

## **Organizational commitment, emotional labor and intentions to leave: an exploratory study conducted among call center agents**

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to present an exploratory study that examines the relationship between the multidimensional concept of organizational commitment, emotional labor, and intentions to leave the organization. The concept of organizational commitment has three components: affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991,1997). The three components represent a psychological state that defines the employee's relationship with his organization. While the concept of emotional labor refers to the management of emotions during interaction with customers in a service context (Hochschild, 1983). This concept involves the use of emotion-regulation strategies including deep acting, surface acting and the expression of naturally felt emotions. In this article, we review literature pertaining to these two concepts. Then, based on the psychological contract theory (Rousseau, 1989), we will attempt to answer the following research questions: can organizational commitment predict emotional labor among call center agents? What is the link between organizational commitment, emotional labor and intentions to leave? The qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed that organizational commitment can predict the type of emotion-regulation strategies performed by call center agents. More precisely, affective commitment predicts the use of deep acting and the authentic expression of positive emotions. Normative commitment is associated with all types of emotion-regulation strategies, while continuance commitment is more associated with surface acting. Furthermore, the results show a positive impact of surface acting strategy on turnover intentions. Surface acting is the main predictor of turnover intentions, whereas a negative effect of deep acting strategy and the expression of authentic positive emotions was found on the intentions to quit. In the same vein, a negative effect of the three dimensions of organizational commitment on intentions to quit was revealed. These findings have interesting practical implications with regard to various management functions such as recruitment, training and performance management.

**Keywords:** organizational commitment, emotional labor, emotion regulation, intentions to leave

**JEL Classification:** M54

**Paper type:** Empirical research

## 1. Introduction:

Emotional labor and organizational commitment are two concepts that have aroused a great interest in management sciences for more than half a century, particularly in the field of industrial psychology and the field of organizational behavior. The interest shown for the concept of organizational commitment is justified by the crucial role it plays in determining whether an employee will remain with the organization for a longer period of time and work ardently towards achieving its objectives. While the interest shown for emotional labor is justified by its impact on the employees' psychological health and job performance.

On the one hand, the use of emotions in the workplace has become a requisite in many service companies as it is the case in call centers. Call center agents express higher levels of emotional labor than employees in any other professional group (Kim & Han, 2008). These workers are expected to show positive expressions, adopt helpful temperament and be able to provide good and friendly customer service. In many situations, these workers suppress negative feelings in order to comply with the positive image of the organization and show appropriate emotions. This process of regulating one's emotions to comply with social norms is referred to as emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983). Emotional labor is performed through three strategies: surface acting, deep acting (Grandey, 2000; Hulsheger & Schewe, 2011) and the authentic expression of emotions (Cossette & Hess, 2012, Walsh, 2019). According to Grandey and Sayre (2019), surface acting, focuses on emotional responses by showing the emotions needed for a job. The second strategy, deep acting, is a process through which individuals change perceptions of a situation to adjust emotion. They modify their internal feelings to align with the organization's display rules. For Walsh (2019), the displaying of naturally felt emotions while complying with organizational requirements is the third strategy of emotional labor. During the last decade, research on emotional labor sought to link this concept to a wide variety of variables such as job performance (e.g., Goodwin et al., 2011), personality traits and individual differences (Mahoney, 2012), turnover intentions (e.g., Kim & Choi, 2015; Lee et al., 2019), emotional exhaustion, job burnout (e.g., Lewig & Choi, 2015; Kim & Lee, 2021) and leadership (Lu & Guy, 2014).

On the other hand, organizational commitment is crucial in the call center sector as it has a direct impact on job satisfaction, employee performance and quality of customer service (Singleton, 2016). Organizational commitment is generally described as an emotional bond connecting the individual to his organization based on shared organizational and ethical values, on a permanent desire to remain a member of the organization and a constant desire to contribute to the good functioning of the organization (Meyer and Herscovitch, 2001). Organizational commitment is a multidimensional construct composed of three distinct dimensions: affective, normative and continuance commitment. Affective commitment is the degree to which an individual identifies with, participates in and appreciates the organization. Normative commitment is a feeling of moral obligation to continue employment (Allen & Meyer, 1990), whereas, continuance commitment is the member's awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001).

Past studies on organizational commitment have focused mainly on affective commitment and its outcomes (e.g., Mathieu & Zajac, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1997). Alike the concept of emotional labor, organizational commitment has been associated with relevant employee behaviors and attitudes such as job performance (e.g., Kim et al, 2018; Sungu et al., 2019; Al-Tarawneh, 2021), job satisfaction (e.g., Singleton, 2016; Yunus et al., 2020), organizational citizenship behaviors (e.g., Allen & Meyer, 2000), organizational trust (Loes & Tobin, 2020), turnover and absenteeism (e.g., Park et al., 2014). However, previous research on both organizational commitment and emotional labor have not focused on the relations between the three constructs of organizational commitment and the different emotion regulation strategies.

Organizational commitment, as a positive organizational variable and because of its strong motivational implications, maybe a potential predictor of emotional labor strategies among call center agents. Based on these arguments, this qualitative study aims to answer the following research question: Can organizational commitment predict emotional labor strategies among call center agents? What is the link between organizational commitment, emotional labor and intentions to leave?

This contribution conceals a double originality. First, no study, to our knowledge, has sought to understand the link between organizational commitment and emotion-regulation strategies while considering commitment to be an antecedent of emotional labor in a call center context. Second, it should be noted that the vast majority of research that has focused on organizational commitment and emotional labor has been done by North American researchers in a North American context. Several studies have emphasized the importance of observing and understanding the antecedents and consequences of different emotional labor strategies in different cultural contexts (Eid & Diener, 2001; Grandey et al., 2005). It would, therefore, be relevant to test our variables in a Moroccan context to better understand the impact of cultural differences on the concepts of organizational commitment and emotional labor.

