhaustion (Kruml & Geddes, 2000), emotional dissonance (Bakker & Heuven, 2006), job satisfaction (Ibanez-Rafuse, 2010; Ozturk, Karayel & Nasoz, 2008; Sheetal, 2010), workplace stress, and burnout (Mann, 1999b; Mann & Cowburn, 2005). Thus, increased levels of emotional labor that are found in university lecturers are a call for concern. Therefore, a need exists for continued investigation into occupational stress and emotional labor among university lecturers, and within academe.

According to Bartram, Djurkovic, Casimir and Stanton (2012), there is an association between emotional labor and intention to leave. Thus, there is a need to address retention factors of academics and the skill shortages faced thereof. Notably, high attrition rate for academics fuels the educational problem namely, the attraction (recruitment and selection), retention, and shortage of teachers (Farber, 1991; Mottet & Beebe, 2006). In order to lower emotion related turnover rates, there is a need to better understand emotional management and the role emotion plays in teaching. Jobs that involves frequent contact with people usually entails high emotional labor (Mann, 1999a, 1999b). Notably, university lecturers have multiple stakeholders including management, external agencies, a growing population of students, research teams and society at large (Kinman, 2008; Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). Evidently, lecturers are now involved in more contact with people, and dealing with the issues of students. Thus, an increase in the contact of people is a factor that is strongly associated in high emotional labor (Constanti & Gibbs, 2004). In addition, students at university are marked with a sense of entitlement (Twenge, 2000), and pose a unique set off emotional challenges to academics. Academics experience high levels of stress, which in turn, affects their emotions during their interaction with students and whilst teaching (Hagenauer & Volet, 2015). In order for academics to buffer emotional labor display, they are to be provided with a supportive work environment that provides respite from the demands of students (Tunguz, 2014).

2. Design and methodology

The paper is a meta-analysis and qualitative in nature. The study uses secondary data and reviewed various literature on emotional labor, teaching and higher education institutions, and presents a paper conceptual in nature. It considers the evaluation of academics in higher education institutions as emotional laborers. Literature was further probed to investigate academics, as emotional laborers and the consequences and challenges were discussed.

3. Discussion

Table 1. Contextualization of emotions displayed by academics

	Teaching	Research	Leadership & administration
Emotional experience	Enjoyment, enthusiasm, humour and caring (Bellas, 1999, Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). Neautrability (Bellas, 1999). Impatience, annoyance and anger (Bellas, 1999). Enthusiasm, happiness, confidence, self-assurance, and passion about and satisfaction (Winograd, 2005). Assertiveness and sternness (when dealing with disruptive students) (Tunguz, 2014). Passion, enthusiasm, annoyance and frustration (Hagenauer & Volet, 2015). Sincere, natural, and real feelings (Ozturk et al., 2015).	Stress, anxiety and fear (Martin, 1998). Guilty and unenthusiastic (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). Neutrability (Bellas, 1999).	Accommodating, ambitious and achieving (Bellas, 1999). Frustration, suspicion, empathy and trust (Abery & Gunson, 2016).
Type of emotional labor displayed	Surface acting	Deep acting	Surface acting

The paper establishes that academics are emotional laborers and presents the challenges faced. Academics are prone to dividing their time at work amongst teaching, research and administration. Table 1 contextualizes the emotions displayed by academics, matched across the type of work they are involved in. From this, a corresponding type of emotional labor displayed namely, deep acting and surface acting, is matched according to their work. There is a need for academics to effectively manage their work, and emotions during these designated areas of work. It is likely that academics may experience unique set of challenges in one set area of work rather than another. For example, it has been indicated that emotional labor essentially will impact the teaching effectiveness of academics (Gaan, 2012). Academics need to ensure their emotions are managed during this time and are able to regulate and monitor their emotions. Consequently, the occurrence of teaching effectiveness being hampered is likely to impede on student performance.

