

Examining Facets of Emotional Exhaustion In The Malaysian Service Industry

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Abstract

Malaysia is moving towards high service industry. This kind of industry places a high expectation on their employees to provide the best services to the customers. For this to happen, every employee has to demonstrate a consistent compliance to the rules of emotional labour. The term 'emotional labour' was first introduced by Arlie Hochschild in 1983 to describe the phenomenon of service employees that goes beyond physical and mental duties. Emotional labor is linked to emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion and also applicable to many areas of business with direct consequences and impact on the employee's performance. Previous studies reported that emotional labour can lead to emotional exhaustion. This study, thus investigates the role of emotional labour and employees' emotional intelligence towards emotional exhaustion. Specifically, this study examines the direct influence of employees' emotional intelligence on emotional exhaustion and the direct influence through two dimensions of emotional labour towards emotional exhaustion in the service organisation settings. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test the proposed model because it provides path coefficients to measure the relationships posited in the model. The study provides added value for theoretical consideration and meaningful insights into the framework of emotional intelligence-emotional labour-emotional exhaustion relationships. In addition, this study has several practical implications for service industries in policy formulation, recruitment and training. The findings of the study is also useful for frontline service employees to deal with their emotional challenges.

Keywords: Emotional Exhaustion, Emotional Labour, Emotional Intelligence, Service Industry, Organizational Behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since today's work environment is becoming more dynamic, rapidly changing, and highly competitive, most companies have begun to focus heavily on providing the best services to their customers. Malaysia is also facing new challenges resulting from the commitment to regional liberalization, privatization and globalization demands. There is also a growing demand for Malaysia to produce world-class products and services as well as providing world-class management. Front-line service employees of today have to play a vital role in giving the best service and maintaining relationship with customers as they are part of the marketing efforts of the organisation. Front-line employees are also the people who know the customers, their demands and behaviors. They are the communication and marketing agents responsible for influencing sales, maintaining reputation, and promoting the image of the organisation. Information which they gather from their customers is valuable for future planning and strategic positioning necessary for the continuing success of the organisation.

Some marketing cliché such as “the customer is always right”, “customer first”, “the customer is king” may cause imbalances in the power relationship between front-line service employees and customers whereby the employees have to serve with a smile despite of aggressive verbal abuses from the customers [1]. Such situations may place the employees in serious emotional dissonance as they have to display positive emotion when they in fact feel very uncomfortable and unhappy. Since Malaysia is moving towards a high service industry, this kind of industry places high expectations on their employees to provide the best services to customers. For instance, industries such as fast food restaurants, retails and entertainment industries spend a lot of time interacting with customers. This interaction includes an expectation by the customers for good service. For example, good service from front counter service employees would include a caring attitude, politeness, warmth, and empathy. There are some reports of high turnover rate in several industries in Malaysia such as the hotel industry [2] and retail industry [3].

Since our service industries are emphasizing on achieving customer satisfaction, it is clear that rationality and emotionality play pivotal roles in determining behavior in organizations. Research on emotion have been getting attention from many scholars because most of the early research highlight the importance of management in ensuring their employees’ emotions remain stable as they work for the organisation. Besides, treating them very well is seen to be very important as they are regarded as the intellectual property of the organisation. In modern management, we believed that the employee is not only a worker, but he or she brings his or her intelligence and wisdom to move the organisation to the next level which is beyond their target and maintain competitive advantages in the industry.

Previous research stated that dealing with customer demand often involves some amount of emotional labour that may require emotional intelligence to be managed appropriately. In fact, research about the emotional side of organisation provides better understanding of emotions and its interaction with organisational demand as well as customer demands. In order to move towards a fully service-oriented economy, greater awareness and understanding of an individual’s preferences, values and emotional expressions are needed. From the organisational behavior perspective, employees are the internal customers which organisations should pay attention to. If organisations do not focus on them, the organisations are at risk of not being able to satisfy their employees, thus having greater turnover retention. Organisations that can apply the theoretical and empirical knowledge will be better controlled to benefit from service encounters. Individuals and organisations that understand emotional and effective communication may be able to satisfy customers successfully. In other words, understanding emotion is about creating an environment that promotes a positive and healthy lifestyle as it is in line with the aims of contemporary organisational behavior research.

