Emotional labor and motivation in teachers

Camelia Truta*

Abstract

Teaching profession is one with the highest requirements regarding emotion labor. Even though previous studies (Sutton, 2004) showed that teachers engage in emotion management as part of their professional identity with the purpose of professional efficacy, it is not clear yet what are the motivational bases of this engagement. We assessed specific emotional regulation strategies adopted in the workplace, the intrinsic/extrinsic motivation for work, and several job characteristics in a sample of Romanian teachers with the aim to identify motivational dimensions associated with emotional labor.

Keywords: emotional labor; intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; display rules; teaching profession.

1. Introduction

The question of motives underlying employees’ engagement in emotion regulation in the workplace did not aroused such a strong interest for researchers as the topic of antecedents and consequences of emotional labor. Following Hochschild (1983) who first defined emotional labor as the management of emotions for pay, researchers paid little attention to the role of motivation in performing it. It was considered that the mere presence of several antecedents (including emotional display rules existent in the organization, organizational demands or the characteristics of the face-to-face interaction with clients) will necessarily lead to emotion regulation (Morris & Feldman, 1996; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Pugliesi, 1999). Much of the research

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body on the topic indicates that use of specific emotion regulation strategies is also determined either by organizational or personal characteristics. Engagement in deep acting (attempt to modify the internal, subjective feeling) (Hochschild, 1983) is associated with perception of positive display rules (Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005), number of years in service (Grandey, 2000) or with the duration of client-employee interaction (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). Surface acting (attempt to modify the emotional expression either by suppression or simulation) is associated with perception of negative display rules (Diefendorff et al., 2005) and with negative affectivity (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002).

The teaching profession is, undoubtedly, one with the highest requirements regarding emotion management (Hargreaves, 1998; Zhang & Zhu, 2008). Several studies (Sutton 2004, 2007) show that performing emotional labor is determined by specific motives related to professional efficacy and identity, while other authors suggest that the motives underlying emotional labor are related to professional norms and scripts (Isenbarger & Zembylas, 2006). But none of these authors clearly state the motivational bases of teachers’ engagement in emotion regulation on work.

Despite the general agreement on Deci and Ryan’s self-determination model of motivation as the most pertinent related to emotional labor, there is little empirical evidence to support the presumed relations between intrinsic motivation and deep acting, on one hand, and extrinsic motivation and surface acting, on the other hand (Sisley & Smollan, 2012; Tsai & Chen, 2013; Bolton, 2005). Hochschild’s assumption that emotional labor is performed only for pay suggests that this act is extrinsic motivated (and, therefore, not very self-determined), but we could also argue that employees performing with a smile for the pleasure of satisfying the other (the client) does so for intrinsic reasons.

Cossette (2009) sustains that intrinsic motivation have little impact on employees engaging in emotional labor, since they regulate their emotion in order to meet mainly an organizational demand. If employees integrated the emotional rules as part of their professional identity, as in the case of teachers investigated by Sutton (2007), their motivation is self-determined, but remains extrinsic. Also, commitment to the display rules moderates the relation between existence and perceptions of emotional display rules and the use of emotional labor strategies (Gosserand & Diefendorff, 2005).

2. Method

We aim to highlight the relations between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and emotional labor in the context of teachers’ work. Teaching profession is relevant for such an investigation as it is considered to be one of the highly demanding jobs in terms of emotional labor requirements. We hypothesize that intrinsic motivation is associated with teachers’ engagement in deep acting, while extrinsic motivation is more relevant in use of surface acting. Also, we presume that intrinsic/extrinsic motivation will improve the prediction model of use of emotional labor strategies based on organizational display rules and emotional effort.

2.1. Participants

Participants in the study were 118 Romanian teachers, working at all levels of the educational system. Participants were addressed during their attendance at mandatory continuous education programs. Participation was voluntary and no benefits were ensured. The youngest participant was 24 years old and, at the time of completion the questionnaires, she was in-service for one year and two month, while the oldest was 56 years old with 36 years in-service (m = 39.56, σ = 11.04 for age; m = 17.43, σ = 12.92 for years in service). Most participants (91%) were females.

2.2. Measures

Emotional labor dimensions (frequency, variety, and intensity of displayed emotions) and strategies (surface acting and deep acting) were assessed with Emotional Labor Scale (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). The authors conceptualize two forms of surface acting: suppression (diminishing the intensity and emotional expression of felt
emotions) and simulation (displaying an emotion that is not genuinely felt). We took both forms into analysis as previous studies show that the two forms are distinct (Glomb & Tews, 2004).

Motivation was measured with Amabile’s Work Preference Inventory (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey & Tighe, 1994), an instrument designed to assess perceptions of competence and self-determination needs (similar to Deci and Ryan’s self-determination model), and cognitions and emotions associated with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Emotional effort, as the variable level of effort employees make to modify their emotions or behavior according to display rules, was assessed using Hospitality Emotional Labor Scale (Chu & Murnman, 2004).

To assess specific job characteristics we used items from Diefendorff, Richard and Yang’s study (2008). The items measure employees’ perceptions on organization demands regarding displaying of appropriate emotions in interactions with clients. Positive emotions display rules (3 items), negative emotions display rules (3 items), and job demands - regarding variety of tasks in interaction with clients (3 items) were measured.

All instruments were self-report scales.

