

# Determining the Effect of Emotional Labor on Work Engagement: Service-Sector Employees in Private Enterprises\*

Özgür Öngöre

Work attitudes have physical, cognitive, and emotional aspects, just like other attitudes. Work engagement is a work attitude with many emotional aspects such as enthusiasm, willingness, pride, and enjoyment. Emotional efforts, which can be called emotional labor, are needed to reach work engagement. These emotional efforts can occur while presenting natural feelings or for feeling the emotions required at work.

The problem of the research is to determine the significant effect of emotional labor on work engagement for service-sector employees in private enterprises.

## Emotional Labor

Emotional labor represents employees' emotional efforts in the workplace. Emotional labor is accepted as being used more in the service sector, especially in works with intense human relations (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Hochschild (1983, p. 7) defined emotional labor as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display." Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) expanded Hochschild's theory by adding natural emotions dimension in addition to surface acting and deep acting dimensions. They emphasized that employees have natural emotions and present these emotions while working. In

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@ PhD, Kastamonu University, ozgurongoretr@yahoo.com

the literature, emotional labor is generally considered as a three-dimensional structure with surface acting, deep acting, and natural feelings.

In this study, emotional labor was explained with two dimensions: employees' emotional efforts to display the real feelings and employees' emotional efforts to feel the required emotions. Surface acting was denied as a dimension of emotional labor because actually it has no feeling inside and can be considered a fake display of the necessary emotions. Because surface acting involves physical efforts like body language without any feeling, it can be accepted as physical labor. According to this approach, emotional labor can be defined as the emotional efforts that are in harmony with business ethics and displayed by employees while working (Öngöre, 2016a).

In the field research, emotional labor was examined with surface acting, deep acting, and natural feelings dimensions. Thus, it was aimed to compare the effect of deep acting (emotional efforts) and natural feelings, which are considered emotional labor, with the effect of surface acting on work engagement.

### **Work Engagement**

Work engagement can be identified as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption dimensions (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Vigor is characterized by high energy, mental resilience, willingness, and persistence; dedication is characterized by psychological identification with one's work and strong involvement; absorption is characterized by being fully concentrated and engrossed in one's work (Salanova et al., 2011; Schaufeli et al., 2002). Work engagement, involves enjoyment and enthusiasm as a positive work attitude (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Bakker, 2005).

Work engagement can be considered as a positive work outcome and work attitude of employees in organizations. As a work attitude, work engagement can demonstrate employees' psychological tendencies regarding their work (Hulin & Judge, 2003) and can be accepted as an evaluation of employees' feelings, beliefs, and loyalty toward their work (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to determine whether or not emotional labor significantly predicts work engagement for service sector employees in private enterprises, where working conditions are poorer than in public enterprises (see Kumaş & Çağlar, 2017). Another purpose of the study is to determine whether or

not socio-demographic variables (age, gender, income, and total work experience) significantly predicts work engagement for service-sector employees in private enterprises.

**Hypothesis 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, income, and total work experience) are significant variables to predict work engagement.

**Hypothesis 2.** Emotional labor is a significant variable to predict work engagement.

## Method

### Participants

In this study, accurate data was collected from 153 service-sector employees (90 females [59%], 63 males [41%]) working in private enterprises in Ankara. Employees' mean age was 32.88 years ( $SD = 10.34$ ) and average work experience is 11.95 years ( $SD = 10.43$  years). 18% ( $n = 27$ ) of the employees reported being from the lower income group, 71% ( $n = 108$ ) from the middle, and 11% ( $n = 17$ ) from the upper income group.

### Instruments

The questionnaire form was used in this study to collect data from the participants consists of three parts: a personal information form, prepared by the author, and involving questions about participants' age, gender, income, and total work experience; the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002) and adapted to Turkish by Öngöre (2016); and the Emotional Labor Scale, developed by Diefendorff et al. (2005) and adapted to Turkish by Basım and Begenirbaş (2012).

## Findings

Correlation analysis was performed to determine the presence of significant relationships among the study's variables. The results of the correlation analysis to determine the presence of significant relationships among socio-demographic variables (age, gender, income, and total work experience), emotional labor (surface acting, deep acting, and natural feelings), and work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption) are given in Table 1.

In this study, categorized variables (gender and income) in socio-demographic variables, were converted to dummy variables before included in the analyses.

Gender was coded as “1” for females and “0” for males. Income was coded as “1” for low income group, and “0” for others. Because age and total work experience are continuous variables, these variables included in the analyses without converting to dummy variables.

Table 1

*The Relationships Among Research Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	1.00									
2. Gender	.13	1.00								
3. Income	-.38**	-.01	1.00							
4. Total Work Experience	.88**	.28**	-.31**	1.00						
5. Surface Acting	-.19*	.05	.14	-.17*	1.00					
6. Deep Acting	-.09	.08	.11	-.08	.55**	1.00				
7. Natural Feelings	.10	-.04	-.05	.08	-.24**	.20*	1.00			
8. Vigor	.27**	.17*	-.33**	.23**	.10	.19*	.24**	1.00		
9. Dedication	.21*	.17*	-.34**	.16*	-.06	.17*	.25**	.74**	1.00	
10. Absorption	.22**	.13	-.31**	.16	.04	.19*	.19*	.63**	.73**	1.00

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$

The results of the correlation analysis indicated that the socio-demographic variables (age and income) were significantly related to all the dimensions of work engagement (i.e., vigor, dedication, and absorption). Meanwhile, the other socio-demographic variables (gender and total work experience) were significantly related with two dimensions of work engagement (i.e., vigor and dedication).