The term ‘emotional labour’ was introduced by Arlie Hochschild in 1983 to describe the phenomenon of service employees that goes beyond physical and mental duties [5]. For example, this includes employees who are required to show a genuine concern for customers’ needs by smiling and having good interpersonal skills as these skills are the determinant to customer’s perception about quality service. These types of activities are called emotional labour. Emotional labour can be very challenging, especially when employees face unpleasant clients. The employees need to hide real emotions and smile even though they receive negative responses from their customers.

Every company has its own display of rules when dealing with customers. According to Rafeil & Sutton (1987), these display of rules can be formally transmitted through training manuals or informally encouraged by the organisational culture [4]. As personal interactions between employees and customers are of concern, the company is also train to display rules through a detailed code of interactions and company policy. These employees are programmed by the company in order to produce authentic results. Every employee must obey the organisational rules displayed to ensure that the services are pleasant and satisfying.

Furthermore, Hochschild (1983) acknowledged two emotional labor strategies that may be used by employees to manage their emotions which include surface acting and deep acting [5]. According to Johnson (2007), surface acting only involves controlling of the outer expression. Employees usually experience emotional dissonance where they need to continue experiencing uncomfortable feelings [6]. In contrast, employees who adopt deep acting will be able to control internal emotions, thus directing them to really enjoy the interaction and convince themselves to think positively even though they face negative reaction.

Since emotional labour is significant in many business industries and the consequences may have an impact on the employee's performance, previous studies claimed that emotional labour can lead to emotional exhaustion [7] [8] [9] [10]. Van Dierendonck and Mevissen, (2002) defined employees' emotional exhaustion as a stage where the employees feel loss of energy and emotional fatigue because of excessive psychological demands from the organization [11]. However, emotional exhaustion can be avoided if employees have a high level of emotional intelligence rather than employees with a low level of emotional intelligence [12]. According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence is defined as the capability of managing ourselves and relationships with others, building effective teamwork, leading others, and forecasting the future [13]. Previous study shows that emotional exhaustion is one of the burnout construct as postulated in Maslach and Jackson's model, whereas four constructs are found in emotional intelligence which consists of self-emotional appraisal, other's emotional appraisal, regulation of emotion and use of emotion as postulated in Wong and Law's model.

Every employee has different levels of emotional intelligence. Moreover, emotional intelligence may help to reduce emotional exhaustion and guide employees to behave very well. Since front-line service employees are very crucial to organisational performance, therefore understanding front-line employee's emotional intelligence and emotional labour as antecedents of emotional exhaustion is a vital research which is useful from the managerial perspective. With the economic changes that are moving towards high dependency on service industry as a tool for the country's economic development, frontline service employees must perform their jobs even though they may be in a stressful environment. As a result, many talented employees, especially Gen Y leave the industry because they feel emotionally exhausted and burnt out with their job. One of the reasons for high job turnover in the industry includes pressure from duties and management, as well as longer working hours including at nights and weekends.

Frontline service employees are critical to the success of numerous service industries, and they are simultaneously facing the continuing problem of employee emotional exhaustion and high turnover rates [14]. Such employees who are confronted with emotional exhaustion will reach a stage where they will face lack of energy and depletion of emotional resources due to excessive psychological demands [15]. There are some impacts of emotional exhaustion that leads to a decrease in job satisfaction and performance, high turnover, alcoholic and drug abuse, physical and mental illness and social life problems [16].

Besides, Fowler (2014) mentioned in her 45th Annual Meeting on Women's Cancer that emotional exhaustion is associated with decreased career satisfaction and psychological distress. Therefore, understanding the antecedents of employee emotional exhaustion can provide benefits not only to the employees, but also to organisations, industries and economic of the country as a whole. In addition, the concept of emotions at work has drawn much attention from researchers and practitioners [17]. They claimed that various individual characteristics have emerged as significant predictors of emotional labour as well as impression management. As cited by Lee and Ok (2012), previous research has focused more on establishing a direct relationship between emotional labour and antecedents such as personal and job characteristics [8].

Although previous research have examined the links between individual characteristics (e.g., age, gender, emotional intelligence, affectivity, and personality type) and emotional labour, the results revealed large unexplained variations in the strength and direction of the effects [18]. As such, it

has been hard to reach reliable conclusions regarding the nature of these relationships, which in turn have hindered the formulation of clear directives for management practices. Moreover, little empirical research has been conducted to show an integrated view by examining antecedents of emotional labour that may further influence the outcomes of emotional labour [19] [20] [21].

