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Less acting, more doing: How surface acting relates to perceived meeting effectiveness and other employee outcomes

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Abstract

This study adds to the growing body of research on work meetings and extends the emotional labour literature beyond a service context by examining the relationship between surface acting during meetings and perceived meeting effectiveness. Additionally, the relationships of surface acting during meetings and perceived meeting effectiveness with time-lagged reports of intention to quit and emotional exhaustion 3 months later were investigated. Structural equation modelling of data from 178 working adults revealed negative relationships between surface acting and perceptions of meeting effectiveness. Perceived meeting effectiveness partially mediated the relationship between surface acting and both intention to quit and emotional exhaustion 3 months later. These findings expand both the limited research on perceived meeting effectiveness and the surface acting nomological network to include a consideration that expressing inauthentic emotions in meetings (surface acting) may relate to the perceived effectiveness of the meeting. As well, both surface acting during meetings and perceived meeting effectiveness may relate to how emotionally exhausted employees feel and their intentions to seek other employment. Given the cost and pervasiveness of meetings in daily organizational life and their potential effects on the well-being of employees, understanding how to make meetings effective is paramount – particularly if researchers and practitioners want to better understand how perceived meeting effectiveness may be related to various employee outcomes.

Practitioner points

- Organizations use up to 15% of their personnel budget on meetings, yet meetings are often considered ineffective by employees.

- Organizations wishing to increase the perceived effectiveness of their meetings can work to reduce the degree to which employees feel they have to express inauthentic emotion in meetings.

- In turn, expressing inauthentic emotion in meetings related to employees' future emotional exhaustion and intent to leave the organization.

Background

Meetings at work are ubiquitous and increasingly common (Leach, Rogelberg, Warr, & Burnfield, 2009; Rogelberg, Leach, Warr, & Burnfield, 2006). As communication technology increases, the prevalence of meetings also increases (Anson & Munkvold, 2004) because employees have the capability to hold meetings both face-to-face and in distributed contexts (e.g., conference calls, video-conferencing). The frequency of meetings also stems, in part, from the wide variety of purposes meetings serve in organizations and the patterns of organizational design that require ongoing collaboration (Rogelberg, Scott, & Kello, 2007). For example, meetings have been used to make decisions (Hirokawa & Poole, 1996), train employees (Clark, 1998), share information with various stakeholders (McComas, 2003), brainstorm (Reinig & Shin, 2002; Volkema & Neiderman, 1995), problem solve and coordinate activity (McComas, Tuit, Waks, & Sherman, 2007), and socialize newcomers (Schwartzman, 1989).

Despite their ubiquity, meetings have been an understudied context until fairly recently. Workplace meetings should garner more attention because understanding such a commonplace activity of employees is central to unpacking the everyday experiences of employees in the twenty-first century. Tracy and Dimock (2004) echo this sentiment by asserting meetings at work are one of the few settings in which employees simultaneously pursue a wide range of functional, relational, and organizational cultural objectives. In addition, meetings are important to understand because, as Rogelberg, Allen, Shanock, Scott, and Shuffler (2010) contend, they may be considered affective events triggered by the relationships among features of the job, the workplace, and the communication activities that comprise the meetings. Indeed, meetings are considered an affect-laden genre of organizational communication (Yates & Orlikowski, 1992) in which employees engage in a variety of activities that help them make sense of their organization, thus affecting their attitudes about the organization and the job (Raes, Glunk, Heijltjes, & Roe, 2007; Rogelberg *et al.*, 2010). During meetings, people interact with supervisors, make decisions, divide tasks, give and receive recognition, make plans, and perform myriad other activities – all of which are consistent with the types of work events that generate affect (Basch & Fisher, 2000). Further, these activities occur while participants are also subject to social dynamics and status differences (Cooren, 2007; Mirivel & Tracy, 2005; Rogelberg *et al.*, 2010).

The degree to which employees believe that their meetings are effective is an important focus of study because organizations invest up to 15% of their personnel budget on meetings (Doyle & Strauss, 1982). Despite all of the resources allocated to meetings, more than one-third of time in meetings may be unproductive and up to two-thirds of meetings may fail to meet their goals (Green & Lazarus, 1991). Rogelberg, Shanock, and Scott (2012) note that wasted time in meetings has many other costs besides simply dollars associated with employees' time including 'meeting recovery syndrome', or time spent cooling off due to frustration (Doyle & Strauss, 1982), and complaining to others (Schwartzman, 1995), which may be pronounced if the meeting was perceived as ineffective. Because of all the costs that may be associated with ineffective meetings, it is important to understand what may contribute to ineffective meetings and how to reduce these potentially negative antecedents.

This study is aimed at expanding our understanding of employees' perceptions of meeting effectiveness in several ways. The limited research to date on predictors of perceived meeting effectiveness (Cohen, Rogelberg, Allen, & Luong, 2011) has focused primarily on design characteristics of meetings (e.g., use of agendas, provision of refreshments). Meetings, of course, involve more than agendas and snacks. Meetings are emotionally laden events due to their goal-related activities, social interactions, and status dynamics (Rogelberg *et al.*, 2010). Thus, we drew from the emotional labour research (Grandey, 2003)

and examined how one emotional process, surface acting, may expand our understanding of perceived meeting effectiveness. We consider and test the notion that surface acting (i.e., faking the appropriate emotion for the context; Hochschild, 1983) in meetings may contribute to lower perceived meeting effectiveness and higher emotional exhaustion and intent to quit one's job. Specifically, we propose that surface acting in meetings may relate to attendees' evaluation of the effectiveness of their meetings as well as their overall well-being (i.e., emotional exhaustion and intent to quit).