According to the results, emotional labor dimensions (deep acting and natural feelings) were significantly related with all work engagement dimensions (i.e., vigor, dedication, and absorption). Surface acting, as another emotional labor dimension, was not significantly related with work engagement dimensions.

Stepwise hierarchical regression analysis was used to determine the variables that significantly predict work engagement. The stepwise method was used to exclude variables that did not fit the model. Two different blocks were created from the independent variables by the hierarchical method, thus enabling the independent variables to be included in the analysis in their respective blocks.

The first block included socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, income, and total work experience), and the second block included dimensions of emotional labor (surface acting, deep acting, and natural feelings).

Table 2

*Stepwise Hierarchical Regression Analysis for the Variable of Vigor*

Independent Variables, Predictor	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Standard Error B	Beta (β)	t	F
Socio-demographic Variables						
Income		-5.85	1.27	-.34**	-4.61	
Gender		2.28	.98	.17*	2.33	
Emotional Labor						
Natural Feelings		.66	.18	.28**	3.68	
Surface Acting		.17	.07	.19*	2.53	
Model	.47					10.54**

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01

When the results of the stepwise hierarchical regression analysis for vigor were examined, income ( $\beta = -.34, p < .01$ ), gender ( $\beta = .17, p < .05$ ), natural feelings ( $\beta = .28, p < .01$ ), and surface acting ( $\beta = .19, p < .05$ ) were found as significant variables predicting vigor ( $F_{(4, 147)} = 10.54, p < .01$ ). The regression model explained explains 47% of the variance in vigor (see Table 2).

Table 3

*Stepwise Hierarchical Regression Analysis for the Variable of Dedication*

Independent Variables, Predictor	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Standard Error B	Beta (β)	t	F
Socio-demographic Variables						
Income		-5.60	1.28	-.32**	-4.37	
Gender		2.01	.99	.18**	2.39	
Emotional Labor						
Natural Feelings		.58	.18	.24**	3.27	
Model	.20					12.21**

\*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01

According to the results of stepwise hierarchical regression analysis for dedication, income ( $\beta = -.32, p < .01$ ), gender ( $\beta = .18, p < .01$ ), and natural feelings ( $\beta = .24, p < .01$ ) were found as significant variables predicting dedication ( $F_{(3, 148)} = 12.21, p < .01$ ). The hierarchical model explained 20% of the variance in dedication (see Table 3).

Table 4

*Stepwise Hierarchical Regression Analysis for the Variable of Absorption*

Independent Variables, Predictor	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Standard Error B	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t	F
Socio-demographic Variables						
Income		-6.74	1.53	-.34**	-4.41	
Emotional Labor						
Deep Acting		.38	.12	.23**	3.04	
Model	.15					13.03**

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

When the results of stepwise hierarchical regression analysis for absorption was examined, it was found that deep acting ( $\beta = .23, p < .01$ ) and income ( $\beta = -.34, p < .01$ ) were significant variables predicting absorption ( $F_{(2, 149)} = 13.03, p < .01$ ). The hierarchical model explained 15% of the variance in absorption (see Table 4).

According to the findings of the study, the first hypothesis was confirmed for income and partially for the gender. The second hypothesis was partially confirmed for surface acting, deep acting, and natural feelings.

## Discussion

The research findings indicate that natural feelings significantly predict vigor and dedication. If employees have a good personality-job fit and sufficient working conditions, then the intended/needed feelings can occur naturally. When employees present their own inner feelings at work, they can work with more energy and become more enthusiastic about their work.

According to the results of the study, absorption can be aroused by deep acting. Employees may need to present emotional efforts to feel the emotions that are required while working. As a result of these emotional efforts, employees can concentrate on and stay engaged in their work.

Surface acting was found as a significant predictor of vigor. As mentioned previously, surface acting can be accepted as physical labor because it involves physical efforts like body language but no feeling. Accordingly, surface acting understandably predicts vigor. Employees who present more physical efforts (physical expressions) to make their work, can be more energetic and have more willingness while working.

In addition, the socio-demographic variable of income was found as a significant predictor of vigor, dedication, and absorption. High income levels can be seen as a vital motivator for all work attitudes, including work engagement.

Gender was found as a significant predictor of vigor and dedication. Employees' vigor and dedication levels vary according to the gender. In some works, gender can make a significant difference. Male or female employees can be more persistent, energetic, and enthusiastic. At the same time according to work, male or female employees can be more strongly involved in and define themselves through their work.

The study was limited to service-sector employees in private enterprises because the main idea of the study was to focus on employees who work in poor conditions.

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