

## EMOTIONAL LABOR AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT AMONG SOUTH KOREAN PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYEES

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I examined the relationship between emotional labor and organizational commitment with 208 South Korean public service employees and used structural equation modeling to analyze the data. The results indicated that deep acting was positively associated with the 3 components of organizational commitment, namely, identification, affiliation, and exchange, and the identification commitment component in particular. However, no significant relationship was found between surface acting and the 3 components of organizational commitment. Thus, South Korean public service employees with a strong sense of organizational identity and who feel valued by their organization may generate positive emotions and engage in deep acting, leading to a high level of organizational commitment.

*Keywords:* surface acting, deep acting, emotional labor, organizational commitment, public service employees, identification commitment, affiliation commitment, exchange commitment.

There is increasing recognition of the importance of emotional labor in service sectors because service employees' behavior is the most important determinant of service quality (Bowen, Siehl, & Schneider, 1989; Pugh, 2001; Yürür & Mengenci, 2014). Service employees' behavior is particularly important in public service organizations (Lee, 2016), because their expressed emotions may leave a lasting impression on citizen clients, whose perceptions of service quality and attitude toward the government are thereby affected (Allen, Pugh, Grandey, & Groth, 2010; Barger & Grandey, 2006; Lee, 2016; Pugh, 2001).

Hochschild (1983) defined *emotional labor* as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (p. 7) in exchange for a

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wage. Jobs requiring interpersonal contact and thus with emotional labor characteristics, include those of health care providers, street-level employees, teachers, call center workers, and law enforcement officers (Diefendorff, Richard, & Croyle, 2006; Grandey, Diefendorff, & Rupp, 2013; Lee, 2016; Sloan, 2004). When performing emotional labor, service workers comply with organizational display rules by using two behavior strategies: surface acting and deep acting. *Surface acting* involves showing inauthentic emotional expressions to customers when the organization's display rules differ from one's own feelings (Allen et al., 2010; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002), whereas *deep acting* is attempting to control one's internal thoughts and feelings to authentically express the desired emotions (Allen et al., 2010; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). In this study I examined the emotional labor components of surface and deep acting.

Prior researchers have shown that employees' organizational commitment has a positive influence on the organization through extrarole behavior (Balfour & Wechsler, 1996; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986; Ueda, 2011) and job involvement (Kanungo, 1982; Liou, 1995; Stevens, Beyer, & Trice, 1978). However, most research on the relationship between emotional labor and organizational commitment has been conducted in the private service sector. Inconsistent results from this research have led to ongoing debate about whether surface acting is negatively related to organizational commitment, deep acting is positively related to organizational commitment, or there is no significant relationship between these variables.

To address this gap in the literature, I investigated the relationship between emotional labor and organizational commitment in the public service sector in South Korea. I used Balfour and Wechsler's (1996) organizational commitment measure because it was created for the public sector, which may allow a future comparison between the public and private sectors.

## Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### Emotional Labor

Emotional labor is performed to enhance organizational performance and promote customer satisfaction. Emotional labor jobs have appropriate and inappropriate emotional display rules, that is, requirements that employees must comply with to fulfill role expectations (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey et al., 2013), which are dictated by the demands of the job. Employees who use surface acting in response to emotional display rules may experience internal tension and physiological exhaustion (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Gross & Levenson, 1997; Pugliesi, 1999). As a result, employees may not have a positive attitude toward, or feel satisfaction about, their job. In contrast, deep acting goes beyond following the rules and involves attempting to make emotional displays authentic (Allen et al., 2010).

### Emotional Labor and Organizational Commitment

Several researchers (Yang & Chang, 2008; Yürür & Mengenci, 2014) have found no significant relationship between deep acting and organizational commitment, whereas Bozionelos and Kiamou (2008), and Ghalandari, Jogh, Imani, and Nia (2012) with nurse participants, have identified a positive relationship. Further, although many researchers have found a negative relationship between surface acting and organizational commitment (Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Kidwell, Hardesty, Murtha, & Sheng, 2011), others have not identified a significant relationship (Ghalandari et al., 2012; Mikeska, Hamwi, Friend, Rutherford, & Park, 2015).