Further, research on how employees react to ineffective meetings is scant despite their prevalence. The direct costs associated with poorly run meetings are clear (e.g., wasted time; Rogelberg *et al*., 2012). Less clear are the relationships between perceived meeting effectiveness and more subtle outcomes, outcomes that are not readily seen by an organization, but can nonetheless be highly consequential. Specifically, we investigate the relationship between perceived meeting effectiveness and employees' emotional exhaustion and quitting intentions, measured at a later point in time. Figure 1 displays our hypothesized model.

Surface acting in meetings

Because early definitions of emotional labour focused on modifying one's emotions in front of the public, previous research has primarily focused on the customer service context (Hochschild, 1983). In the customer service context, employees are often required to display certain emotions (e.g., through smiling, pleasant tone of voice) although they may not be feeling that particular positive emotion (e.g., if a customer is surly). Thus, customer service contexts may elicit surface acting, a form of emotional labour, where employees plaster on the organizationally prescribed emotional response even if they are not feeling that emotion (Allen, Pugh, Grandey, & Groth, 2010). Specifically, surface acting is defined as faking the appropriate emotion to fit the context (Hochschild, 1983). To date, emotional labour research has focused primarily on the customer service interface and less on other contexts (Hulsheger & Shewe, 2011). Recently, Ashforth and Humphrey (2012) noted that a trend in the emotional labour research has been to extend the examination of emotional labour beyond service workers. They argued emotional labour takes place in a wide variety of jobs because our roles at work are replete with social expectations and thus emotions are inevitably experienced. This view is consistent with Diefendorff, Richard, and Croyle (2006) who argued display rules such as acting friendly to others and suppressing annoyance are requirements of most jobs. They found it common for leaders to engage in surface acting just as much as service workers do.

Given their affect-generating nature, meetings are a context that has the potential to involve surface acting. There are many potential important implications and activities involved in meetings including dividing tasks, planning for the future, listening to information from supervisors, and dealing with co-workers with whom you may or may not agree. Because meetings create a context in which decisions are made and information is shared, employees are likely to feel a variety of emotions during the meeting and may attempt to modify their outward expression of emotion to fulfil standard norms concerning emotional expression in the workplace (i.e., express positive and suppress negative emotion; Grandey, 2000). For example, one could imagine feeling frustrated during a meeting and wanting to roll one's eyes at a co-worker's comment. Based on organizational norms, however, one may feel like one has to refrain from doing so and thus will modify their outward expression and suppress this negative emotional reaction. Similarly, an employee might feel scared about news of potential lay-offs during a meeting, but try hard to display neutral emotions. Thus, the affect generated in meetings may require employees to surface act to uphold emotional norms within the workplace (Diefendorff, Richard, & Yang, 2008; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Surface acting and perceived meeting effectiveness

When meeting attendees choose to surface act (e.g., act pleasant to others even when they disagree, or put on a smile when they are angry about a decision being made), they are expressing an inauthentic emotion that is inconsistent with their internal emotional state. Because emotional labour requires cognitive and emotional resources to be accomplished (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002), engaging in surface acting takes resources away from the employee's ability to meet his or her goals for the meeting (e.g., networking with others, gaining information that might help reach individual goals). Surface acting in meetings would reduce perceived meeting effectiveness for the individual, particularly as relevant to the individual's ability to deploy cognitive and emotional resources in pursuit of his or her goals for the meeting.

The notion that spending personal (cognitive and emotional) resources on faking one's emotions takes away from the ability to pay attention during meetings is consistent with a resource allocation view of emotion (Beal, Weiss, Barros, & MacDermid, 2005). According to Beal *et al*. (2005), affect requires attentional resources. Affect that is not relevant to a task (e.g., faking emotions in the context of meetings) pulls attention away from the task at hand leading to decrements in performance. Similarly, Diestel and Schmidt (2012) have argued that self-control demands, such as surface acting at work, take away from the ability to complete goal-directed behaviour at work. Thus, employees who have to devote resources to faking their emotional displays may not be able to use the meeting to help reach their individual goals for the meeting and thus perceive the meeting as ineffective for them. Consistent with Rogelberg *et al*. (2006), in the eyes of the employee, an effective meeting might mean that the meeting helped meet goals such as the opportunity to network or to gain information helpful to their job. Given we are referring to surface acting in meetings and that emotional control such as surface acting is likely to get in the way of goal-directed behaviour (Diestel & Schmidt, 2012), employees who surface act would be expected to generally walk out of meetings perceiving the meetings as ineffective for meeting their goals.

Although there is no research to date directly linking surface acting to perceived meeting effectiveness, the closest example comes from Scott, Allen, Bonilla, Baran, and Murphy (2013), who found that meetings were perceived as more effective when participants believed they had freedom to express dissent during those interactions. When employees do not perceive such freedom to express dissent, effort that might have gone into expressions of disagreement or opposition is instead invested in surface acting required for the suppression of one's genuine thoughts and feelings. Although surface acting in these instances may help reduce expressed conflict in meetings, some potential for creative ideas and innovation may be lost. In that case, the issue is one of the overall effectiveness of the meeting, whereas our focus is on perceived meeting effectiveness for the individual employee (i.e., in terms of helping individuals meet their own goals for the meeting, such as networking or gaining information). In either case, surface acting in meetings would be expected to use cognitive and emotional resources that result in reduced perceptions of meeting effectiveness.

> *Hypothesis 1*: Surface acting in meetings at work is negatively related to perceived effectiveness of meetings at work.