Furthermore, although there is now an increasing trend of research that acknowledges this phenomenon [22], few have considered how to control and reduce emotional negative outcomes. If the organisations neglect the welfare of frontline employees, the employees may have a greater tendency to be physically or emotionally exhausted, thus it will result in greater turnover and reduced organisational commitment [23]. This study, thus investigates the role of emotional intelligence and emotional labour on emotional exhaustion. Specifically, this study examines the direct influence of employees' emotional intelligence and emotional labour on emotional exhaustion in the service organisation setting.

2. REVIEW OF PRIOR EMPIRICAL STUDIES

The review of prior empirical studies is divided into four sections that explain the relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion, emotional intelligence and emotional labour, emotional labour and emotional exhaustion and the mediating effect of emotional labour on the relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion.

2.1 Relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion occurs commonly among frontline counter service employees because they try to serve customers but they cannot cope with unexpected customer demands due to limited emotional resources. As a result, employees will suffer prolonged frustration and stress, thus this may lead to burnout at work [24]. Therefore, emotional intelligence provides abilities to manage emotions quickly and help to process emotional information accurately. Furthermore, emotional intelligence as a major source of emotional resources will also help employees to effectively cope with stress and frustration.

According to Kim et al., (2012) emotional intelligence could be a helpful personal resource in coping with emotional situations while acting as a supportive aspect in performing emotional labour [25]. In two more recent studies by Davis and Humphrey (2012), evidence for the incremental validity of ability and trait emotional intelligence in predicting depression beyond personality and cognitive ability was reported [26]. Moreover, emotional intelligence trait reduces stressor and mental health problems. The negative relationship between emotional intelligence and stress [27] and relationship between emotional intelligence and burnout [8] are well established. For example, Lee and Ok (2012) found that customer-contact hotel employees with high levels of emotional intelligence reported a smaller number of burnout symptoms than their lower emotional intelligence counterparts [8].

However, given that current research evidence is in favor of developmental emotional intelligence training, it is argued that emotional intelligence may be not an effective technique for reducing employees' emotional exhaustion. This is because many challenges faced by service industries in Malaysia, such as lack of funding, and occupational stressors, such as high workload experienced by frontline service employees, may not always be flexible. It is acknowledged that more emotional intelligence studies need to be conducted to confirm the existing research results in this domain. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: Emotional intelligence relates positively with emotional exhaustion.

2.2 Relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional labour

The concept of emotional intelligence has received much attention from researchers and practitioners in the organisational behavior literature since the early 1990s [25]. In order to ensure successful performance of service employees, many studies acknowledged the importance of emotional intelligence [25]. In the hospitality industries, in particular, scholars tend to view

emotional intelligence as a potential factor to contribute toward positive attitudes and behaviors in hospitality employees' emotional labour [28] [29].

Employees with higher levels of emotional intelligence tend to be more successful in their service delivery jobs than less emotionally intelligent employees because emotionally intelligent employees can perceive and interpret emotions of self and others accurately. They use such emotional knowledge to facilitate thoughts and actions, and easily regulate their own emotions in accordance with a given situation [30]. These emotional intelligence dimensions provide employees with the ability to perceive the need to frequently display emotions as part of their work role, thus helping to perform emotional labour in response to these situational demands [28] [25].

In line with this, Lee and Ok (2012) in their study on the effects of emotional intelligence and emotional labour, they found that emotional intelligence reduced the positive relationship between emotional labour and depressed mood at work among customer service employees [8]. They reasoned that service providers with high emotional intelligence can better align their levels of emotional engagement with the emotional demands of the job, efficiently and effectively fulfill organisational requirements of display rules, and recover quickly from adverse effects of emotional labour.

Another study by Prentice (2014) suggested that people with higher levels of emotional intelligence have more positive social interactions with others [31]. They tend to show concern for others, voluntarily help others, and be perceived as good peers or friends by others because they can comprehend social cues such as emotional expressions and behavior in communication. Furthermore, previous research has indicated that emotional intelligence is an individual's capacity for emotional control and emotional labour as an expression of that capacity [32] [33]. For instance, such a physical laborer needs physical fitness to engage in physical labour, while service employees need emotional intelligence to perform their jobs [32].