Hochschild (1983) stated that, over time, surface acting causes a feeling of detachment from an individual's true feelings and those of others. Kidwell et al. (2011) maintained that individuals' emotional displays and suppression of their emotions have a significant influence on service employees' attitude and behavior. Such suppression and detachment may contribute to a weak organizational identity, reduced organizational commitment, a lower likelihood of getting along with coworkers (Mikeska et al., 2015), and greater emotional dissonance (Yang & Chang, 2008). For example, Yang and Chang (2008) found in their examination of clinical nurse participants that surface acting and organizational commitment were negatively related. Further, previous researchers (Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002) have suggested that surface acting may indirectly inhibit organizational commitment by inducing feelings of detachment.

In contrast, Humphrey, Ashforth, and Diefendorff (2015) proposed that individuals who engage in deep (vs. surface) acting identify more with their role. High organizational identification resulting from deep acting is positively related to high organizational commitment (Meyer, Becker, & Van Dick, 2006), accepting organizational goals and values, and being willing to expend extra effort on behalf of the organization (Panaccio & Vandenberghe, 2009). Moreover, when employees engage in deep acting to contribute to the organization, their identification, affiliation, and exchange components of organizational commitment may increase. *Identification commitment* refers to membership in an organization that is respected by the public and makes important contributions to the public good. *Affiliation commitment* relates to beliefs in regard to how organizational members care about others, their well-being, and their belongingness to the group. *Exchange commitment* refers to the extent to which the organization recognizes the contribution of, demonstrates concern about, and provides support and encouragement to employees (Ghalandari et al., 2012; Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011). Hülsheger and Schewe (2011), who examined service occupations, including bank employees, found a positive relationship between deep acting and organizational commitment. Therefore, I proposed the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1:** Surface acting will be negatively related to identification commitment.

**Hypothesis 2:** Surface acting will be negatively related to affiliation commitment.

**Hypothesis 3:** Surface acting will be negatively related to exchange commitment.

**Hypothesis 4:** Deep acting will be positively related to identification commitment.

**Hypothesis 5:** Deep acting will be positively related to affiliation commitment.

**Hypothesis 6:** Deep acting will be positively related to exchange commitment.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

I conducted a survey between April and June 2015 with public service employees in a random selection of five of the 25 *gu*s (similar to New York City boroughs in the US) in Seoul, South Korea: Guro, Jongno, Seocho, Seodaemun, and Yeongdeungpo. After I had obtained informed consent from the employees with a statement that their information would remain confidential, I distributed surveys to 300 public service employees (approximately 60 employees per *gu*), of whom 254 returned the survey. When I had removed outliers and unusable data, there were 208 participants.

Demographic analysis indicated that all 208 participants (55.3% women, 44.7% men) held full-time jobs and primarily worked in administrative services (68%). The remaining service sectors that they were employed in were social (7%), transportation (4%), finance & accounting and information & communication (5%), housing (5%), support (3%), and others (8%). The average age of the participants was 37.60 years ( $SD = 9.55$ , range = 28–57), and their average length of public sector work experience was approximately 10 years ( $M = 10.83$ ,  $SD = 9.44$ ). In regard to their level of education, most participants (63.4%) were college graduates, with the remaining participants being high school graduates (9.1%), 2-year degree graduates or having completed some college studies (14.0%), graduate school graduates (8.2%), and others (5.3%).

### Measures

As the original surveys were in English, they were translated into Korean by two bilingual public administration experts who cross-checked each other's translation to validate the translation. All items were responded to on a 7-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The surface acting and deep acting survey items were taken from Diefendorff, Croyle, and Gosserand (2005), with each construct assessed with three items. Organizational commitment was measured with three items each for identification commitment, affiliation commitment, and exchange commitment, which were derived from Balfour and Wechsler (1996).

### Data Analysis

I used SPSS 22.0 and Amos 18.0 for data analysis. I tested the latent variables by performing factor analysis with varimax rotation. All variables exhibited good convergent validity and reliability values above .70. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was .858 and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant at  $p < .001$ . The factor analysis of the variables is shown in Table 1 and Cronbach’s alphas for the latent variables are shown in Table 2.