In the next section of this article, we will present a synthesized literature review on both organizational commitment and emotional labor, this section will be concluded by presenting our research model and the study hypotheses. Research procedures and study context will be explained. Finally, we dedicate the last section of research results and discussion. Research limitations and key practical implications with regard to organizational commitment and emotional labor are also highlighted.

## **2. Literature review and hypothesis development:**

This section synthesizes the evolution of literature pertaining to both organizational commitment and emotional labor.

### **2.1. Organizational commitment**

A review of the literature on organizational commitment disclosed two major theoretical frameworks that drew the path for most studies. The first one is Homan's exchange theory (1958) based on which organizational commitment is considered as the result of the exchange relationship between the individual and the organization. The theory suggests that a positive relationship arises between the individual and the organization as the exchange between them becomes auspicious from the individual's point of view. The second theory was developed by Becker in 1960. From a theoretical perspective, Becker's theory is the evolution of Homan's theory. It adds the element of time and the notion of side bets<sup>1</sup> to the exchange paradigm. According to Becker more individuals invest time, effort, expertise and other personal assets in the organization, the more they will have difficulty leaving it. Consequently, as time goes by, individuals are expected to show stronger commitment towards the organization.

Numerous definitions were given to the concept of organizational commitment models in different ways. Commitment has been, in fact, a difficult concept to define. Meyer and Allen (1991, 1997) collected a list of definitions and analyzed the similarities and differences. Their compilation of definitions served as the foundation for a definition of what they considered the

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<sup>1</sup> According to Becker (1960) "Side bets" represent anything of value invested by the individual (e.g., Time, effort, energy) that would prevent him from ceasing membership in the organization.

“core essence” of commitment: “Commitment is a force that binds an individual to a course of action that is of relevance to a particular target”. (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2001, p. 301).

Based on this definition Meyer and Allen (1991) developed a model in which they categorized organizational commitment into three separate dimensions: “affective commitment,” “normative commitment,” and “continuance commitment.” Affective commitment reflects the desire to maintain membership to the organization that develops largely through work experience. This commitment is based on identification with the values and objectives of the organization. Normative commitment reflects an obligation to remain that arises from the internalization of a standard of loyalty and / or the receipt of favors that require reimbursement. Finally, the continuance commitment refers to the need to stay resulting from the recognition of the costs associated with a possible departure from the organization. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Meyer and Allen (1997), consider that the three components of organizational commitment mentioned above, coexist to different degrees in the individual. Therefore, it would be wise to talk about a real psychological state when studying the concept of organizational commitment.

The most important reason for distinguishing among the different forms of organizational commitment was that they result into different behavioral consequences. To date, the three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment, developed by Meyer and Allen, is considered as the major model in organizational commitment studies (e.g., Bentein & Vandenberg, 2000; Vandenberghe, & Stinglhamber, 2005; Cohen, 2003; Greenberg & Baron, 2008).

## **2.2. Emotional Labor**

Hochschild (1983) was the first to introduce the concept of emotional labor. She defined emotional labor as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (p.7). According to her, this emotional labor is sold for a salary and therefore represents an exchange value. She introduced the concept of “rules of feelings”, which correspond to the emotional norms by which the individual must interact with his professional environment (Hochschild, 1983). There are also more recent definitions that conceptualize emotional labor as a process of managing emotional responses (emotion regulation) through which, visible emotional performance must conform to the rules of emotional display considered acceptable or unacceptable by the organization (Display rules: Grandey, 2000; 2020; Grandey and Gabriel, 2015; Grandey and Melloy, 2017). These conceptualizations integrated the concept of emotional labor proposed by Hochschild (1983) with the theory of emotional regulation suggested by Gross (1998).

In literature, we note the existence of three distinct forms of emotional labor considered as strategies of emotion regulation: 1) deep acting, 2) surface acting and 3) authentic expression of emotions. These strategies help the individual to comply with the emotional display rules established by the employer and at the same time to manage his own emotions. Employees may use one, two or even all three strategies depending on the situation (Sutton, 2004). According to Grandey and Sayre (2019), deep acting involves changing feelings, which can be done using cognitive strategies that enable the individual to refocus his attention (e.g., taking into account the point of view of a difficult client to be more understanding). Surface acting consists of simulating positive emotions (e.g., empathy, compassion, interest) and suppressing or hiding felt negative emotions (e.g., frustration, rage, hostility) (Diefendorff et al., 2005). On the other hand, the expression of naturally felt emotions involves the authentic manifestation of emotions without any regulatory changes (Walsh, 2019). Conceptualizing emotional labor in three distinct forms is very useful since each of these strategies can have different implications on organizational behaviors such as work performance, or certain consequences such as emotional exhaustion and burnout.