Surface acting and perceived meeting effectiveness as related to emotional exhaustion

Another purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between surface acting in meetings and potential negative effects on employees' well-being in the form of emotional exhaustion. In a recent meta-analysis of emotional labour, Hulsheger and Shewe (2011) showed that surface acting was consistently and positively related to emotional exhaustion across numerous studies focusing on the customer service interface. Emotional exhaustion refers to feelings of being overextended and depleted of one's emotional and physical resources (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Hulsheger and Shewe (2011) argued surface acting in

the customer service interface leads to emotional exhaustion because surface acting involves continual monitoring of actual and desired (i.e., expressed) emotions. This tension between emotions felt and emotions expressed demands effort and drains mental resources.

We expect a similar relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion would occur in the meeting context. In a service context, organizational norms exist to drive expectations for employees to act a certain way with customers even if they are not feeling that emotion. Similarly, the workplace meeting context demands employees interact and participate in collective action overshadowed by complex social dynamics and status differences (Cooren, 2007; Mirivel & Tracy, 2005; Rogelberg *et al*., 2010) while adhering to prescribed display rules for emotions in the workplace. Some display rules, such as acting friendly and hiding annoyances (i.e., expressing positive and suppressing negative affect), are ubiquitous across roles (Ashforth & Humphrey, 2012; Diefendorff *et al*., 2006). Thus, surface acting in meetings may use up an employee's emotional resources, leaving him or her feeling emotionally depleted. This notion is consistent with Diestel and Schmidt's (2012) argument that self-control demands, which include the regulation of emotions at work, produce psychological costs including greater emotional exhaustion. They found self-control demands (broadly defined, but including control of emotions at work) related positively to emotional exhaustion and stated surface acting, or displaying emotions that are not truly felt, would be a particularly exhausting form of emotional control at work. Given how common meetings are in employees' lives, we expect that the more one has to surface act in meetings, the more emotionally exhausted one is likely to feel over time.

Hypothesis 2: Surface acting in meetings at work is positively related to emotional exhaustion.

Also, perceived meeting effectiveness may function as an explanatory mechanism for the relationship between surface acting in meetings and emotional exhaustion. As argued above, surface acting in meetings would reduce perceived meeting effectiveness for the individual, particularly as relevant to the individual's ability to meet his or her goals for the meeting such as gaining information, networking with others. Given that emotional control such as surface acting is likely to get in the way of goal-directed behaviour (Diestel & Schmidt, 2012), employees who do more surface acting would walk out of meetings feeling that the meetings were ineffective for pursuing their individual goals. Conversely, employees who, on average, do not have to control their emotions and surface act are likely to believe their meetings are effective for them in terms of meeting their goals. Demands, such as surface acting, that get in the way of goal-directed behaviour were found to be costly in terms of emotional exhaustion (Diestel & Schmidt, 2012). Thus, employees who believe their meetings are effective would not need to expend additional emotional resources trying to recover from what they perceive as ineffective meetings. Consistent with this notion, Rogelberg *et al*. (2012) note that ineffective meetings result in 'meeting recovery syndrome', or time spent cooling off due to frustration (Doyle & Strauss, 1982) and time spent complaining to others (Schwartzman, 1995), which over time would be expected to lead to feelings of emotional exhaustion. Thus, we expect surface acting in meetings would relate to emotional exhaustion in part because of its negative relationship with perceived meeting effectiveness.

Hypothesis 3: Perceived meeting effectiveness partially mediates the relationship between surface acting in meetings and future emotional exhaustion.

Surface acting and intent to quit

We were also interested in examining how surface acting may relate to intent to quit, outside of a service context. Previous research has shown that surface acting has been positively related to intent to quit as well as actual turnover (Chau, Dahling, Levy, & Diefendorff, 2009) in a service context (i.e., bank tellers). Chau *et al*. (2009) argue surface acting is connected to turnover intentions because of the

uncomfortable emotional dissonance that occurs when one engages in surface acting (i.e., perceived difference between felt and expressed emotion). This emotional dissonance, they argued, motivates employees to remove themselves from situations where such dissonance occurs, thus making them think about quitting. Thus, we chose to focus on intent to quit as a second outcome of interest because of its established relationship with surface acting in a service context and because of the practical costs of turnover for organizations that result from quitting intentions (Loi, Hang-Yue, & Foley, 2006). The losses to organizations include replacement costs such as recruitment and training (cf. Loi *et al.*, 2006). Surface acting in the meeting context is expected to have a similar relationship with intent to quit as in the service context. Much like for service workers, surface acting in meetings is likely to be a frustrating experience that may lead employees to desire to look for alternative employment.

> *Hypothesis 4*: Surface acting in meetings at work is positively related to intent to quit.

Surface acting and perceived meeting effectiveness as related to intent to quit

In addition to the proposed direct relationship of surface acting in meetings with intent to quit, perceived meeting effectiveness may also play a mediating role in the link between surface acting in meetings and intent to quit. There is limited research to date on the outcomes of perceived meeting effectiveness other than simply the cost of wasted time in meetings (Allen, Rogelberg, & Scott, 2008). However, researchers (Baran, Shanock, Rogelberg, & Scott, 2012; Rogelberg *et al.*, 2006, 2010) have recently argued that experiences in meetings would relate to employees' general attitudes about the organization such as turnover intentions. In the only study to date examining perceived meeting effectiveness with intent to quit, Rogelberg *et al.* (2006) found a negative relationship, suggesting more effective meetings may reduce employees' intentions to leave. This is not surprising because meetings are omnipresent and important events that help employees make sense of their organizations (Raes *et al.*, 2007; Rogelberg *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, similar to emotional exhaustion, employees who have to spend time faking their emotions during meetings, thus reducing the perceived effectiveness of meetings, are likely to associate the organization with a place where effective meetings are not likely to occur. The negative feelings resulting from ineffective meetings may motivate employees to think about leaving their current job.