In a study about nurse academics, conducted by Ozturka, Bahcecikb, Ozcelikb and Kemer (2015), it was noted that those working in state universities for longer than six years experienced mid-level emotion labor, described as sincere, natural, and real feelings. Similarly, their study further identified that academics working at state universities for at least six years experienced deep acting, as a result of the academic lifestyle and socialization related to the job.

Ogbonna and Harris (2004) noted the development in academic work and its intensification. Academics respond to a mix of organizational and occupational expectations. In this regard, there is a need for academics to develop a form of coping mechanism for such expectations. The intensification of academic work is brought upon the modification of university policies and strategies. A study conducted by Bono and Vey (2005) investigated the relationship between emotional labor and stress, and identified that emotional dissonance, deep acting and surface acting resulted in emotional exhaustion. Notably, this is likely to raise the intensification of occupational expectations.

Notably, challenges faced by academe, in terms of emotional display, academics may resort to surface acting or deep acting. Evidently, emotional labor literature has suggested that most employees resort to one of two strategies to regulate their feelings in compliance with display rules, namely, surface acting and deep acting (Grandey, 2000, 2003; Hochschild, 1983).

Recommendations and conclusions

The paper sets out to show that academics are emotional laborers and challenges they perceive. It has been noted that employees are able to regulate their emotions by using various strategies (Cossette & Hess, 2015). From the review of the literature, it is evident that teaching is an emotional endeavor. From this, it is recommended that researchers further empirically investigate emotional labor within higher education. The current study theoretically explores the challenges faced by academics. Notably, the literature and research on emotional labor continue to expand and may well certainly overlap in to the teaching field. However, there is need for further research on how academics perceive their challenges of emotional labor from a personal perspective, and its impact on students.

Ideally, future research on emotional labor of academics should expand on the way which it impacts higher education institutions, and its employees and students. Furthermore, future research should provide insights on how academics regulate their emotions, and is an important factor in providing insights to many aspects of academics and their careers. In addition, in-depth qualitative research can be carried out to establish ways in which academics can mitigate the consequences of emotional labor. Likewise, there is a need for quantitative research to be carried out in this field. Notably, emotional labor in higher education intuitions is relatively an understudied research area. It has been suggested that little attention is given to the implications of emotional labor in academia, and can be regarded as underexplored area of study (Colley, 2006; Hagenauer & Volet, 2015).

The performance of emotional labor is required in certain jobs. Since academics are subjected to emotional labor, and the demands placed on them are likely to affect their delivery to students and also develop a strategy to cope with their feelings. Thus, academics may face the demands placed on them through emotional labor (Hargreaves, 1998; Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006; Winograd, 2003; Yin, 2015). According to Berry and Cassidy (2013), academics perform high levels of emotional labor. It is likely that academic staff utilize emotional labor as a coping mechanism. Evidently, Ogbonna and Harris (2004) confirmed that academics are dissatisfied in the reduced job autonomy and identified that emotional labor are utilized as a coping mechanism. Notably, the demands placed on academics in terms of teaching, research and administration fosters a space for emotional labor. Thus, academics in higher education institutions need to be cognisant of the job demands on their emotion (Yin, 2015). It is imperative that universities pay attention to the emotional demands faced by newly hired and less experienced university lecturers in terms of staff recruitment, staff retention and staff wellbeing. Thus, an increase in emotional labor enables lecturers to meet changing occupational and organizational expectations. Ideally, the challenges

faced by academics through the pressures of emotional labor. Thus, the management of universities and departments need to be cognisant that emotional labor features in the career of academics, and may pose a risk. High emotional labor intensity are likely to pose a threat to academic staff job performance, well-being, teaching effectiveness and job satisfaction. Consequently, implications for student performance may arise. It is essential that academics address the emotional demands of their work to ensure emotional equanimity is maintained (Grandey, Kern & Frone, 2007; Rupp & Spencer, 2006).

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