

Impact of Emotional Labor on Employee Wellbeing in the Presence of Psychological Capital

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This study examined the impact of emotional labor on employee wellbeing in the presence of psychological capital as a moderating variable. The concept of emotional labor was measured through its components of surface-level acting and deep-level acting. A survey questionnaire was used to collect the data from managerial-level employees working in the service sector of Lahore, Pakistan. The sample size was 395 gathered through convenience sampling; a non-probability sampling technique. Further, the data was analyzed by using AMOS. The confirmatory factor analysis and the regression analysis were applied to test the hypotheses of the study. The findings of the study revealed that emotional labor has an inverse relationship with employee wellbeing. Similarly, surface-level acting and deep-level acting deteriorate the employee wellbeing in an organizational setting. The moderation analysis of psychological capital discovered that emotional labor reduces and employee wellbeing enhances in the presence of this moderator. This study provides useful insights to understand the impact of emotional labor especially for the employees working in labor-intensive education and health sectors.

Keywords: Emotional Labor; Employee Wellbeing; Psychological Capital; Pakistan

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Human Emotions are considered a complex yet interesting phenomenon which has been widely studied by various researchers (Fineman, 1993; Briner, 1999; Scheibe, et.al., 2021). Employee emotions are considered to be an important part of the job which may bring fruitful results for the employees as well as their organization. However, organizational tasks demanding fake emotions may result in exhausting the employees, both mentally and physically. According to Paoli (2000), 59% of employees in European organizations routinely go through emotional exhaustion/labor in their jobs. Initially, the Emotional Labor (EL) notion was presented by Hochschild (1979) as a display of certain emotions to meet the job requirements. In another classical research, Hochschild (1983) defines emotional laborers as employees whose job is to influence the emotions of other people as a result of their interaction. The emotional laborers are supposed to hide their emotions and display the emotions which they are directed under the organizational policies. It is, therefore, claimed that physical traits, body gestures, and facial expressions are equally important at a workplace as interpersonal dealings and emotions are (Syed & Ali, 2013).

The emotional well-being of humans arises from the happiness and satisfaction they perceive from their surroundings (WHO, 2018). This emotional well-being is described as employee wellbeing which is associated with the happiness of employees. However, disaffection from an individual's true feelings arises when employees undergo EL, which may have disadvantageous consequences affecting the psychological wellbeing of employees (Loayza-Rivas & Fernández-Castro, 2020). Hence, EL, if ignored, may result in creating negative impacts such as a feeling disgraced, awkwardness, depression, and stress (Syed & Ali, 2013). Hence, it is pertinent to understand the concept of EL to enable the employees as well as organizations to avoid the disturbing outcomes originating from the emotional setback. It is believed that the concept of EL is multi-faceted involving varied explicit and implicit factors. But, the most common antecedents of EL are incidence frequency, change of emotions, and emotive disagreement (Costakis, et.al., 2020; Morris & Feldman, 1996). However, EL can be best interpreted by using two main

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emotional instruments: surface-level acting and deep-level acting (Kruml & Geddes, 2000).

Another construct of psychological capital or PsyCap has emerged as an important notion to comprehend the employees' behaviors, attitudes, and wellbeing (Avey, et.al., 2010). The PsyCap refers to the positive psychological resources of efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism among employees. According to the findings of comprehensive research, PsyCap creates a positive effect on employee wellbeing (Avey, et.al., 2010). Hence, a comprehensive understanding of generating PsyCap may enable the organizations to focus on enhancing employee wellbeing and reducing the negative effects of EL among employees.

There is a dire need to develop a competitive workforce in organizations which is strongly attributed to employee wellbeing. However, bad and exhaustive work practices, if present, will cause the EL among employees to negatively impact their emotional state. Consequently, EL may play a role in deteriorating the employee's wellbeing. These assumptions provide a rationale for this study, which will focus on studying the impact of EL on employee wellbeing for a deeper understanding of these concepts in a Pakistani context. The study will also attempt to analyze the moderating role of psychological capital in determining the relationship between EL and employee wellbeing. Although, this relationship has already been studied in a few pieces of research in Pakistan (Hayyat, et.al. 2017; Khalil, et.al. 2017), the moderating role of PsyCap has not yet been identified. Hence, the moderating role of PsyCap will help to bridge the literature gap in various psychological and human resource frameworks. An empirical analysis will provide useful insights on understanding the relationship between EL and employee wellbeing in a Pakistani context.