In view of that, employees with high emotional intelligence are able to display the required emotions and are more likely to respond better to customers even when dealing with unpleasant customers. Moreover, employees with high emotional intelligence have empathy values in themselves, thus making them able to understand others' emotions. They also find it less challenging to persuade in a desired organisation display rules compared to employees with lower emotional intelligence. Hur, Moon and Han (2014) claim that emotional intelligence is positively related to deep acting but not associated with surface acting [18]. Accordingly, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

H2a: Emotional intelligence relates positively with deep acting strategy.

H2b: Emotional intelligence relates negatively with surface acting strategy.

2.3 Relationship between emotional labour and emotional exhaustion

Based on service management literature, emotional labour is particularly relevant to service encounters because frontline service personnel are situated at the organisation-customer interface, have face-to-face interaction, and representing the organisation to customers. An increasing number of research studies on service have focused on the effects of emotional labour on consumer reactions or job outcomes of employees. For instance, scholars acknowledge that the positive emotions displayed by frontline employees have a significant positive influence on a consumer's evaluation of quality service [34], and positive word of mouth [22]. Although emotional labour can result in positive outcomes, it is also associated with negative outcomes such as employee stress, increased sick leave, and a higher turnover [35].

Based on previous research, this emotional labour may have positive or negative consequences such as emotional exhaustion and emotional distress, cynical attitudes toward customers [36]. Therefore, this emotional phenomenon in service jobs may substantially influence the forming of employees' job-related attitudes such as employee service orientation. In other words, stress

experienced by front counter service employees is related to emotional labour. When contact personnel express positive emotions to match an organisation's emotional display rules, but in contrast to their personal feelings, higher emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions were found among emotional laborers [37]. Thus, affective delivery demands can be difficult and are related to emotional exhaustion [38]. Working in emotional labour that demands more emotional resources is associated with higher levels of emotional exhaustion [39]. Moreover, emotional labour is positively associated with emotional exhaustion, which consequently causes high job turnover [40].

However, according to Jung and Yoon (2014), emotional labour provides a meaningful role in enhancing an organisation's competitiveness and performance while inducing employees' positive organisational behavior [10]. Previous research has shown the relationship between emotional labour and emotional exhaustion. For example, surface acting was positively correlated with emotional exhaustion [36]. Besides, Grandey (2003) also hypothesized a direct, positive path from surface acting to emotional exhaustion and the result was supported [41]. According to Hur, Moon and Han (2014), these researchers confirmed that emotional labour is positively related to emotional exhaustion in which causes employees to quit from the job [18]. With regard to deep acting strategy, most of the previous studies show that deep acting strategy creates a more favorable impact rather than surface acting. In other words, previous research has demonstrated that service providers displaying positive emotions enhance customers' positive moods, which, in turn, increase satisfaction and lead to positive behavioral intentions such as willingness to return and positive word-of mouth [42].

For instance, deep acting has a positive correlation with a sense of personal accomplishment, thus lowering the emotional exhaustion. However, the relationship between deep acting and emotional exhaustion has been debatable. Grandey (2003) claimed that deep acting is positively related to emotional exhaustion, but the result was not significant [41]. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H3a: Deep acting relates negatively with emotional exhaustion.

H3b: Surface acting relates negatively with emotional exhaustion.

3. METHODOLOGY

Figure 1 shows the research framework used to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion, the relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional labour (deep acting and surface acting), and the relationship between emotional labour (deep acting and surface acting) and emotional exhaustion among front-line service employees.

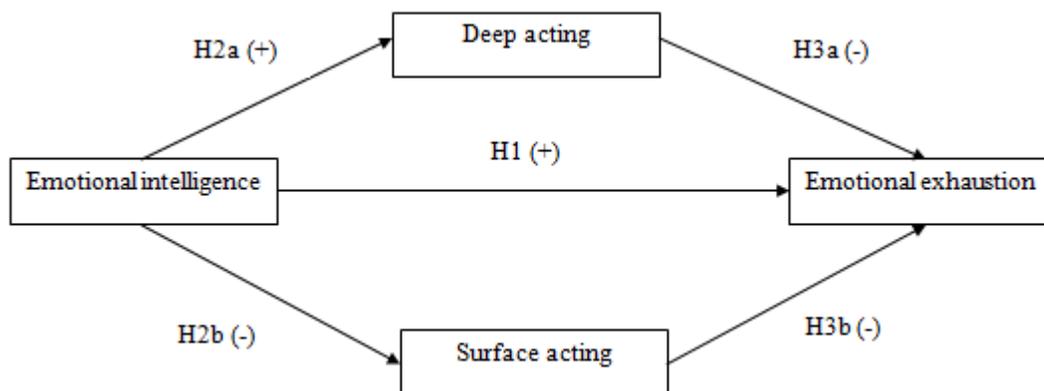


FIGURE 1: Research Framework.