> *Hypothesis 5*: Perceived meeting effectiveness partially mediates the relationship between surface acting in meetings and intent to quit.

Method

Sample and procedure

This study took place as part of a larger study of work meetings, communication patterns, and job attitudes. Respondents were recruited using StudyResponse (Stanton & Weiss, 2002), an academic, non-profit organization that connects social science researchers with a large panel of potential survey respondents. StudyResponse provides small incentives to survey takers, such as gift cards and cash prizes. In an attempt to reduce common-method bias, the survey was designed to include two waves of data collection. Following recommendations from Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), the researchers created psychological and temporal separation by measuring the outcome variables, intention to quit and emotional exhaustion, 3 months after measuring the predictor variable (surface acting), and mediating variable (perceived meeting effectiveness).

For this study, we limited the sample to potential respondents located in the United States and who worked at least 20 hr per week, spoke English, and had regular meetings. In an attempt to maximize response rate, we sent a pre-notification to a random selection of panel members who met these criteria.

Of the 678 respondents who matched these criteria and agreed to participate, 291 responded with usable data from the first wave of data collection for a response rate of approximately 43%. A subsequent survey was sent to these 291 participants 3 months later with a subset of variables (including the intent to quit and emotional exhaustion variables used for the present study). Of the 291, 178 people responded with usable data from the second wave of data collection for a response rate of approximately 61%.

The 178 working adults used for the present study were employed within a wide range of organization types. Organization types included publicly traded, for-profit (23.7%); privately held, for-profit (38.7%); private, not-for-profit (12.1%); and public sector (25.4%). Organization size ranged from <10 employees to well over 100,000 employees, with a mean size of approximately 53,000 employees. Mean tenure with current organization was 8.30 years ($SD = 7.71$). Respondents ranged in age from 18 to more than 65; most (85.3%) were between 25 and 54 years old. Most respondents were female (69.7%) and highly educated, with 37.3% having earned an undergraduate degree and 19.2% having earned a graduate degree. On average, employees were at the midpoint of their organization in terms of job level, with only 5.1% at the lowest level and 4.0% at the highest level. The mean number of meetings attended each week varied ($M = 2.56$, $SD = 3.17$). Thirteen respondents indicated that they attend no meetings on average during a typical week; however, given that they also indicated that they did have regular meetings at work (albeit presumably less frequently), we did not exclude these cases from our analyses. We ran our hypothesized model with and without those 13 cases to check whether excluding them would change our results. It did not, all coefficients for hypothesized relationships were still significant and of similar magnitude (i.e., all were within the 95% confidence interval of the coefficients with the cases included).

Because 113 of the respondents from the first survey time point did not respond to the second survey, we investigated differences between them and the 178 who responded to both surveys. We found no statistically significant differences between these two groups regarding descriptive characteristics such as organization type, organization size, tenure, age, gender, education, number of meetings attended per week, job level or on our focal variables of surface acting or perceived meeting effectiveness. We do not provide a comparison for emotional exhaustion or intent to quit because these variables were assessed at time two, and thus, the 113 respondents who only responded to survey one do not have scores on those time two variables.

Finally, given our primary analyses used structural equation modelling, which requires data with no missing values, we evaluated the frequency of missing data for all relevant variables. Less than 5% of the data were missing for study variables, which is below the threshold that Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) deem potentially problematic in terms of affecting results. To maintain our sample size at 178, we followed Tabachnick and Fidell's suggestion and replaced any missing data at the item level with the item mean.

Measures

Surface acting

We used the 5-item measure developed by Brotheridge and Lee (2003) for service contexts to assess surface acting. The directions for rating the items were adapted to reflect the study's focus on meetings. Participants were asked to rate how often they do these behaviours in meetings, using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Sample items include 'Put on an act in order to deal with others in an appropriate way' and 'Fake a good mood when interacting with others in the meeting'.

Perceived meeting effectiveness

Consistent with Rogelberg *et al*. (2006) and Scott *et al*. (2013), we assessed meeting attendees' perceptions of meeting effectiveness. The 6-item scale developed by Rogelberg *et al*. (2006) to capture perceived effectiveness of workplace meetings in a typical week was used. However, we dropped two items that had to do with the overall group's goals given that our focus was the individual's perceived meeting effectiveness and reactions to the meeting rather than the effectiveness of the meeting overall for the work group. Participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of the meetings they attend in a typical week on a 5-point rating scale ranging from 1 (*extremely ineffective*) to 5 (*extremely effective*). Sample items include 'In achieving your own work goals', 'In providing you with an opportunity to acquire useful information', and 'In providing you with an opportunity to meet, socialize, or network with people'. Although a complement to this measure would have been some objective indicator of the effectiveness of meetings, none were available in the current data set. The data contain information about a wide variety of types of meetings attended in a typical week, which would presumably have widely differing indicators of effectiveness. Thus, for the current data set, perceptions were the only available measure.

Emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion was measured 3 months after the initial study using the 8-item emotional exhaustion scale on the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Participants were asked 'How often do you?' followed by a series of statements. A sample item is '…feel emotionally drained from work'. Items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*every day*).