Considering this, following are the objectives of conducting this research:

- To understand the impact of EL on employee wellbeing.
- To determine the moderating role of PsyCap in determining the relationship between EL and employee wellbeing.

Literature Review

Employee Wellbeing. In an organizational context, excessive emotional and psychological demands from work deplete the energy of employees leading to their emotional exhaustion (Hochschild A., 1983; Mäkikangas, et.al. 2020). On the other hand, well-being acts shown by the organizational management depict how employees achieve authority, promotions, and success. Facing EL on a frequent basis causes emotional exhaustion among employees leading to their low performance (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Moreover, the mandated workplace emotions create stressful feelings which may also cause emotional dissonance for employees (Park, et.al., 2021). According to Park, Ahn, Hyun, and Rutherford, emotional exhaustion negatively influences employee wellbeing and their propensity to leave the organization. Considering this relation, when employees are involved in unnatural acting or showing fake emotions, they are pushed to face emotive disagreement which eventually hurts their inner-self and EL occurs (Morris & Feldman, 1996).

Emotional Labor. An empirical research argues that fake emotions derived from the true feelings of an employee generate EL and adversely affect the employee's wellbeing (Grandey, et.al., 2019). This adversely affected employee wellbeing may resultantly produce detrimental outcomes for the organizations (Hayyat, et.al., 2017). On contrary, positive and appropriate emotions of employees help them to effectively contribute to achieving the organizational goals (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Employee emotions are becoming an essential part of research studies, as the researchers of sociology and psychology have critically identified the significance of employee emotions in organizations (Briner, 1999; Mohsin & Ali, 2018; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). The service organizations in particular tend to monitor employee wellbeing by taking into account the EL. The concept of EL describes how the employees of an organization control their emotions to have a positive emotional impact on their peers and customers (Hochschild A. , 1983). This required or mandated emotional exercise creates EL among employees. Consequently, such employees may face negative consequences including emotional

fatigue, hiding inner feelings, lower employee wellbeing, employee burnout, and much more (Adelmann & Zajonc, 1989).

EL from a psychological point of view indicates that an undesirable change in employee emotions inversely affects their productivity, performance, and wellness (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). In a working environment where employees have to fake or hide their emotions, employee wellbeing gets adversely affected. Additionally, EL tends to increase stress among employees that leading to undesirable consequences at their workplace as well as in their personal lives (Zaghini, et al., 2020) leading to a lower level of employee wellbeing. Last but not least, EL is determined through the surface and deep level acting of employees; where surface acting is about modifying the facial expressions and deep acting is modifying the inner feelings to fulfill the emotion-based work requirements (Grandey, 2017).

Surface Level Acting. Surface-level acting is considered as a crafted emotional feeling and exhibits psychological behavior. It is generated by the mindful representation of body gestures such as facial expressions, (Diefendorff, et.al., 2005) as a part of organizationally desired emotions. Surface level acting does not include the imitation of emotions and requires less effort by employees but still, it is damaging to the employee's wellbeing (Bhave & Glomb, 2013). Similarly, it might be hassle-free for the employees to mold their physical appearance for their work demands as sometimes it becomes a part of their work routine (Winkler, 2016). Involving this, employees explicitly show untrue or fake emotions such as smiling faces to meet their work demands. This surface-level acting emotionally drains the employees leading to a lower level of employee wellbeing.

Deep Level Acting. Deep level acting is a complex type of EL in which an employee puts some real effort to manage the emotions because fulfilling the need to hide the actual feelings is difficult (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). In such a situation, a figurative picture must be created in mind to feel the work situation and act accordingly (Briner, 1999). Furthermore, the quality of fake emotions in deep acting should also be

exhibited as natural and true emotions by the employees (Hochschild A. R., 1979); which is a hard task as compared to surface acting. Thus, a high level of EL is caused due to deep acting. However, recurring obligatory emotions become easy for the employees to show as they become a part of their functional context (Ashforth & Fried, 1988). Interestingly, only self-aware employees can execute deep level acting because they understand how to regulate their emotional state according to their workplace setting (Hochschild A. , 1983). Nonetheless, consistent EL caused by deep level acting may lead to a lower level of employee wellbeing which must be addressed by organizational support strategies (Grandey, 2017).