## **2.3. Hypotheses Development**

### **2.3.1 Organizational commitment and emotional labor**

The link between the two major concepts of our study, organizational commitment and emotional labor, is based on the theory of the psychological contract developed by Rousseau (1989). According to this theory, the concept of organizational commitment can be seen as an exchange relationship between the employee and his organization. This is a voluntary contract that suggests freedom of engagement on the part of the employee. This contract includes an individual's beliefs about the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange relationship with his employer. According to Rousseau (1989), key issues relate to the belief that a promise was made and that compensation was offered in exchange, thus binding the parties to a set of mutual obligations. In our case, the terms of the contract refer to the emotional effort made by the individual during a social interaction with a client in order to comply with the emotional display rules defined by the organization. The commitment of the individual thus, encourages him to make emotional efforts in exchange for a salary. Based on the above and given the exploratory nature of our research, we make the following general hypothesis:

***Ha: Organizational commitment can predict emotional labor.***

Nevertheless, while the three forms of engagement proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991) seem to push the individual to be attached to his organization, they do not appear to have the same antecedent variables or consequences in the workplace. Affective commitment is based on an identification with the values and goals of the organization, as well as an emotional attachment to it. This dimension of commitment shows the strongest links with performance and job satisfaction (Nauman et al., 2021; Panda et al., 2021, Al-Tarawneh, 2021). We assume that, when interacting with the client, such positive commitment would promote the use of the two positive emotion-regulation strategies: deep acting and authentic expression of emotions.

***Ha1: Affective commitment is positively associated with deep acting and natural expression of emotions***

***Ha2: Affective commitment is negatively associated with surface acting.***

Normative commitment, on the other hand, reflects the employee's sense of duty or responsibility towards his organization (Meyer and Allen; 1991). Based on Rousseau's (1989) theory of the psychological contract, we can deduce the existence of a tacit agreement between the individual and the organization. This agreement pushes the individual with a moral obligation towards his employer to make positive efforts in terms of emotion regulation in order to respect the emotional display rules prescribed by the organization. It is also, interesting to note that several studies have confirmed a positive relationship between normative commitment, job satisfaction and job performance (Yunus & Anuar, 2020, Al-Tarawneh, 2021). Taking into account the positive nature of deep acting and the authentic expression of emotions as well as the negative nature of surface acting, we can make the following hypotheses:

***Ha3: Normative commitment is positively associated with deep acting and the authentic expression of emotions.***

***Ha4: Normative commitment is negatively associated with surface acting.***

Continuance commitment refers to the evaluation of the costs incurred following a possible departure from the organization. It is determined by two attitudes: the lack of employment alternatives and perceived sacrifices (Vandenberghe, 2015). The results of several studies show that there is a negative relationship between continuance commitment and performance (Meyer et al., 2002; Al-Tarawneh, 2021). This leads us to believe that such a commitment would not promote the use of positive emotion-regulation strategies (deep acting and the authentic

expression of emotions); Whereas, it could predict the use of negative emotion-regulation strategy (surface acting). As a result, we make the following hypotheses:

***Ha5: The two components of the continuance commitment are positively associated with surface acting***

***Ha6: The two components of continuance commitment are negatively associated with deep acting and the authentic expression of emotions***

### **2.3.2 Organizational commitment, emotional labor and intentions to leave**

Retention is the variable most predicted by organizational commitment. Several studies establish that the different forms of commitment (affective, normative, and continuance) are negatively related to the risk of resignation (Meyer et al., 2002)

***Hb: Organizational commitment is negatively associated with intentions to leave the organization***

Literature indicates a direct relationship between emotion-regulation strategies and intentions to leave. Cho et al. (2017) highlight a positive relationship between surface acting and the intentions to leave as well as a negative relationship between deep acting and intentions to leave. Concerning the authentic expression of emotions, few studies have been conducted to understand its consequences. At this stage the relationship between this strategy and the intentions to leave remains entirely exploratory. Thus, given the positive nature of this strategy, we make the following assumptions:

***Hc1: Deep acting and authentic expression of emotions are negatively associated with intentions to leave the organization***

***Hc2: Surface acting is positively associated with intentions to leave the organization***

### **2.3.2 Research moderating variables**

The literature indicates the existence of several individual and organizational factors that influence organizational commitment and emotional labor simultaneously. As moderating variables, we chose the perceived supervisor support, gender and seniority. The choice of these variables is supported by Grandey's model (2000, 2019), where she proposes to consider these three variables as moderating variables in the process of emotion regulation. Moreover, previous research has shown that in terms of emotional expression, there is clear evidence that gender explains the use of different emotion-regulation strategies (McRae et al., 2008). Also, gender has an effect on the levels of organizational commitment and its different dimensions (Karrasch, 2003).

***Hd1: Perceived supervisor support, seniority and gender are moderating variables in the relationship between the different forms of organizational commitment and the different emotion-regulation strategies.***