3.1 Population, Sample and Sampling Procedures

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research. The target population of this study is the customer service officers and counter crew in fast food outlets, banking, entertainment, tourism and hospitality industries. These industries were selected because employees in these industries spend a lot of time interacting with customers. Front counter service employees are the respondents in this study for two reasons. Firstly, their service performance represents the organisation to the customers. Secondly, they are particularly vulnerable to emotional exhaustion since they have face-to-face interactions with customers every day.

The individual unit of analysis in this study is front counter service employees in various organisations located in the main cities in the country. The sampling procedure that was used in this study was the convenience sampling technique. The convenience sampling technique was chosen by the researcher because it allows the researcher to obtain basic data and trends related to this study without the complications of using a randomized sample.

3.2 Data Collection Method

Data were collected over a period of two months through a self-administered questionnaire. Furthermore, data were collected through a survey of front counter service employees whose major role in the organisation was to spend most of their working time providing services to external customers. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed using the convenience sampling technique and the response rate was 80%. Two responses were discarded due to incompleteness; therefore, the final number of usable questionnaires returned was 398.

3.3 Variables and Measurement

Emotional intelligence [43]

This study used Wong & Law's Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) which developed by Wong and Law (2002) and which consists of 16 items. WLEIS was chosen due to its brevity and reputation as a psychologically sound measure. WLEIS consists of four dimensions such as self-emotion appraisal, other's emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion with four items in each dimension. Response options ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Like most emotional intelligence studies, this study combined the four dimensions into a single emotional intelligence measure as the study aimed to test the overall emotional intelligence construct rather than the individual dimension.

Emotional labour [36]

Emotional labour which consists of deep acting and surface acting was assessed using a 14-item scale developed by Brotheridge and Lee (1998). The measure assesses how often respondents behave effectively at their jobs as described in each item, with 1=never and 5=always. A sample item of Deep Acting is "make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others" and a sample item of Surface Acting is "resist expressing my true feelings".

Emotional Exhaustion [24]

Nine items form the emotional exhaustion subscale of the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The measure assesses how often respondents report feeling the symptoms of emotional exhaustion at work. A sample item is "I feel emotionally drained at work". The scale employs a seven-point Likert format that ranges from never to every day.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Profile

Table 1 shows the profile of the respondents. Based on Table 1, the proportions of male and female respondents were almost equal with 50.5% males and 49.5% females. In terms of ethnicity composition, the Malays represented the highest percentage of respondents which was 40.7%, followed by Indians with 27.6% and Chinese consisting of 22.1%. The rest of the respondents from other ethnicity (9.5%). In terms of age, the majority of the respondents' age

ranged between 21 and 30 years; there were 264 respondents in this category indicating about 66.3% of the sample. This was followed by the category of respondents aged from 31 to 40 years old (14.1%), while those below twenty years of age comprised 0.6%. The remaining respondents are represented the age category of above 41 years. In fact, the majority of the respondents belong to Gen Y, and this may be due to the requirement of being front counter service employees who do not require high qualifications and skills. Besides, this age represents those who are at the initial stage of entry into the job market that can be filled by young employees. In terms of tenure in services, the majority of the respondents (40.7%) have worked within 1 to 3 years in their current organisations. Furthermore, about 31.5% of the respondents have worked for less than 1 year, and 14.8% between 4 and 6 years.

TABLE 1: Profile of Respondents (n=398).