Psychological Capital. Psychological capital term or PsyCap includes favorable and healthy psychological resources for a human mind in an organizational context (Grabarek, 2018; Gooty, et.al., 2009). PsyCap emphasizes positivity for human motivation by ensuring the provision of self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism among employees (Gooty, et.al., 2009). These positive mental resources provide confidence and encouragement to the employees to effectively contribute to organizational tasks. According to Bandura (1994), self-efficacy is a belief in one's capabilities to perform the duties in the desired manner. It defines how people think, feel and motivate themselves; ultimately depicts their behavior. Furthermore, hope gives people positive energy to move forward and they plan a way towards success (Grabarek, 2018). It is another positive resource for the employees to enhance their personal and organizational performance. Similarly, employee resilience is an integral part of PsyCap which refers to the capacity of adaptation and coping with adversity (Masten, 2001). It is claimed that resilient employees are more productive and have a high level of self-efficacy (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006). Finally, optimism refers to the positive feelings about the future of an employee when he/she feels confident about his/her successful future (Avey, et.al, 2010). The optimistic feelings of employees lead to their better performance in organizational settings, thus, also adding to the PsyCap.

All the elements of PsyCap positively influence the minds of the employees which ultimately leads to their well-being (Avey, et.al, 2010;

Gooty, et.al., 2009). Hence, organizations need to effectively understand this concept of PsyCap to ensure the wellbeing of their employees. These constructive essentials of PsyCap are crucial for varied workplace variables such as job satisfaction, peer relationships, and motivation much more (Luthans, et.al, 2006). Keeping in view the positive resources or PsyCap, organizations can use PsyCap to reduce the negative impacts of EL. A study on teachers in China reveals that PsyCap has a significant relationship with EL and its outcome variables such as employee wellbeing (Cheung, et al., 2011). According to Cheung et al., the positivity of employees gets disturbed when they exhibit fake emotions to perform their tasks. Consequently, it devalues the employees' well-being and their overall performance (Yin, et.al, 2018). The study by Yin, et.al suggests that PsyCap significantly moderates the relationship between EL and its consequences. Therefore, organizations that wish to reduce EL and increase the well-being of their employees must enhance their PsyCap.

The literature review leads to developing the four main hypotheses for this study:

H1: There is a significant and negative relationship between EL and employee wellbeing.

H2: There is a significant and negative relationship between surface-level acting and employee wellbeing.

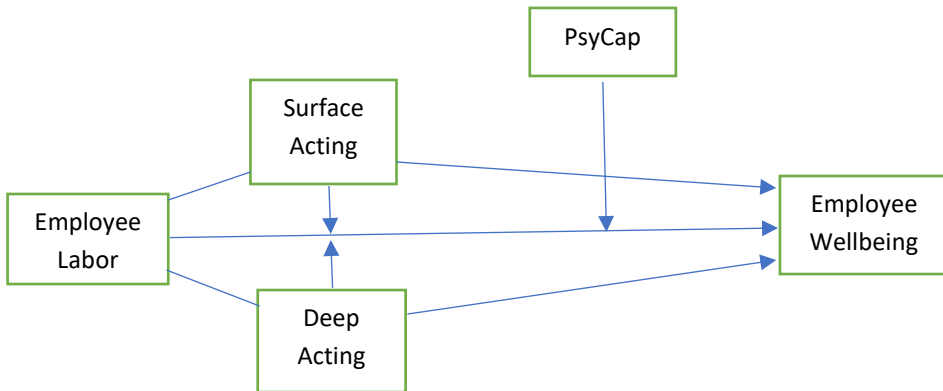
H3: There is a significant and negative relationship between deep level acting and employee wellbeing.

H4: Psychological capital significantly moderates the relation of EL and employee wellbeing.

Research Model

The discussion in the literature review and the development of hypotheses led to the generation of a research model for this study. This conceptual research model will be empirically analyzed by testing the research hypotheses of this study. The model shows EL and its components i.e. surface acting and deep acting as independent variables, employee wellbeing as a dependent variable, and PsyCap as a moderator.