### Results

To examine the relationships between surface acting, deep acting, identification commitment, affiliation commitment, and exchange commitment, I used structural equation modeling. I used confirmatory factor analysis to analyze the variables (see Table 1). I then calculated standardized regression values, which represent convergent validity, and squared multiple correlations, which represent content validity. All factors exhibited good convergent and content validity. The standardized solutions for the respecified item measures and a full list of the items are shown in Table 2.

Table 1. *Factor Analysis Results*

| Item | Component   |             |             |             |             |
|------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|      | 1           | 2           | 3           | 4           | 5           |
| Q211 | <b>.927</b> | .066        | .183        | -.010       | .095        |
| Q212 | <b>.891</b> | .068        | .186        | .027        | .026        |
| Q210 | <b>.888</b> | .079        | .122        | .097        | .167        |
| Q312 | .061        | <b>.807</b> | .397        | -.051       | .120        |
| Q313 | .096        | <b>.796</b> | .211        | -.012       | .303        |
| Q311 | .075        | <b>.763</b> | .310        | -.069       | .305        |
| Q306 | .367        | .176        | <b>.775</b> | -.101       | .024        |
| Q307 | .168        | .418        | <b>.767</b> | .077        | .132        |
| Q308 | .176        | .325        | <b>.651</b> | .090        | .465        |
| Q305 | .073        | .386        | <b>.522</b> | -.005       | .477        |
| Q203 | -.125       | -.149       | -.019       | <b>.872</b> | .085        |
| Q201 | .062        | -.081       | .084        | <b>.861</b> | -.037       |
| Q202 | .336        | .336        | -.094       | <b>.653</b> | -.165       |
| Q310 | .204        | .400        | .136        | -.098       | <b>.764</b> |
| Q309 | .094        | .328        | .560        | .042        | <b>.562</b> |

*Note.* 1 = deep acting, 2 = exchange commitment, 3 = identification commitment, 4 = surface acting, 5 = affiliation commitment. The highest loadings for each component are shown in **bold**. Items are listed by name in Table 2.

Table 2. *Standardized Solutions for Revised Measures*

| Latent variable  | Standardized factor loading | $R^2$ |
|--|-----------------------------|-------|
| <b>Deep acting</b> ( $\alpha = .924$ )   |                             |       |
| Q 2.10: I try to actually experience the emotions that I must show to clients/customers.         | .866                        | .749  |
| Q 2.11: I work hard to actually feel the emotions that I need to show to clients/customers.      | .971                        | .942  |
| Q 2.12: I work at developing the feelings inside of me that I need to show to clients/customers. | .856                        | .732  |
| <b>Exchange commitment</b> ( $\alpha = .889$ )   |                             |       |
| Q 3.11: This organization appreciates my accomplishments on the job.                             | .866                        | .750  |
| Q 3.12: This organization does all it can to recognize employees' good performance.              | .880                        | .775  |
| Q 3.13: My efforts on the job are recognized and appreciated by my employer.                     | .788                        | .620  |
| <b>Identification commitment</b> ( $\alpha = .770$ )   |                             |       |
| Q 3.05: I am proud to tell people who I work for.  | .745                        | .555  |
| Q 3.06: What this organization stands for is important to me.                                    | .689                        | .475  |
| Q 3.07: I work for an organization that is competent and able to accomplish its mission.         | .839                        | .705  |
| <b>Surface acting</b> ( $\alpha = .746$ )  |                             |       |
| Q 2.01: I hide my true feelings to appear pleasant at work.                                      | .865                        | .748  |
| Q 2.02: In my job, I act confident and self-assured regardless of how I actually feel.           | .679                        | .452  |
| Q 2.03: I wear a mask to deal with clients/customers in an appropriate way.                      | .742                        | .550  |
| <b>Affiliation commitment</b> ( $\alpha = .884$ )  |                             |       |
| Q 3.08: I feel a strong sense of belonging to this organization.                                 | .899                        | .809  |
| Q 3.09: I feel like part of the family at this organization.                                     | .846                        | .715  |
| Q 3.10: The people I work with care about what happens to me.                                    | .630                        | .410  |

I assessed the model fit using the absolute fit indices of minimum discrepancy (CMIN/*df*) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and incremental fit indices of normed fit index (NFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), and comparative fit index (CFI). The commonly accepted thresholds for these fit indices are as follows: CMIN/*df* < 2, NFI > .90, TLI > .90, CFI > .90, and RMSEA < .10 (in general, RMSEA < .05 is good; however, a range between .05 and .10 is acceptable). The overall model fit results were CMIN/*df* = 2.228, NFI = .916, TLI = .934, CFI = .951, RMSEA = .077.