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	201	50.5
Female	197	49.5
Ethnicity		
Malay	162	40.7
Chinese	88	22.1
Indian	110	27.6
Others	38	9.5
Age		
Below 20 years old	42	10.6
21-30 years old	264	66.3
31-40 years old	56	14.1
41-50 years old	29	7.3
Above 50 years old	7	1.8
Tenure		
Less than 1 year	125	31.4
1-3 years	162	40.7
4-6 years	59	14.8
7-9 years	22	5.5
More than 10 years	30	7.5

4.2 The Relationship Between Variables

Figure 2 shows the overall goodness of fit measures for the hypothesized structural model, specific parameter estimates for most of the paths denoted by the study hypotheses were obtained during the SEM analyses. The hypothesized structural model is comprised of paths from the emotional intelligence to the emotional labour (deep acting and surface acting), which then have paths to the emotional exhaustion. Of the 5 paths in the structural model, 3 of them were significant at $p < 0.01$. Based on regression analysis, emotional intelligence, emotional labour (deep acting and surface acting) explained 15.3% of the variance in emotional exhaustion.

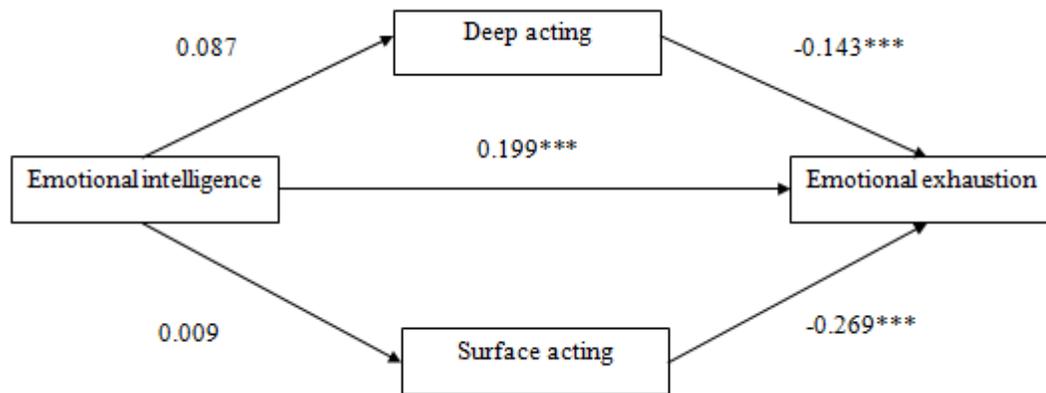


FIGURE 2: Hypothesized model with path coefficients.
Notes. *** $p < 0.01$.

Relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion

Based on Figure 2, emotional intelligence shows a significant relationship with emotional exhaustion in positive association ($\beta=0.199$, $t=4.599$, $p < 0.01$). As the p-value is less than 0.05, hypothesis 1 was supported by the data. This finding indicates that front-line employees who have high emotional intelligence experience more emotional exhaustion. This result is very interesting as the researcher considers that employees with high emotional intelligence may think deeper than others, thus the employees may easily get emotionally exhausted.

Even though the relationship between emotional intelligence and burnout [8] are well established in the literature, this study has found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion which contradict with previous research that reported negative relationship [27] [8]. Thus, it is argued that emotional intelligence may be not an effective technique for reducing employees' emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that more emotional intelligence studies need to be conducted to confirm the existing research results in this domain.

Relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional labour (Deep acting & Surface acting)

Based on Figure 2, emotional intelligence relates positively with deep acting ($\beta=0.087$, $t=1.589$, $p=0.11$). Emotional intelligence also relates positively with surface acting ($\beta=0.009$, $t=0.166$, $p=0.87$). However, the p-value for both relationships was more than 0.05. This result indicates that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and deep acting; and also no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and surface acting. Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported statistically. This finding supported the research conducted by Hur, Moon and Han (2014) who claim that emotional intelligence is positively related to deep acting but not associated with surface acting. This finding is also interesting because a person who has high emotional intelligence should not use surface acting as their regulation of emotion. They must be able to act accordingly and genuinely rather than choose to fake. According to Ramachandran, Jordan, Troth and Lawrence (2011), surface acting does not require emotional intelligence abilities.

Relationship between emotional labour (Deep acting & Surface Acting) and emotional exhaustion

Based on Figure 2, deep acting relates negatively with emotional exhaustion ($\beta= -0.143$, $t=2.817$, $p=0.01$). As the p-value is less than 0.05, it shows a significant relationship between deep acting and emotional exhaustion. Thus, the hypothesis 3a was supported by the data. On the other hand, surface acting relates negatively with emotional exhaustion ($\beta= -0.269$, $t=5.744$, $p < 0.05$). As the p-value is less than 0.05, it shows a significant relationship between surface acting and

emotional exhaustion. Thus, the hypothesis 3b was supported by the data. This finding confirms that emotional labour has a significant influence on emotional exhaustion as mentioned by Hochschild (1983). Besides, this study shows that emotional labour can help in reducing emotional exhaustion as the relationship shows a negative direction manner.