Figure 1
Proposed Research Model



Method

The study data was used for one specific point of time and therefore, follows a cross-sectional approach along with a quantitative research strategy. The unit of analysis for research is the individual employees working in the education and health sectors of Lahore, Pakistan. The data was collected through a convenience sampling technique based on the availability of the employees by using a close-ended questionnaire adapted from different sources. The scale for employee wellbeing included seven items and it was adapted from the research of Juniper, et.al., (2009). The reliability of the employee wellbeing scale was measured through Cronbach's Alpha value which was 0.77. EL and its components were measured by using the questionnaire developed by Liu & Zhang (2015) and included ten items.

The Cronbach's alpha value for EL was found to be 0.80. Lastly, PsyCap was measured by adapting the questionnaire of the study done by Cheung et al. (2011) and its Cronbach's alpha value was 0.79. There were eight items included for PsyCap. Finally, the responses were sought from

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500 employees but the net sample size was 395 (N=395) with a response rate of almost 80%.

Furthermore, the questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale to measure the responses from Strongly Disagree=1 to Strongly Agree=5. Moreover, the consent of the participants was sought before distributing the questionnaires to ensure their volunteer participation. Finally, the data were analyzed by using AMOS. [In order to test the hypothesis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and regression analysis were applied.

Results

To begin with the data analysis, the reliability of the questionnaire was tested through Cronbach's alpha. The value of Cronbach's alpha was greater than 0.7 for all the three main variables i.e. EL, employee wellbeing, and PsyCap.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The CFA was performed to measure the covariance among items forming the constructs (Statistical Consulting, 2021). Table 1 provides values to assess the fitness of the proposed research model through CFA. Certain thresholds should be met in order to assess the good fit for the model (David, 2021). According to the results for model fit, Chi-square/df value is less than 5 which is counted as acceptable. Further, GFI (Goodness of fit) explains the amount of variance which is less than 1 i.e. 0.92 to assess the model fit. Lastly, CFI (Comparative fit index) is 0.91 which also depicts a good model fit.

Table 1

Model Fit Table

Chi-square/df value	0.35
GFI (Goodness of fit)	0.92
CFI (Comparative fit index)	0.91

Regression Analysis

The regression analysis was performed to test the hypotheses of the study. To explain this, Table 2 shows no indication of multicollinearity as all the VIF values shown are less than 5. After applying the linear regression analysis, the standardized coefficient values for EL ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = -0.72$) show a significant yet, negative relationship with employee wellbeing. The result shows an inverse relationship between EL and employee wellbeing. Therefore, H1 is accepted showing there is a significant and negative relationship between these two variables. Additionally, Table 2 also illustrates a negative association between surface-level acting and employee wellbeing ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = -0.12$). This result portrays that even surface-level acting adversely impacts the positive mindset of the employees and reduces their wellbeing.

Hence, there is a negative relationship between surface-level acting and employee wellbeing and H2 is accepted. Similarly, deep level acting has a significant and negative relationship with employee wellbeing ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = -0.22$). The result depicts that employees' mental health or wellbeing deteriorates when they have to change their inner-self and hide their true feelings at their workplace. This result allows us to accept H3 showing a significant and negative relationship between deep level acting and employee wellbeing.

Finally, the R-square values for all three hypotheses were within the acceptable range of 0 to 1 (Cameron & Windmeijer, 1997). These values show the variance caused in dependent variables due to independent variables.

Finally, multiple regression analysis was performed to test the moderating effect of PsyCap on the relationship between independent and dependent variables of the study i.e. EL and employee wellbeing, respectively. Table 2 shows that PsyCap significantly moderates the relationship between the two variables ($p < 0.05$, $\beta = 0.39$). Thus, it can be inferred that an increase in PsyCap strengthens the inverse relationship between EL and employee wellbeing. This means that EL reduces and employee wellbeing increases in the presence of positive psychological resources. Hence, PsyCap significantly moderates the relationship between EL and employee wellbeing, and H4 is accepted.