## **3. Methodology**

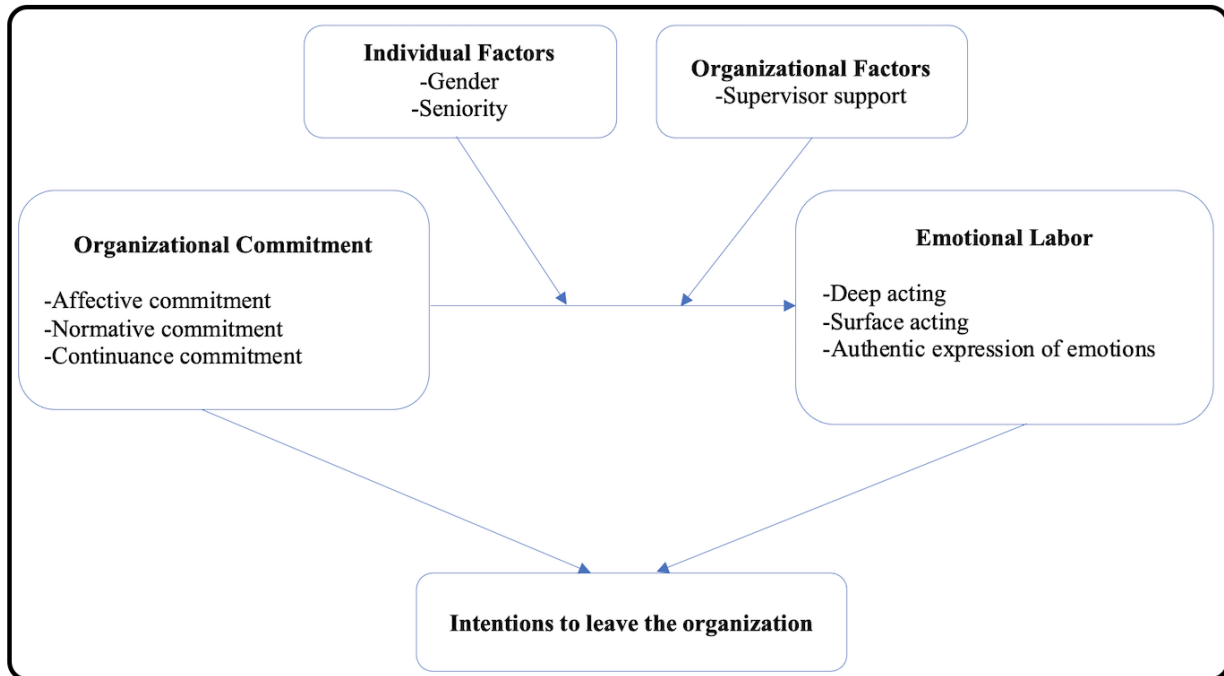
In order to provide answers to our research questions, we opted for a qualitative research using semi-structured interviews. Our study was conducted in a call center context. The next sections will provide details about our methodology.

### **3.1. Research Model**

Our research attempts to answer the following research questions: What links exist between organizational commitment and emotion-regulation strategies? Can organizational

commitment predict emotional labor among call center agents? What form of organizational commitment can be an antecedent of which emotion-regulation strategy? What is the link between organizational commitment, emotional labor and intentions to leave? Can gender, seniority and supervisor support affect the relationships between emotional labor and organizational commitment?

**Figure1. Research model relating organizational commitment, emotional labor and intentions to leave**



*Source: authors based on literature review*

### 3.2. Research procedures

This section explains the context in which the research was conducted as well as the procedures adopted for data analysis. Given the exploratory nature of the study, a qualitative research method was chosen. The ambitions of qualitative research are generally “directed at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 22). The data collection method chosen for this purpose was semi-structured interviews. As clarified by Ritchie (2003), this data collection method enables the researcher to have “an opportunity for a detailed investigation of people’s personal perspectives, for in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomena are located, and for a very detailed subject coverage” (p. 36). An interview guide was developed prior to conducting interviews and it was based on the different variables of the research: 1-organisational commitment, 2-emotion-regulation strategies, 3-Perceived supervisor support and 4-intentions to leave the organization. Each participant was asked a series of predefined open-ended questions. Interviews took place during February 2022 and ranged in length from 1 hour to 1h30 min. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Anonymity and confidentiality were made clear to all participants. The interviews were carried out in French, and the transcribed segments used in the article were translated by the authors.

#### 3.2.1 Sample and study context

The individuals’ selection to participate in the study was mainly based on their relevance to the research topic. Consequently, they were all telemarketing or customer service agents working



in different call centers located in Rabat or Casablanca. The choice of call centers as a field study is based on their specific characteristics. First, the job design within these business units requires the use of different emotion-regulation strategies. Indeed, in order to comply with the company's requirements in terms of customer service levels, the call center agents perform monotonous and stressful tasks and are emotionally invested. Agents working in such a context, express emotions that they do not feel, and instead suppress spontaneous emotions. Call centers require agents to find solutions to the customers' problems and to respond in all circumstances to their requests, with civility and courtesy (Korczyński, 2003). Agents, thus, must respect the rules of feeling and behavior relating to socially appropriate expressions in a given situation (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). The second reason for choosing call centers as a field of study is their high turnover rates. These specific characteristics of call centers make them an appropriate field to understand the potential link between organizational commitment, emotional labor and intentions to leave the organization.

In order to reach our participants, we opted for the snowball sampling method. This is an improbability method in which the selection of additional respondents is based on referrals from initial respondents (McDaniel and Gates, 2020). This method of sampling is used with hard-to-reach populations. This is the case for call center agents as many of them have night shifts and they are very restricted when it comes to leaving their positions during working hours. The total number of our participants is 15, among which 8 are female and 7 are male. The sample size was determined on the basis of theoretical saturation. Although it is a snowball sample, diversity in terms of age, seniority and gender was one of our major concerns in this study. The table below shows the sample characteristics.

*Table 1: Sample Characteristics*

Interview number	Name	Age	Seniority (years)	Gender
1	Chahine	Between 25 and 30	Between 3 and 4 years	Male
2	Farah	Between 20 and 25	Less than 1 year	Female
3	Mohammed	Between 30 and 35	More than 4 years	Male
4	Kenza	Between 35 and 40	More than 4 years	Female
5	Imad	Between 30 and 35	More than 4 years	Male
6	Kawthar	Between 25 and 30	Less than 1 year	Female
7	Ibtissam	Between 20 and 25	Less than 1 year	Female
8	Younès	Between 25 and 30	Between 1 and 2 years	Male
9	Taha	Between 20 and 25	More than 4 years	Male
10	Majdouline	Between 25 and 30	Less than 1 year	Female
11	Souad	Between 25 and 30	More than 4 years	Female
12	Ibrahim	More than 40	More than 4 years	Male
13	Yousra	Between 20 and 25	Less than 1 year	Female
14	Khadija	Between 25 and 30	Less than 1 year	Female
15	Amine	Between 30 and 35	More than 4 years	Male

*Source: Elaborated by the authors using Nvivo*

### 3.3. Analysis methodology

In order to manipulate the data gathered during the interviews, we used Nvivo. This is a qualitative data analysis software that allows better coding, and data retrieving and analysis. It enables more complex and more exhaustive coding schemes and better interpretation by assisting forms of analyses that “would be impossible to carry out manually” (Richards & Richards, 1991, p. 319).