3. Findings

As part of data analysis we calculated the internal consistency for each scale on the present sample, even though previous studies (Trușa, 2012) revealed good psychometric characteristics of used scales on different Romanian samples. On the investigated sample, all scales and subscales prove to have good internal consistency (Table 1).

Our hypotheses stipulated the relations between use of specific emotion labor strategies and the two forms of work motivation. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, along with emotional effort, positive and negative display rules, and emotional effort were all measured as antecedents of emotional labor strategies in accordance with Diefendorff and colleagues’ study (2005). Correlation coefficients are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Alpha Cronbach and correlation coefficients for variables in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
<th>(8)</th>
<th>(9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surface acting – suppression (1)</td>
<td>a = .71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surface acting – simulation (2)</td>
<td>.351**</td>
<td>a = .69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep acting (3)</td>
<td>-.118</td>
<td>.282**</td>
<td></td>
<td>a = .81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional effort (4)</td>
<td>-.094</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>.434**</td>
<td>a = .84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive display rules (5)</td>
<td>-.050</td>
<td>-.068</td>
<td>.229*</td>
<td>.241*</td>
<td>a = .78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative display rules (6)</td>
<td>.177*</td>
<td>.232*</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>-.157</td>
<td>.295**</td>
<td>a = .70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job demands (7)</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>.263**</td>
<td>.306**</td>
<td>.225**</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>a = .71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic motivation (8)</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>-.189</td>
<td>.257*</td>
<td>.235*</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>-.034</td>
<td>.221*</td>
<td>a = .74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic motivation (9)</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>-.082</td>
<td>-.104</td>
<td>.087</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.085</td>
<td>.219*</td>
<td>.510**</td>
<td>a = .76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01

The correlations between antecedent variables and emotional labor strategies are weaker than expected. Use of suppression of emotions strategy weakly correlates with perception of negative display rules and does not correlate with any form of motivation. Simulation of emotions does not register correlations with the investigated antecedent variables. The medium correlation between suppression and simulation of emotions (r = .351, p ≤ 01) might indicate that, in the case of teachers, the two form of surface acting imply similar internal regulation mechanisms. Given the obtained data, there is no support for generating a predictive model of teachers’ use of suppression or simulation as emotional labor strategy, as intended.

Deep acting has the strongest correlations with all anticipated predictors and, as anticipated, with intrinsic motivation. Still the Pearson correlation coefficients are small. The perceived level of effort necessary for regulating
emotions is most highly correlated with use of deep acting as emotional labor strategy. We expected that intrinsic motivation will contribute to a better prediction of use of deep acting by teachers, but results of hierarchical regression analysis, presented in table 2, reveal that the prediction value of intrinsic motivation is weak.

Table 2. Regression analysis results for deep acting as dependent variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>Δ R²</th>
<th>SE b</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>14.29</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.783</td>
<td>12.60</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Predictors: (Constant), emotional effort, positive display rules, job demands
2. Predictors: (Constant), emotional effort, positive display rules, job demands, intrinsic motivation

Both predictive models of deep acting use taken into analysis are significant; the second model that included intrinsic motivation as predictors explains 35% of the total variation of deep acting use. Analysis of unstandardized coefficient shows that between intrinsic motivation and deep acting the relation is a positive one (B = .271), the increase of intrinsic motivation is association with a positive change of the deep acting.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The teaching profession is one with the highest requirements for emotional labor, since the interaction with clients (the students, the parents, representatives of the community) is constant and last more than any other type of client – employee interaction. In this context, to identify the motivational bases of teachers engagement in emotion regulation is pertinent. Still, the lack of an integrative conceptual model of the motivation – emotional labor relation makes difficult any attempt to investigate the topic.

In the present study, perception of positive display rules and job demands regarding client interaction seems to be the most relevant antecedents for the use of specific emotional labor strategy. Intrinsic motivation is relevant only in relation to deep acting, while surface acting is not associated with any form of motivation. Intrinsic motivation is not itself a predictor of deep acting, it has predictive value only when associated with several organizational antecedents. These findings must be discussed in the light of the particularity of investigated sample – mainly females, with relative high work experience and working at different educational level. According to Diefendorff and colleagues conceptualization (2005), positive emotions display rules and negative emotions display rules are imposed by the organization. This aspect might also introduce significant variability in the results as the investigated teachers work in different school from different part of Romania, each school having its own internal norms and rules.

Still, as the findings suggest, the role of motivation is more complex than the mere impulse to action and behavior. Since the motivational bases of engaging in emotion regulation seems to be distinct for some strategies, for deep acting at least, a deeper analysis is required to identify the motives underlying employees’ emotion management in the workplace.

In the present study, we conceptualized and assessed motivation as an antecedent of emotional labor alongside organizational demands. But motivation might mediate this relation, rather than act as determinant factor. Both Sutton (2004) and Gosserand and Diefendorff (2005) sustain that use of regulatory strategies vary according to motivational factors, which might be a good starting point for a further analysis. The display rules by themselves do not impulse to action, nor does the face-to-face interaction with the client. It seems much more plausible that the motivation employees have to follow these rules, along with their commitment to follow the display rule will better predict the frequency and intensity of regulating emotions at work. We suggest that such analysis should be made on larger samples on employees with a high similarity regarding job characteristics and organizational demands as both these aspect are pertinent antecedents of emotional labor.
References


