Exploring the Nature of Emotional Labor in the Sport Setting

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Abstract

Grandey (2000) defined emotional labor as the regulation of both feeling and expression of emotions for the organizational goals. With respect to its importance on the individual and organizational outcomes, there has been growing interests on the role of emotional labor in the work place. However, until recently, there has been no research exploring emotional labor concept in the sport settings. As such, this paper suggests the first study exploring whether coaches perform emotional labor in their interactions with athletes. In doing so, this paper may be a starting point of investigating the role of emotional labor in the sport settings. Therefore, in this paper, the overall explanation of emotional labor including the basic assumptions and definitions, and theoretical backgrounds addressing emotional labor in leadership will be discussed. Finally, based on the literatures, practical implications and future research direction will be proposed.

Key words: emotional labor, sports, coaches, athletes

I. Introduction

Emotion is a central part of our daily life. People feel something every moment and the emotion actually drive people to behave in a certain way. However, there had been not much research on the role of emotions in the work place until recently due to the two major reasons. First, Arvey, Renz, and Watson (1998) argued that emotions were the opposite side of rationality. During the past, the importance of rationality had overwhelmed that of emotionality, which in turn led to the belief that it is not necessary to study emotionality. Second, they also argued that emotions are challenging to study and measure because of subjectivity it contains in nature. All individuals have different feeling states which makes it hard to assess.

However, organizations across the world have been increasingly focusing on providing an excellent service experience to their customers. In the service-oriented organizations, the interactive experience between employee and customer became so important that organizations try to ensure their interactive experience is pleasant and satisfying. As such, there has been growing inter-
est in the role of emotions in the workplace (Arvey et al. 1998). During the past two decades, there has been much emphasis on the management of emotions as part of the work role, which has been called emotional labor. According to Grandey (2000), emotional labor is defined as “the regulation of both feeling and expression of emotions to achieve organizational goals” (p. 97). There has been conclusive evidence that emotional labor is a significant factor for favorable organizational outcome (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996).

II. Background

1. Basic Assumption of Emotional Labor

The basic assumption of emotional labor is that it is essential for the organization to have organizational emotional display rule which serves as the standard for the appropriate expressions of emotions. It actually defines which emotions employees should display and suppress in their interaction with customers to be effective on their jobs (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996).

Wharton and Erickson (1993) introduced three types of display rules such as integrative, differentiating, and masking. Integrative display rules means expressing positive emotions and encouraging warm relationship with customers. For example, customer service employees usually are expected to display positive emotions such as cheerfulness in their interaction with customers. In contrast, differentiating display rules involves expressing negative emotions and driving people apart (e.g., fear, hate, anger). For instance, debt collectors need to express negative emotions such as anger and aggressiveness when they try to receive money from borrowers. This negative emotion allows them to achieve their objectives more effectively. Finally, masking emotions are displays of neutrality.

However, in the practical situation, there could be a mismatch between felt emotions and displayed emotions. That is, service employees possibly need to suppress negative emotions when they are not feeling so cheery. For example, although the customer service employees from the previous example do not have a good mood, they need to suppress negative emotion thus, express positive emotions through smiling and kindness in their works to adhere to the display rules. This state is called emotional dissonance, the separation of felt emotion from emotion expressed to follow display rules (Hochschild, 1983). The previous research has been reported that this emotional dissonance is harmful to the physical and psychological well-being of employee because it causes psychological discomfort. As such, this uncomfortable state result leads employees to reduce this mismatch through a variety of emotion regulation strategies (Grandey, 2000).

Emotional labor takes place in this situation. It is actually employee’s effort to resolve emotional dissonance in order to adhere to organ-