The method of analysis chosen for this study is content thematic analysis. Content analysis has been defined as a set of procedures followed to study the content of transcribed texts. Systematically, content analysis assists the researcher in identifying the properties of his content such as the frequency of most relevant keywords (Klenke, 2015). On the other hand, thematic

analysis is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p.81). It also interprets different facets of the research subject. (Boyatzis, 1998). Processed data in thematic analysis can be presented and classified based on similarities and differences (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Braun and Clarke (2006) distinguished between deductive and inductive thematic analysis. The deductive coding approach is a top-down method where the researcher starts by identifying a codebook including the initial set of codes. This set of codes is usually guided by specific research questions or an existing research framework or theory. Regarding the inductive coding approach, it is considered as a bottom-up approach where the researcher derives his codes from the data itself. In their own words, Braun and Clarke (2006) define inductive analysis as: “a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions” (p.83).

In this study we opted for a hybrid approach of thematic analysis, that incorporates both inductive and deductive coding. This approach was more appropriate in our case because we had two types of code development: the prior research-driven codes and data-driven codes (Boyatzis,1998). The prior research-driven codes were obtained from our knowledge of past research concerning emotional labor and organizational commitment as well as the hypotheses we elaborated in our research model. These codes enabled us to create a “start list” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of codes even before starting to read the transcribed texts. Data-driven codes, on the other hand, were generated inductively from the raw information available in the transcribed texts, they were exclusively based on what we found relevant in the data. While doing the thematic analysis we followed the detailed step-by-step guide elaborated by Braun and Clarke (2006). Their methodology suggests following phases: 1) familiarizing with the data; 2) looking for themes;3) reviewing the themes; 4) defining and naming themes; and 5) generating the report.

The construction of a theme dictionary allowed us to analyze the object of the research thus answering the research questions. Our theme dictionary extracted from Nvivo is as follows:

**Table 2: Theme dictionary**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Files</b>	<b>References</b>
1)Seniority	Number of years of professional experience	7	14
2)Organizational Commitment	Psychological state that refers to a relationship between the individual and his organization	15	74
2a-Affective commitment	Emotional attachment and identification with the organization's values and goals	7	24
2b-Continuance commitment	A commitment that refers to the evaluation of the costs caused by a possible departure from the organization	5	8
2b1-Commitment by lack of alternatives	A commitment that refers to the lack of alternatives available to individuals elsewhere	6	14
2b2-Commitment by perceives sacrifices	A commitment that refers to the personal investments that the individual risks to lose in case of a departure from the organization	5	6
2c-Normative commitment	A commitment that refers to the sense of moral obligation to remain with the organization	6	17
3)Intentions to leave	The individual's intention to leave the organization and seek employment elsewhere	15	48
4)Social support	The socially supportive relationships that the individual has with his colleagues and his supervisors	6	14
4a-Colleagues support	The dynamics of interpersonal relationships and the possibilities of receiving help from colleagues	9	12

4b-Supervisor support	The dynamics of interpersonal relationships and the possibilities of receiving help from the supervisor	15	42
5)Emotional labor	A process of regulating emotions and expressions in order to comply with specific emotion display rules defined by the employer	15	49
5a-Deep acting	A process of regulating emotions and expressions deeply in order to comply with the organization's objectives	10	32
5b-Surface acting	An emotion-regulation strategy that aligns the feelings of individuals, in a mechanical way, with the organization's requirements	12	25
5c-Authentic expressions of emotions	A strategy that emanates from a complete and authentic sense of self-expression	12	29

*Source: Elaborated by the authors using Nvivo*

## 4. Results and discussion

The objective of this section is to present and extract as much information as possible from the results obtained from the analysis and processing of the semi-structured interviews via Nvivo. First, we will present the results and discussion linking the two main variables of our research: organizational commitment and emotional labor. Second, we will present the results pertaining to these two variables and intentions to leave. Finally, we will discuss how the moderating variables impact the causal relationship between organizational commitment and emotional labor.

### 4.1. Organizational commitment and emotional labor

The table below presents the meta matrix linking the two main variables of our research: organizational commitment and emotional labor.