Table 2*Regression Analysis*

Variables	p-value	Standardized Coefficients	VIF	R-Square Value
EL → Employee Wellbeing	0.00	-0.72	1.39	0.62
Surface Level Acting → Employee Wellbeing	0.00	-0.12	1.96	0.22
Deep Level Acting → Employee Wellbeing	0.00	-0.22	2.01	0.48
EL*PsyCap → Employee Wellbeing	0.00	0.39	1.62	0.53

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to bridge the literature gap in the field of organizational behavior through an empirical analysis of EL and its components. The results depict that EL negatively influences the wellbeing of employees, thus, reducing their performance and productivity. The findings of the study are aligned with the previous studies depicting the inverse relationship between the two variables (Ashforth & Fried, 1988; Grandey & Melloy, 2017; Hayyat, et.al, Nisar, 2017). EL originates from the demand of showing undesirable emotions to perform a certain task. It can ultimately cause mental/emotional exhaustion among employees and deteriorates their wellbeing. Therefore, organizations need to address this issue through appropriate work strategies that may not involve fake emotions. This would help the employees to perform their tasks without any undue emotional pressure to change/hide their true feelings. Researches have shown that even a small yet unnatural change in facial expressions, on a repetitive basis, can cause EL and disturb the employee's wellbeing (Bhave & Glomb, 2013). Therefore, sensitivity towards employee emotions must not be ignored by the organizational management to support employee

wellbeing. A well-managed support system enables the employees to work with mental peace and avoid the negative consequences of EL.

Furthermore, the physical and emotional well-being of employees depends on how comfortable they feel in an organizational setting. Facing deep level acting can not only drain their physical energy but can also hurt the emotions of employees (Zaghini, et al., 2020). The findings of this study corroborate with the previous literature and depict a negative relationship between deep level acting and employee wellbeing. Avoiding surface and deep level acting save employees' mental energy for effective participation in work tasks. Resultantly, such employees show better productivity and performance as compared to their counterparts by recognizing their potential (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993).

Thus, it can be clearly said that organizations need to emphasize adopting human/employee sensitive work practices to avoid emotional exploitation of their employees through work requirements. It would also keep their employees motivated and confident.

Lastly, the study results have identified that PsyCap has a significant role in organizational settings and the field of organizational behavior. It encourages the positive behaviors and attitudes of employees so they can effectively contribute to achieving the organizational goals (Avey, et.al, 2010; Cheung, et al., 2011). Positivity in the work environment not only imparts confidence to the employees but also gives them hope for their successful future. In addition to this, strong and resilient employees can cope with organizational adversities in a better manner. Similarly, these positive resources of PsyCap help the employees to avoid EL and feel good about their work. This will allow employees to keep themselves motivated and grow for their personal and organizational goals (Loayza-Rivas & Fernández-Castro, 2020; Yin, et.al, 2018). Finally, organizations need to encourage positivity, ethics, and support in their work settings to enhance the wellbeing of their employees and to reduce the negative emotions of EL.

Overall, the findings of this study in the Pakistani context present significant insights for organizational management. The labor-intensive nature of the service sector invites more stringent implications of this study for the organizational leadership to take fruitful measures to ensure employees' wellbeing and avoid EL. It is primarily because the negative

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emotions of the employees lower their level of motivation, thus, restricting their productivity and performance. Resultantly, these demotivated and emotionally strained employees yield impediments to organizational success. In today's competitive world, organizations need to have an enhanced focus on developing human capital by reinforcing a positive state of mind among employees. This PsyCap positively influences employee wellbeing and helps to curtail the adverse effects of EL. Consequently, employees will tend to be more engaged in their tasks and perform well.

Therefore, practitioners in the Pakistani service sector may incorporate encouraging and facilitating work practices to foster employee wellbeing and develop PsyCap; to reap the benefits of better employee performance.

Conclusion

It can be concluded on the basis of research findings that the proposed conceptual model of this research is useful to analyze the relationship between EL and employee wellbeing. The study has revealed that EL adversely affects the employees' mental and physical wellbeing. A keen focus on ensuring the provisions of a positive work environment will add to the PsyCap which is necessary to keep the employees motivated, confident, and hopeful about their future in the organization. Consequently, such employees will put all their energies to perform their tasks and achieve the organizational goals. This study attempted to understand these concepts in the service sector of Lahore, Pakistan. The findings will allow the local practitioners to adopt employee supportive work practices that may help to reduce EL and increase employee wellbeing.

Limitations

This study has some limitations related to the generalizability of its results. It is primarily because of its limited geographical domain and limited sample size. However, future researches can be performed with an increased sample size and more intervening variables for a comprehensive understanding of these concepts in a Pakistani context. Lastly, a qualitative analysis may also yield better and comprehensive insights regarding the perceptions of employees about variables of this study.

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