



**“TELL ME HOW YOU REALLY FEEL?”:  
AN EMOTIONAL MANAGEMENT  
PERSPECTIVE ON PROJECT  
MANAGEMENT AND BEHAVIOR IN  
PROJECT TEAMS**

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## A Little About Me

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## Have You Ever...

**Made an effort to suppress a negative attitude or emotion when working in a team setting?**

**Worked to develop the needed feelings you need to show to your team or stakeholders?**

**Prepared for a meeting by putting on a smile even though you were feeling upset?**



## What is emotion regulation?

- The innate human ability to influence the emotions you have, when you have them, and how you experience and express those emotions



## What is emotional labor?

- Managing and displaying emotions to be consistent with **organizational display rules** (i.e., prescriptions), regardless of whether those emotions are consistent with what you are actually feeling
- It's emotion regulation for pay

## Examples of display rules



## Types of Emotional Labor

- **Surface Acting**
  - Modifying the outward expression of your emotion
  - Faking your outward expression to “fool” others (mask)
- **Deep Acting**
  - Consciously changing how you feel and expressing the desired emotion



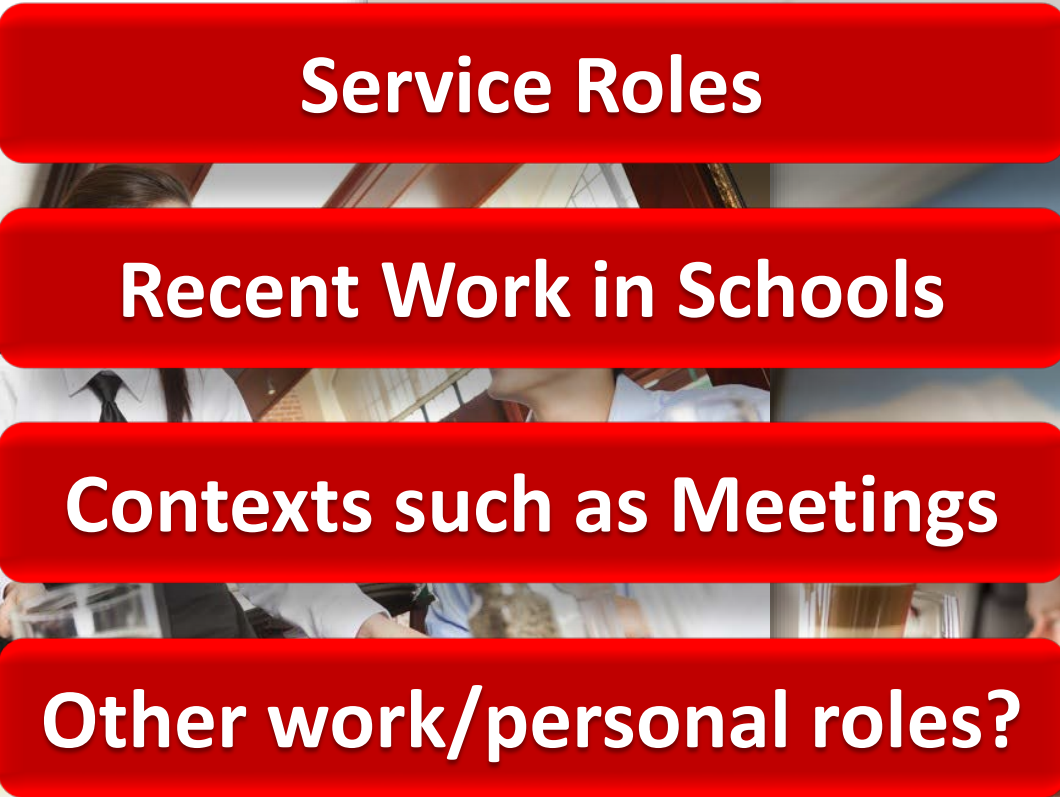
# Previous Research: Origins of Emotional Labor