**Table 3: meta matrix combining organizational commitment and emotional labor**

Interviewees	Theme 1: Organizational Commitment			Theme 2: Emotional Labor		
	Affective Commitment (AC)	Normative Commitment (NC)	Continuance Commitment (CC)	Deep Acting (DA)	Surface Acting (SA)	Authentic Expression of Emotions (AEE)
#1 Chahine Male	<p><b>AC:</b> «I feel like I'm a part of a big family I think I'm emotionally attached. »</p> <p><b>NC:</b> «... I feel indebted to the company because they gave me the opportunity to learn and choose what I want to do.»</p>			<p><b>DA:</b> «... I put myself in the client's situation and I try to understand them...If I were them, I would ask questions and I would be skeptical, so what you have to do is understand and serve the client well. »</p> <p><b>AEE:</b> « I show my positive emotions much more than negative ones. »</p>		
#2 Farah Female	<p><b>AC:</b> «I feel some emotional attachment especially in relation to the work environment. »</p> <p><b>CC:</b> « ... in this call center the salary is better so it pushes me to make real efforts for the company. »</p>			<p><b>DA:</b> « I put myself in others' shoes. Especially when the customer's situation is a bit tricky... between the two faking emotions and understanding the customer...»</p> <p><b>SA:</b> « We have to simulate all the time and give the impression that we are happy to talk and serve the customer.... I don't like poker face... »</p> <p><b>AEE:</b> « In the context of work I can't show my negative side I have to stay professional and show only the good side. »</p>		
#3 Mahammed Male	<p><b>CC:</b> «... I stay because I want to maintain my relationship with my colleagues... the work climate is good...I stay mainly out of necessity I don't want to lose what I've already earned in my current job. »</p>			<p><b>SA:</b> « Sometimes I fake emotions to please a customer such as using excessive polite expressions and courtesy ..I do this to comply with my supervisors' requests»</p> <p><b>AEE:</b> « I show my real emotions, but only those that can be accepted by the company and by the customer»</p>		
#4 Kenza Female	<p><b>CC:</b> « .. I am a single mother I have no choice but to work and keep my job ... when you realize that you are well surrounded and that you have seniority and that you have a place in the company you say to yourself why leave and start all over again? »</p>			<p><b>SA:</b> « Sometimes I make an effort to smile and sound nice to a client when I don't necessary feel like it. I do some acting... hypocrisy is our daily life. »</p> <p><b>AEE:</b> « I don't like to share how I really feel with the customer. And I don't let my personal feelings influence my work. »</p>		
#5 Imad Male	<p><b>CC:</b> « Commitment for me is a partnership between me and the organization; I give effort in exchange of money....I have no other alternatives, after all...»</p>			<p><b>SA:</b> « I'm not going to make the effort to feel emotions that I don't feel. I show what the company asks for: politeness, courtesy ... but I'm not going to change my feelings for people I don't know, I don't engage emotionally. »</p>		
#6 Kawtar Female	<p><b>AC:</b> « I feel committed to my company...When you have the right working conditions, you feel good...I have an emotional attachment to the company...»</p> <p><b>NC:</b> «You tell yourself I was given this responsibility; I was taught how to act in difficult situations so I have to exceed expectations. »</p>			<p><b>DA:</b> «...empathy, I have to understand, to listen and not be cold with customers...the customer is not a real friend but I have to treat him as such....I usually put myself in the customer's shoes...»</p> <p><b>AEE:</b> « ... I can only show my feelings when I'm happy but not when I'm upset or sad... »</p>		

<p>#7 Ibtissam Female</p>	<p><b>AC:</b> « being committed to an organization means that you do all the required tasks with all the necessary efforts....I believe I have an emotional attachment to the company»</p>	<p><b>DA:</b> « ...my interaction with the customer lasts only a few minutes; what matters most is to do my job properly... as best as I can, I have to find solutions to their problem, it's my job! I direct my energy towards the duties I have to fulfil with my client and my company. »</p> <p><b>AEE:</b> « We can't show our real feelings with the customer we risk losing him.... Especially the feelings of anger and frustration. Maybe if I'm happy, I can seem more energetic with a client but to show my anger... no»</p>
<p>#8 Younès Male</p>	<p><b>NC:</b> « I am not emotionally attached to the company but I feel indebted to the company and to my superiors...because I have a moral obligation, I make efforts and I do my best to serve the clients. »  <b>CC:</b> « I've invested efforts that I don't want to lose. »</p>	<p><b>DA:</b> « You have to understand the customer, reassure him and put yourself in his place, apologize when necessary. »  <b>SA:</b> « Acting! always! we spend our days pretending..... we have to be kind, friendly and courteous even if we don't necessarily want to do it. »  <b>AEE:</b> « When I'm happy I can show it, but not when I'm not well.. I have to hide it. »</p>
<p>#9 Taha Male</p>	<p><b>CC:</b> « ...for me commitment is about money, bonuses and salary that we receive at the end of the month...I stay with the company simply to meet my financial needs. »</p>	<p><b>SA:</b> « I do not show my true feelings, very often I simulate and pretend ... I change my voice to give the impression that I am happy to talk to the customer. »  <b>AEE:</b> « I keep my negative feelings for myself and share my positive feelings with others. »</p>
<p>#10 Majdouline Female</p>	<p><b>NC:</b> « I feel indebted they took me back, they trusted me and without conditions, the least thing is to be professional and help the client as best as I can...the only way to do that is by putting yourself in the client's shoes and seeking to help him. »</p>	<p><b>DA:</b> « I put myself in the customer's place and I understand that if the customer is angry it is because he has been poorly served somewhere... I focus on the elements that bothered him to be able to find solutions ... it is not against me as a person »  <b>SA:</b> "As we must be courteous, we keep our feelings of frustration to ourselves...It is necessary to remain professional»  <b>AEE:</b> "I make use of my real feelings, the positive feelings only»</p>
<p>#11 Souad Female</p>	<p><b>AC:</b> « I feel good about my job. I understand what we do and the company's objectives...»  <b>NC:</b> « they believed in me! they saw potential in me! they trusted me! I must do my best...we are the best paid in the market. »</p>	<p><b>DA:</b> « I speak with kindness, I explain, I listen I put myself in his place to understand the reasons that pushed him to be mean. »  <b>AEE:</b> « I remain true to myself ...I do not let my negative side appear ...being myself strengthens my bond with the company. »</p>
<p>#12 Brahim Male</p>	<p><b>NC:</b> « The company trusted me so I have to meet the customer's expectations and manage my stress in front of him»  <b>CC:</b> "I wanted to leave...If I had another alternative, I would have done it. »</p>	<p><b>DA:</b> « The customer is looking for a solution to a problem ...that I understand.»  <b>SA:</b> « We simulate often!...I set up an acting stage to solve the problem.»  <b>AEE:</b> «...I show my authentic feelings.»</p>