Intent to quit

Turnover intention was measured 3 months after the initial study using the three items developed by Parra (1995) and published in the study by Rogelberg *et al*. (2006). Participants were asked to 'Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements'. A sample item is 'I often think of ending my work at this organization'. Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Control variables

We chose to assess job level as a potential control variable because it may be related to focal variables in our study. The higher up people are in the organization, the more power and status they hold (Scott, 2003). Those with higher power feel freer to be themselves and to say and do what they want (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008) and, therefore, may not feel the need to surface act. These employees may also feel less emotionally exhausted or likely to quit given their status in the organization. We also assessed whether commonly used descriptive variables in meetings research (Rogelberg *et al*., 2010) had relationships with focal variables in our study. These included age, gender, education, tenure with the organization, organization size, organization type, and number of meetings.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 1 displays means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and internal reliabilities. Correlations between study variables were consistent with the direction of the hypotheses. All measures showed acceptable internal reliabilities. Job level, assessed by asking participants to report how high up their job level is in their organization from 'lowest' (1) to 'highest' (5), correlated positively with perceived meeting effectiveness and negatively with both surface acting and emotional exhaustion. None of the

other potential control variables had a significant relationship with study variables. Thus, we included only job level as a control variable in our main analyses.

Discriminant validity of constructs

We first tested a series of nested confirmatory factor analytic (CFA) models to assess whether the survey variables were distinct from each other and that the indicators loaded onto their intended latent variables. We used Mplus version 6 (Muthén & Muthén, 2011) to compare the fit of four nested models: (1) a one-factor model treating surface acting, perceived meeting effectiveness, emotional exhaustion, and intent to quit items as indicators of one latent factor; (2) a two-factor model treating surface acting as a separate factor, and the perceived meeting effectiveness, emotional exhaustion, and intent to quit items as a single factor; (3) a three-factor model treating surface acting and perceived meeting effectiveness as separate factors, and emotional exhaustion and intent to quit as a single factor, and (4) a four-factor model treating each of the variables as separate factors. To set the metric of the latent variables, the highest loading item from each measure (or for each factor when combined) was set to 1.

Each more differentiated model showed a significantly better chi-square statistic (Table 2), and the model treating each hypothesized construct as a separate construct (four-factor model) showed the best fit. Thus, it appears that the variables in the four-factor model were distinct. Even though the four-factor model fit best, some of our fit indices did not quite meet traditional cut-offs. Therefore, we also checked the average variance in the indicators explained by each factor. All average variances were above .50 (ranging from .70 to .82), indicating that 50% or more of the variance in indicators was due to each latent factor. In addition, all indicators in the four-factor model loaded reliably on their predicted factors (ranging from .70 to .95, the lowest loading item was .70 for a perceived meeting effectiveness item).

Test of hypothesized model

Fit and significance of hypothesized relationships

Structural equation modelling using Mplus 6 was used to test the hypothesized model that allowed us to test all of our hypotheses, including the partial mediating role of perceived meeting effectiveness, simultaneously (Figure 1). Although the chi-square test of exact fit was significant, $\chi^2(164) = 481.63$ ($p < .05$), indicators of approximate fit suggested approximate fit to the data: CFI = .92; TLI = .90; RMSEA = .10.

Figure 1 presents the results of our hypothesized model. The control variable job level was not statistically significantly related to any variables in the full model; thus, it was removed from the model for the sake of parsimony. Surface acting was related to perceived meeting effectiveness, supporting H1 (SMC of .13). As well, surface acting was related to emotional exhaustion (SMC of .33) and intent to quit (SMC of .27) 3 months later supporting H2 and H4. We also examined the results using bootstrap estimates of standard errors because standard errors are the parameters most sensitive to violations of normality assumptions (Kupek, 2006) and found no differences in the significance of proposed relationships using bootstrapped standard errors.

Tests of mediation

Our model posited that the relationship of surface acting with each of our two outcomes (emotional exhaustion and intent to quit) would be partially mediated by perceived meeting effectiveness. Consistent with our model, we found that perceived meeting effectiveness was negatively related to emotional exhaustion and intent to quit controlling for surface acting (Figure 1). As well, we used bootstrapping as recommended by Shrout and Bolger (2002) to test for the significance of the indirect effects of surface

acting with both emotional exhaustion and intent to quit through perceived meeting effectiveness. Using bootstrapped confidence intervals and standard errors, the indirect effects of surface acting with emotional exhaustion (indirect effect = .19, $p < .05$) and intent to quit (indirect effect = .18, $p < .05$) through perceived meeting effectiveness were significant. Thus, it appears that H3 and H5 were supported. The relationships of surface acting with emotional exhaustion and intent to quit 3 months later were partially mediated by the perceived effectiveness of meetings.

Discussion

Our study aids the understanding of the contribution of surface acting to perceived meeting effectiveness and future feelings of emotional exhaustion and intent to quit. We expanded our understanding of predictors of perceived meeting effectiveness beyond simply characteristics of meetings themselves (e.g., whether an agenda was provided) to provide an emotional focus in the form of surface acting. This contribution is important given that meetings are affect-generating events (Rogelberg *et al*., 2010) in which participants make decisions or work on projects. Social dynamics and power differentials are common in this setting, so employees in meetings are likely to be experiencing a range of emotions, not all of which are appropriate to display.

We found a negative relationship between surface acting and perceived meeting effectiveness, suggesting that organizations may wish to try to uncover reasons employees feel the need to fake their emotions in meetings, especially because meeting effectiveness is a fairly robust predictor of overall job satisfaction (Rogelberg *et al*., 2010). The cognitive and emotional resources saved by engaging in less surface acting may allow employees to walk out of meetings perceiving that the meeting was more effective given that they did not have to focus on hiding true emotions. Such employees can devote the resources towards, for example, paying attention, gaining valuable information and networking that might aid their perceptions of the meeting as effective as far as meeting the individual employee's goals for the meeting.