With the exception of the chi-square test (CMIN/*df*) result, all goodness-of-fit indices had an acceptable fit. An explanation for the chi-square test result is the small sample size of 208 participants, as the chi-square test is sensitive to sample size. In general, however, sample sizes over 200 tend to satisfy accepted thresholds (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Because, to my knowledge, I am the first to investigate emotional labor and organizational commitment using Balfour and

Wechsler's (1996) measure, and because all major model fit indices support the present model, I believe that this is a valid model to explain the relationships between surface acting, deep acting, identification commitment, affiliation commitment, and exchange commitment.

The hypothesis testing results show that surface acting was not significantly related to any of the organizational commitment factors (identification commitment:  $\beta = -.011$ ,  $p = .888$ ; affiliation commitment:  $\beta = -.006$ ,  $p = .938$ ; exchange commitment:  $\beta = -.074$ ,  $p = .346$ ). Thus, Hypotheses 1–3 were not supported. However, deep acting was significantly positively related to all the organizational commitment factors (identification commitment:  $\beta = .459$ ,  $p < .001$ ; affiliation commitment:  $\beta = .376$ ,  $p < .001$ ; exchange commitment:  $\beta = .267$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Thus, Hypotheses 4–6 were supported.

## Discussion

In this study I tested the assumption that public service employees in South Korea who engage in surface acting have lower organizational commitment, whereas those who engage in deep acting have higher organizational commitment. My findings indicate that employees who engage in deep acting have higher commitment to the organization; however, no significant relationship was found between surface acting and organizational commitment. This result aligns with that of Mikeska et al. (2015), who found no relationship between their salespeople participants' surface acting and organizational commitment. Mikeska et al. proposed that the adverse outcomes associated with surface acting may relate to the occupation rather than to the organization: Because of the emotional dissonance created by surface acting, employees are likely to experience internal tension, job dissatisfaction, and burnout, but they do not attribute these outcomes to the organization directly. Further, Humphrey et al. (2015) stated that employees who engage in surface (vs. deep) acting are less likely to identify with their role and tend to simply feign the expected emotions.

Regardless of the type of service sector that they work in, employees who engage in deep acting tend to show higher organizational commitment, which, in turn, fosters desirable organizational behavior (e.g., job satisfaction, altruistic behavior, and job involvement). My results indicate that, of the three types of organizational commitment, identification is particularly strongly related to deep acting. Identification commitment is related to how much public service employees are respected by the public. Public employees with an organizational identity and the feeling of being valued may generate positive emotions and engage in deep acting, leading to high organizational commitment. Likewise, South Korean public service employees who engage in deep acting may set citizen clients' satisfaction as an ultimate organizational aim, resulting in high

organizational commitment. Further, when employees receive recognition for their work, this generates positive emotions and more commitment to the organization.

Social recognition, namely, praise from fellow workers, leaders, or staff, may be a valuable factor in increasing employees' organizational commitment. When emotional labor work is not adequately recognized, an individual's intrinsic urge to commit and the likelihood of organizational commitment will decrease. Thus, public service organization managers should focus on creating a supportive organizational culture for employees to engage in deep acting. When public service employees feel that they are valued and supported by others, their intrinsic motivation and willingness to fulfill their expected role may increase, so that, in turn, they become more committed to the organization.

Future researchers should confirm my finding that surface acting and organizational commitment are not related, using different samples and settings to better explain the impact of surface acting on organizational commitment. In addition, a limitation in this study is that all latent constructs were created at a single time point, giving rise to the possibility of common method bias. To avoid this problem, data should be collected from various sources, or longitudinal designs should be used. I recommend that future researchers conduct studies using Balfour and Wechsler's (1996) organizational commitment measure in other public service organizations to confirm my results.

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