#13 Yousra Female	CC: «I need experience on my CV and a salary.. my commitment is based on the need of money and professional experience. »	SA: « We always pretend ...we are forced to pretend and stay professional...you can't engage emotionally with every customer it would be difficult. » AEE: « I do share my good mood. »
#14 Khadija Female	CC: «I don't really feel emotionally attached to the company... commitment goes through the salary in the first place. To be hired you have to be motivated to be motivated you need a good salary!»	SA: « ...it is a profession full of hypocrisy... pretending is a strategy that I resort to very often. Sometimes I show empathy just to please the customer and conclude things. » AEE: « When I'm in a good mood it shows in my attitude...»
#15 Amine Male	CC: « I work on a good project and we're well paid compared to other call centers. It would be difficult for me to find the same salary elsewhere especially that I have a big family to support. »	SA: « I can tell stories and act to better approach the client and make him more comfortable. » AEE: « I think spontaneity is the best solution! However, being authentic should not undermine professionalism! »

*Source: Elaborated by authors using Nvivo*

The results obtained regarding organizational commitment are aligned with the findings of Meyer and Allen (1997), the three components of organizational commitment coexist to different degrees in our interviewees and they have different consequences. As shown in the table above, most of our interviewees have more than one type of commitment towards their call center and use different strategies to regulate their emotions (Grandey, 2000). Nevertheless, we can notice that there are some patterns in the data that confirm some of our hypotheses. For instance, interviewees 1, 6 and 11, all have both an affective commitment and a normative commitment towards the call center and use deep acting and the authentic expression of emotions as emotion-regulation strategies. These findings confirm hypotheses Ha1, Ha2 and Ha3. On the other hand, the interviewees 3, 4, 5, 9, 13, 14 and 15 all show continuance commitment and use surface acting and the authentic expression of emotions. These results confirm hypothesis Ha5 while hypothesis Ha6 was not validated. As far as normative commitment is concerned, results show that when combined with continuance commitment, interviewees tend to use all emotion-regulation strategies as it is the case for interviewees 8 and 12. However, when normative commitment is the predominant type of commitment expressed by the call center agent, deep acting becomes the most used emotion-regulation strategy which validates hypothesis Ha3 once again; while hypothesis Ha4 is not confirmed. Based on the results obtained, 10 out of 15 interviewees have continuance commitment which makes it the prevalent organizational commitment dimension in call centers, while the predominant regulation strategy seems to be surface acting.

These findings offer insights about the relationship between the three constructs of organizational commitment and the three strategies of emotional labor. Affective commitment seems to predict the use of deep acting and the authentic expression of positive emotions. Normative commitment is associated with all types of emotion-regulation strategies while continuance commitment seems to be more associated with surface acting. It is worth noting, however, that most of our interviewees do not consider the authentic expression of negative emotions as an option in the context of their work. This makes sense since agents can only make use of their authentic positive emotions as they have to comply with the organization's display rules.

#### **4.2. Organizational commitment, emotional Labor and intentions to leave**

Regarding organizational commitment and intentions to leave, several studies establish that the different forms of commitment (affective, normative, and continuance) are negatively associated with the risk of resignation (Meyer et al., 2002). Our findings are consistent with these previous studies which confirms hypothesis Hb. However, it seems that interviewees who demonstrate affective and normative commitment are the least interested in leaving the organization. As it is the case for Souad and Majdouline:

*"I'm doing well in my job and I have prospects for the future so I want to stay"* Souad

*"For now, I don't want to quit. I have to meet their expectations. I can't let them down... the company has done a lot for me."* Majdouline

On the other hand, those showing continuance commitment are less committed to the organization than the others and they may leave if they find more attractive offers elsewhere:

*"If I find better, I will quit... If I find a better salary and better working conditions, I will quit."* Imad

*"I'm staying mainly because I don't want to go through another recruitment process anymore I'm tired of this process... And also, because I don't have other options..."* Mohammed

Concerning emotion-regulation strategies and intentions to leave, all our hypotheses were confirmed (Hb, Hc1, Hc2). Our findings were consistent with the results of several previous studies (e.g., Xue et al., 2017; Cho et al., 2017) that indicate a negative relationship between deep acting and intentions to leave:

*"At first, I wanted to leave but thanks to my coaches, I learned the job...now, I know how to manage my feelings well; the management of emotions that I do is not a reason to quit "* Souad

On the opposite side, most call center agents that we interviewed indicate a higher intent to withdraw from the job when they use surface acting. This strategy is the main predictor of turnover intentions. It seems that surface acting decreases the agents' well-being and job satisfaction which leads them to think about leaving their organization. These findings corroborate the results obtained by Kim and Choi (2015), in a context of call centers.

*"Forcing myself emotionally while dealing with clients makes me want to do something else"* Taha

*"Sometimes I tell myself why all this hussle (faking emotions) ... I sometimes want to quit"* Amine

*"The management of emotions is very difficult; we live in a dilemma: how to be angry and show that we are delighted to serve? It's really annoying. So ! Yes I am thinking of leaving the company one day. It's the faking and lying that bothers me the most..."* Farah

For the authentic expression of emotions, results show that interviewees who tend to use their genuine emotions have low intent to quit as this increases their job satisfaction.