We also investigated outcomes of surface acting and perceived meeting effectiveness that are relevant to both employee well-being (emotional exhaustion) and the organization (intent to quit). We not only replicated the negative relationship between perceived meeting effectiveness and intent to quit found by Rogelberg *et al*. (2006), but added strength to the previous finding by measuring intent to quit 3 months after the initial survey rather than all measures being taken at the same time. We also included emotional exhaustion – measured 3 months after other focal variables – as an outcome of perceived meeting effectiveness. As such, we found that perceived meeting effectiveness related to lower intentions to quit and lower emotional exhaustion 3 months later. Perceived meeting effectiveness also partially mediated the relationship between surface acting and both intention to quit and emotional exhaustion.

Implications for meetings research

This study adds to the research and theory concerning workplace meetings by expanding the nomological network surrounding perceived meeting effectiveness to include both emotions within the meeting (i.e., surface acting) and outcomes impacted more broadly beyond the meeting context (i.e., emotional exhaustion and intent to quit). Because of the nascent nature of the meetings literature in general, relatively few antecedents and outcomes of effective meetings have ever been explored (see, Rogelberg *et al*., 2006; Scott *et al*., 2013, for exceptions). By connecting effective meetings to both internal affective processes, such as surface acting, as well as important work-related attitudes, such as emotional exhaustion, this study suggests that workplace meetings have a larger impact on employees than previously considered. Specifically, no previous research considered the possibility that employees might engage in emotional labour in contexts outside the customer/client service interface. This study suggests that processes previously relegated to one particular workplace area might intersect with another common

workplace activity and further substantiate the emotional norms discussed by various scholars (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2002).

By including attitudes at a later time point, the current study implies that meetings have a lasting effect. Consistent with previous research on meetings (Rogelberg *et al*., 2010) as well as affective events theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), the current findings suggest meetings are critical events that may influence the affective experiences of employees and that when meetings are perceived as effective, two extraordinarily negative workplace attitudes/intentions are reduced. Future research could explore the extent to which specific proactive meeting facilitation strategies can be employed to shape employees' attitudes (e.g., engagement) and behaviours (e.g., citizenship behaviours).

The current study suggests that under all circumstances, surface acting in meetings is a negative. However, such a blanket conclusion should be tempered. Although engaging in surface acting results in negative outcomes for employees, emotional labour in general accomplishes both the organizational and cultural norms concerning interactions with others, especially in the customer service domain (Grandey, 2000). After all, if the organization expects positive emotional displays in the customer service interaction, expressing one's negative emotions might result in termination of employment, which is likely a harsher outcome than emotional exhaustion for the livelihood of the employee. Similarly, in meetings with one's supervisor, expressing negative emotions directed at the supervisor because of a decision they make may result in undesirable outcomes for the employee such as receiving less desirable assignments or a general reduction in work-related resources. Thus, surface acting may be the preferred choice to expressing true negative emotions.

Implications for emotional labour research

From this study, the key implication for emotional labour research is the expansion of emotional labour to non-service oriented contexts. Previous emotional labour research focused almost entirely on customer service type situations (Hulsheger & Shewe, 2011). In this study, we asked employees about their emotional labour within a different context (i.e., meetings at work). Further, this study opens the door to studying emotional labour in other work-related contexts and in jobs not typically considered emotional-labour-type jobs. For example, managers in the mid- to upper-levels of organizations may rarely interface with customers. However, they likely interact with co-workers and peers within the institution regularly in meetings. Thus, the finding that in meetings, employees manage their emotions for a wage (Grandey, 2000), which is a recent description of emotional labour suggests that emotional labour is not exclusively a customer service issue and may be a contributor to attitudes and behaviours at work for employees at varying levels of the organization. Future research is needed to empirically test many of these ideas.

Practical implications

Considering the potential impact of surface acting on perceived meeting effectiveness, organizations could encourage meeting leaders to facilitate meeting attendees' authentic expression of how they are feeling. Based on the current research, there are at least two potential benefits of asking for people to express authentic emotions in meetings. First, individuals will feel less like they need to modify the outward expression of their emotions through surface acting, which is known to be related to negative outcomes such as emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2003). Second, without having to 'fake' how they are feeling, employees may have more opportunities to contribute to meetings honestly, creatively, and efficiently and to get more out of the meeting that will be helpful for completing their goals. For example, Scott *et al*. (2013) found that the negative relationship between post-incident ambiguity and meeting effectiveness was moderated by freedom of dissent such that when meeting participants believed they could express disagreement, the negative relationship between post-incident ambiguity and perceived

meeting effectiveness became less negative. In fact, when freedom of dissent was particularly high, the relationship between post-incident ambiguity and perceived meeting effectiveness actually became positive. Such findings, particularly when combined with those reported here, underscore the importance of meeting facilitation strategies that foster a psychologically safe communication climate, an atmosphere 'characterized by open, supportive communication, speaking up, and risk taking' (Scott *et al*., 2013, p. 455). Our focus was on perceived meeting effectiveness in the eyes of the employees, particularly with regard to effectively meeting their goals for meetings. Future research might examine the effects of surface acting on the overall effectiveness of the meeting in terms of objective indicators such as product or solution or quality of decisions made, and the influence of employee's contributions or participation on overall effectiveness.