**Service Roles**

**Recent Work in Schools**

**Contexts such as Meetings**

**Other work/personal roles?**





# Why is emotional labor necessary?

Display rules are workplace standards

Display rules typically call for employees to **express positive** and **suppress negative** emotions







# Causes of Emotional Labor

**People only engage in emotional labor if...**

- They are aware of display rules
- AND their current emotion is not in line with the organization's display rule demands

**Why might a person's emotions not be aligned with display rules?**

- Good day
- Bad day
- Life happens
- Generally negative or positive



# Is emotional labor a “bad thing”?



Workplace  
Professionalism

Organizations perform  
better when their  
employees are exuding  
the right emotions (i.e.,  
brand management)



# Consequences of Emotional Labor

## Consequences of Surface Acting:

- Technically, display rules are being met
- It may not be believable (e.g., faking a smile)
  - Inauthenticity!
- The emotional labor experiences emotional dissonance
- Burnout and emotional exhaustion
- Work disengagement
- Turnover
- Increased stress



# Consequences of Emotional Labor

## Consequences of Deep Acting:

- It takes more effort/energy to change your emotions (i.e., reappraisal)
- Not as much burnout as surface acting
- More empathy within context and with others
- May depend on display rule
  - Actually feel positive emotion
  - Suppress negative emotion



# Consequences of Emotional Labor: I'm NOT doing it!

## Consequences of not engaging in emotional labor:

- Violates display rules (i.e., job description & expectations)
- Violates contextual norms
- May be perceived as unprofessional
- May adversely impact performance metrics
- May receive disciplinary action



## What does emotional labor look like for project managers?

Project managers must coordinate a group of people with diverse sets of knowledge, skills, and abilities to achieve a specific goal/outcome

Project managers are not primarily in service roles, but most frequently interacting in a team setting with peers



## Emotional Labor in Project Management

**Project managers face many expectations from team members and other stakeholders**

- Deadlines, quality of work, etc.
- Some of the expectations may be emotional expectations (i.e., display rules)
- Display rules may shift depending on the context
  - Supportive of a colleague
    - Stern when work quality suffers (i.e., motivate effort of team)

**Project managers may also interact with customers, thus requiring customer service display rules**



**Where might we see emotional labor?**

**Do any of you have project team meetings?**

**Do any of you meet directly with clients?**





# Emotional Labor in the Meeting Context



Meetings are a prevalent (25 million daily, Allen et al., 2015), understudied organizational context

Employees may engage in emotional labor in meetings in an effort to manage impressions or achieve goals (Morris & Feldman, 1997)



## Power Distance in Meetings

Power distance is the degree to which individuals accept that others have more or less authority in relation to themselves (Hofstede, 1980)

When there is more power distance in a group setting, individuals are more likely to engage in impression managing behaviors, such as emotion regulation (Bond, 1991)

Employees want to look good for the people who can promote them, provide them with necessary resources, and affect their work-life balance



## **In Other Words...**

**People engage in emotional labor in meetings to impress their project manager!**

**Is this a good thing?**



# Where do we go from here?



You now know what emotional labor is and what it looks like in your current roles



You likely understand how it feels to be emotionally exhausted because of emotional labor



You understand the causes (display rules, professionalism) and consequences (burnout, turnover) of emotional labor



## NOW WHAT?



# Where do we go from here?

What have you learned? What will you do with this information?

What knowledge should you share with others?

What changes should you make or consider making?



## Some ideas to consider

**Be aware of when and how much you engage in emotional labor**

- Determine when it's time to re-charge

**Be aware of when and how much your team members engage in emotional labor**

- Let them re-charge if needed
- Consider re-framing the situation

**Consider engaging in deep rather than surface acting and helping others to do so**

- It hurts less!

**In meetings, promote psychological safety with authenticity and openness**

- Increases creativity
- Decreases emotional labor
- Improves meetings in general

# QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

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