*"I'm good because I have the possibility of being spontaneous unlike working in other call centers. To me it's a reason to stay loyal to the company."* Kawtar

*"If you express naturally what you feel you will be well... mentally speaking. You will definitely want to stay."* Brahim

### **4.3. Research Moderating Variables**

The results related to our moderating variables confirm Hypothesis Hd. It seems that not only perceived supervisor support that can strengthen or diminish the association between organizational commitment and emotional labor but we need to consider the colleagues' support as a moderating variable as well. Both colleagues' support and supervisors' support can be combined in one variable referred to as social support. Our findings suggest that relationships with colleagues are at the core of most workplace experiences. The better the relationship with both supervisors and colleagues the stronger the commitment towards the organization and towards making emotional efforts. These findings are consistent with the results obtained by Modau et al. (2018) in a study conducted among call center workers. They indicated that the supervisor support reduces work-related stress levels and creates commitment which encourages employees to make effort and stay in the organization. Most of the interviewees confirm the importance of social support in the development of organizational commitment and the use of emotion-regulation strategies.

*"When you work with people who listen and respect their colleagues, you want to stay and do your best... It's the good relationship I have with my supervisor that makes me want to do my best and earn their trust..."* Chahine

*"if the supervisors are good, my commitment gets stronger and I have a greater moral obligation towards the company.. so I want to keep my job. Besides, that's why I stayed 14 months in this call center"* Younès

Regarding gender, our findings show that there is a difference between males and females in how they feel commitment and perform emotional labor. Most of the interviewees who express affective and normative commitment are females while continuance commitment is expressed by males. Moreover, the results in table 3 show that females tend to use deep acting and the authentic expression of positive emotions more than surface acting. These finding are corroborated with the results obtained by Yim et al. (2018) as they demonstrated that women put less effort into surface acting than men. Also, Johnson and Spector (2007) found that women are better at deep acting compared to men and have more positive experiences in jobs that call for emotional labor than men. These results could be explained by the fact that women are



generally better at managing emotions which makes them more qualified to do jobs that involve emotional labor (Grandey, 2000; Johnson & Spector, 2007).

With regard to seniority, results reveal that senior individuals seem to be more committed to their organizations as they feel that they would have a lot to lose if they decide to quit. Interviewees who have more than 4 years seniority (Amine, Brahim, Taha, Mohammed, Imad and Kenza) express continuance commitment and seem to perform surface acting and the expression of naturally felt positive emotions more than deep acting. Affective commitment though, seems to decline with time spent in the call center as it is expressed mainly by interviewees with less than one year of experience. The results pertaining to organizational commitment are aligned with the Becker's side bet theory (1960): the more individuals invest time, effort, expertise in the organization, the more it will be difficult for them to leave. Consequently, as time goes by, individuals are expected to show more normative and continuance commitment towards the organization.

## **5. Summary and conclusions:**

In this exploratory research, we sought to understand the relationship between the different forms of organizational commitment (affective, normative, continuance) and the different strategies of emotional labor (deep acting, surface acting, authentic expression of emotions). We did so by conducting 15 semi-structured interviews with call center agents located in the regions of Rabat and Casablanca. Our findings reveal that affective commitment seems to predict the use of deep acting and the authentic expression of positive emotions. Normative commitment is associated with all types of emotion-regulation strategies while continuance commitment seems to be more associated with surface acting.

When predicting intentions to quit, surface acting significantly impact turnover intentions; however, neither deep acting nor the expression of authentic positive emotions are significant predictors. The same results are obtained for organizational commitment. The three dimensions seem to have a negative correlation with the intentions to leave.

We also observed that there are some organizational and individual factors that may strengthen the relationship between organizational commitment and emotional labor. Gender seems to have an impact on the dimensions of organizational commitment and on the type of emotion-regulation strategy used by agents. Most of the interviewees who express affective and normative commitment are women while continuance commitment is expressed mainly by men. Moreover, women seem to be better at deep acting and expressing naturally felt positive emotions than men. While men seem to perform more surface acting than women. Seniority is another individual factor that seems to be related to organizational commitment and emotional labor. Senior agents seem to develop continuance commitment more than the other dimensions of commitment and use mainly surface acting as an emotion-regulation strategy. On the opposite, newcomers to call centers show affective commitment and normative commitment and perform mainly deep acting and the expression of naturally felt positive emotions. Support from coworkers and supervisors seems to strengthen the relationship between organizational commitment and emotional labor. Interviewees who benefit from such support have positive working experiences which makes them committed to the organization and to performing the expected emotional labor.

This study has some limitations, several of which present openings for future research. The first limitation concerns the choice of a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach which hinders the external validity of the study. The second limitation is related to the sample. A larger sample, would allow for additional analysis and interpretation of the results. The impact of the small sample is most apparent when predicting the role of moderators (seniority, gender and social

support) in our study. Finally, given the exploratory nature of our study, the findings need to be validated by further research.

From a managerial perspective, our exploratory research offers a better understanding of organizational commitment and its implications for employee behaviors in terms of managing emotions and intentions to leave the organization. Indeed, as several previous studies pointed out, it is in the interest of organizations to understand how to reduce staff turnover, absenteeism and improve organizational performance (Chuo, 2003). Also, understanding the antecedents of emotional labor as proposed in our study, would allow organizations to implement good practices to promote better psychological health at work.

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