As well, future research might aid our understanding of how to reduce surface acting in meetings. For example, the need for such emotional labour in meetings may lessen if the employee feels supported by the organization. Organizational support theory holds that employees form general beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (perceived organizational support [POS]; Baran, Shanock, & Miller, 2012; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986; Eisenberger & Stinglhamber, 2011; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Such employees are likely to feel free to express their true affective reactions in meetings (e.g., reactions to ideas or information received) rather than having to labour emotionally by surface acting, or 'faking it'. Employees who believe the organization 'has their back', that is, values their contributions and supports them, are probably less worried about social dynamics in meetings, such as how they will be perceived by others in the meeting, and thus feel free to express true emotions. Therefore, future research might consider the role of POS in reducing surface acting in meetings.

Limitations

First, this study may be subject to common-method bias given that the same participants provided ratings on all the variables via survey. Related to this point is the fact that our meeting effectiveness measure was a perceptual measure, rather than an objective measure, as rated by participants. Perceptions of effectiveness are commonly used in meetings research (Cohen *et al*., 2011; Rogelberg *et al*., 2006) and are relevant because employees' perceptions of whether the meeting was effective may influence how employees react (e.g., feeling like they want to quit, or emotionally exhausted). Also, in the current study, we tried to aid generalizability of our findings by including participants in a wide variety of jobs and types of meetings and thus obtaining an objective measure of meeting effectiveness common to all their situations was not possible. However, given that objective effectiveness of meetings would save organizations money wasted in meetings, future research might examine what contribution surface acting may make to more objective measures of meeting effectiveness (e.g., performance output of group meetings, quality of decisions).

Also, it may be that the degree to which emotional control such as surface acting enhances or detracts from perceived meeting effectiveness may depend on the type of meeting. For example, Jordan and Troth (2004) found that teams that were faced with many problem-solving tasks actually sometimes benefited from emotional regulation because employees who were able to control their emotions also reported having better relationships with their team members, while also making more functional decisions and resolving conflict more quickly. Researchers should also consider examining the level of surface acting when there are leaders present versus not present. Additionally, researchers should consider evaluating how critical the decisions that need to be made during the meeting are, how quickly decisions need to be made, and who the decisions are affecting within the organization. For example, employees may be more likely to surface act in a meeting where changes are being discussed that one may not agree with, but that

organizational leaders may want, compared with a meeting where employees are discussing project updates and no leaders are present.

To reduce concerns associated with common-method bias, we followed methodological recommendations from the study by Podsakoff *et al*. (2003). By collecting our predictor and outcome variables at two different times, it is less likely that our results can be explained by responding to items on a common instrument. In fact, this lag in collecting the outcome variables may make our arguments more persuasive because our results show that experiences in meetings can relate to attitudes more broadly later in time.

Not only were methodological steps taken to reduce common-method bias, but statistical steps were also taken to reduce possible confounding factors (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003). The CFA suggested that a one-factor model fit the data poorly, while a differentiated four-factor model fit the data the best. If common-method bias were present, a single factor model would likely fit the data nearly as well as the fully differentiated model (Conway & Lance, 2010). Additionally, we used the marker variable technique to specifically examine potential biases (Williams, Hartman, & Cavazotte, 2010). A theoretically unrelated variable of social comparison, also known as the marker variable, was added to the model. Then, a CFA was conducted to assess whether the marker variable and the main study variables were related to a common factor (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003). The CFA marker variable results indicate that 3% of the variance in the observed items is attributable to method variance. Because this number is so low, it seems that the present study is not affected by common-method bias. Finally, we also examined several potential control variables to make sure that these other variables did not explain/confound our results (Conway & Lance, 2010).

Another limitation is the fact that causal inferences cannot be made given the correlational design of the study. The directional inferences presented in this study are based on theoretical perspectives in the organizational sciences (i.e., organizational support theory, emotional labour theory/research, and the growing body of research concerning workplace meetings). However, future research should consider using methods that would allow stronger causal inferences including longitudinal designs and/or experiments.

We recognize that another limitation is that the sample was drawn from working adults across the United States, but the sample was a self-selected pool of those participating in the StudyResponse program and may not be representative to all working adults. For example, in our sample, the majority of participants were females and had at least 4 years of higher education. Future research might examine whether the results would hold with a more even gender distribution. Johnson and Spector (2007) found that females who engage in surface acting are more likely to experience negative consequences, including emotional exhaustion, than males. Therefore, additional studies with a more even sample with regard to gender would aid generalizability of the results. There has not been much research to date examining the relationship between surface acting and level of education. Although education did not relate significantly to any of the variables in our model, future research might explore the role of education with regard to surface acting in meetings. If employees are more educated, they may feel more confident about their real feelings and, therefore, be more comfortable expressing their feelings. As level of education increases, employees may feel like they have more expertise in certain topics and feel like they have the ability to contribute to the meeting in a meaningful, productive, and effective way. Thus, with a sample of participants who are less well educated, one might find even higher levels of surface acting in meetings and lower perceived meeting effectiveness.

We also limited our sample to employees who work in the United States. Future research should also test the proposed model with a variety of samples, industries, and countries to gain a more generalizable and

global perspective on predictors and outcomes of perceived meeting effectiveness, especially as cross-cultural differences in emotions and emotional labour have been documented (Allen, Diefendorff, & Ma, 2013). For example, there may be increased surface acting in Asian cultures due to the collectivist culture's meeting norms (Matsumoto, Yoo, Nakagawa, & 37 Members of the Multinational Study of Cultural Display Rules, 2008). The purpose of formal meetings in Asian cultures is to receive direction from leaders, not to speak up and make decisions as a group (Rogelberg *et al*., 2010).

Another limitation of the study is that there are likely additional variables that may affect perceived meeting effectiveness. This is the first study to investigate emotional labour in workplace meetings as related to perceived meeting effectiveness. However, other studies have found some factors other than emotional labour that are important to meeting attendees' perceptions of meeting quality (Leach *et al*., 2009). For example, Cohen *et al*. (2011) investigated meeting design characteristics as important predictors of perceived meeting quality. They found that agenda use, meeting punctuality, facility quality, and meeting facilitator status relate to perceived meeting quality. In fact, simple meeting facility quality characteristics such as lighting, meeting space, refreshments, and temperature were all perceived as important to meeting quality by attendees. Future research should consider introducing emotional labour as a predictor of perceived meeting effectiveness in addition to these meeting design characteristics. It is possible that the presence or absence of these characteristics has an influence on the extent to which meeting attendees are comfortable in their surroundings and feel the need to fake, hide, or otherwise modify their emotions (e.g., if they are not happy about people being late to the meeting, they may find it hard to plaster on a smile or even a neutral face during the meeting). Additionally, future research might consider the size and composition of the group in the meeting as additional factors that could affect the extent to which emotional labour occurs and may affect perceived meeting effectiveness (e.g., if the boss is there and everyone is faking emotions to impress the boss, or if you have three people in the meeting and all are engaged in emotional labour, the meeting may be less effective than if 10 people are there and only four people are engaged in emotional labour).

Finally, we found partial mediation for the relationships in our model, which means that there are other factors besides perceived meeting effectiveness that contribute to the relationship between surface acting and intent to quit and emotional exhaustion. Future research should look into what other factors play a role in perceived meeting effectiveness in addition to surface acting. For example, leaders could consider encouraging employees to speak up during meetings and reinforce that their ideas and concerns are important to the success of the meeting.

Conclusions

Our study has provided a first step in exploring perceived meeting effectiveness in concert with surface acting. The study provides novel insight by considering how employees manage emotions during meetings as related to perceived effectiveness and to time-lagged outcomes with both employee and managerial relevance (emotional exhaustion and intent to quit). This study is unique because it considers the role surface acting within a specific organizational setting (meetings). Future research is required before results can be generalized and boundary conditions considered. However, because meetings are so common in daily organizational life, organizations may want to try to reduce the need for surface acting so that meetings will be perceived as effective in reaching employee's goals. Such reduced surface acting and perceived meeting effectiveness may help employees to remain with the organization and not feel emotionally drained by meetings.

Figure 1. Results for hypothesized model. Emotional exhaustion and intent to quit (ITQ) were allowed to covary (.36). Standardized coefficients are presented. All relationships are significant at $p < .05$.
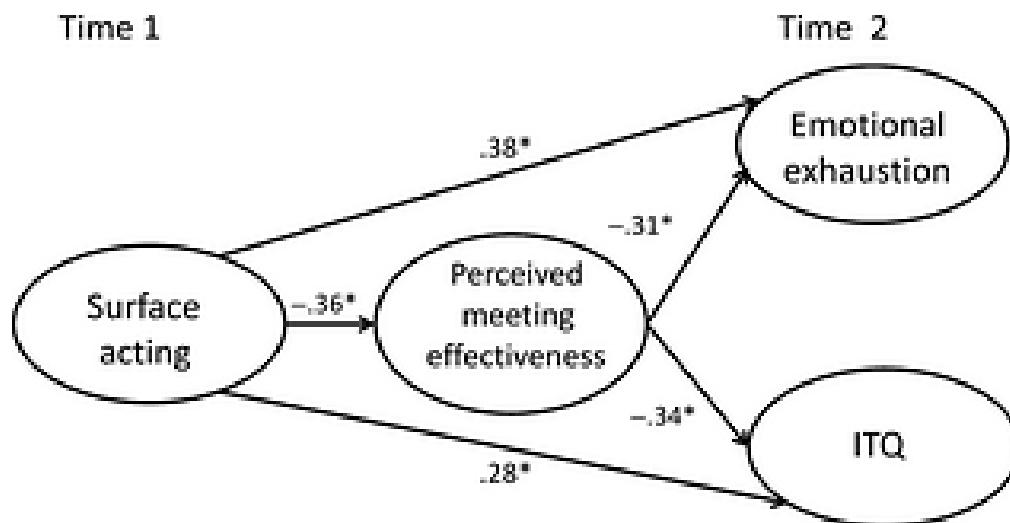

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations between variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Job level	2.98	0.87	N/A				
2. Surface acting	2.17	1.03	−.18*	(.96)			
3. Perceived meeting effectiveness	3.45	0.99	.35**	−.33**	(.90)		
4. Intention to quit	2.46	1.18	−.19**	.39**	−.43**	(.90)	
5. Emotional exhaustion	3.53	1.70	−.17**	.49**	−.42**	.49**	(.96)

Note

$N = 178$. Alpha reliabilities are reported on the diagonal.

$*p < .05; **p < .01$.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analyses model fit indices

	Model					
	Comparative Fit Index	Tucker-Lewis Index	Chi-square	Degrees of freedom	Difference	Root-mean-square error of approximation
One-factor model	.53	.47	1951.23	170	–	.24
Two-factor model	.74	.71	1134.51	169	816.72	.18
Three-factor model	.84	.82	751.17	167	383.24	.14
Four-factor model	.92	.90	481.63	164	367.93	.10

Note

N = 178. One-factor model includes all five constructs as a single factor; two-factor model includes surface acting (Factor 1), perceived meeting effectiveness, emotional exhaustion, and intent to quit (Factor 2); three-factor model includes surface acting (Factor 1), perceived meeting effectiveness (Factor 2), and emotional exhaustion and intent to quit (Factor 3); four-factor model includes all five constructs as individual factors. Difference = difference in chi-square values from the previous model. All chi-square and difference statistics are significant at the .05 level.

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