5. CONCLUSION

This study found that emotional intelligence has a significant relationship with emotional exhaustion. This finding revealed that the relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion is in a positive direction. In other words, when employees have higher emotional intelligence, the more they have the tendency to experience emotional exhaustion. This result shows such a new discovery to be added to in the body of knowledge because previous literature reported the relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion in a negative direction. For instance, Lee and Ok (2012) found that customer-contact hotel employees with high levels of emotional intelligence reported a smaller number of burnout symptoms than their lower emotional intelligence counterparts.

There are some factors that show that the result is different from the literature. It may due to organisational culture differences because research the literature have been conducted in the Western countries [31]. In Malaysia, people are soft spoken and always think about other's perception on them. Sometimes, they may not be brave enough to express their opinions if they feel dissatisfied. Other people may think that they have high emotional intelligence because they are able to control their emotion, but in their heart, they feel dissonance, thus they have a high tendency to experience emotional exhaustion. Besides, the person with high emotional intelligence may think deeper than other, thus making them easily exhausted.

This study also found that emotional labour, either deep acting or surface acting has a significant relationship with emotional exhaustion in the negative direction. It shows that emotional labour helps to reduce emotional exhaustion. This finding was inconsistent with research by Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) as cited in Prentice (2014) that reveals that both types of acting can lead to negative outcomes. Furthermore, a research by Prentice (2014) that was conducted among 578 frontline employees in several hospitality organisation in Florida, USA, postulates both surface acting and deep acting had positive association with emotional exhaustion. Thus, this result is contradicted with Prentice's findings. This inconsistency may be due to different sample frame [31] as well as organisational culture values. Although the direction of this finding is different with her finding, it shares the same conclusion in which both deep acting and surface acting had significant relationship with emotional exhaustion.

Although this study found that emotional intelligence, deep acting and surface acting has a significant relationship with emotional exhaustion, emotional labour has no significant relationship with emotional intelligence. It means that emotional labour does not determined by the level of employees' emotional intelligence. This study confirmed the findings of the study conducted by Ramachandran, Jordan, Troth and Lawrence (2011) that surface acting does not require emotional intelligence abilities.

This study provides useful information especially to Malaysian service industries as well as to the body of knowledge. In order to answer the research questions, this study confirmed that there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and emotional exhaustion as well as between emotional labour which comprise deep acting and surface acting with emotional exhaustion. Frontline employees in services industries such as hospitality, retail and fast food restaurants always engage in emotional labour. For example, the employees must maintain a friendly, polite, and helpful attitude even in situations that normally involve negative emotional reactions such as handling impatient, demanding, or unpleasant customers. As emotional labour is applicable to many areas of business especially front-line service employees, it is very important to assist them in managing their emotions and suggest an appropriate action in order to meet organisational

expectations. Therefore, the organisations should take proactive actions to support and manage any issues regarding emotional management.

It is reasonable to believe that by helping employees deal with emotional exhaustion, it will improve employee morale and reduce employee turnover. Some strategies that can be used by the organisations to help their employees are such as teaching display rules. These are organisationally approved norms or standards that employees learn through observation, instruction, feedback and reinforcement. The employees should be thought how to act, and they may even be given scripts to use when dealing directly with clients. In addition to it, combining this display rules with company culture could be a better way.

Besides, service organisations should invest for the development of their employees by providing access to stress management and emotional health services. As found in this study, the front-line employee who has high emotional intelligence will experience more emotional exhaustion, and the organisations should help these employees solve their problems effectively. For instance, teaching them about problem-solving techniques can help them resolve interpersonal issues before they lead to negative emotions. In addition, they should be enhanced with the ability to recognise other people's emotions to help reduce the burden of emotional exhaustion. In short, building empathy and using other emotional intelligence tools help in reducing the likelihood that emotional conflict will lead to emotional exhaustion.

Apart from that, one of the most effective ways to help people deal with the realities of emotional labour is by sharing success stories. The organisations may allow the employees to learn how others successfully deal with the impact of emotional conflict. It is possible if high emotional intelligence employees get emotionally exhausted during the unpleasant moment while dealing with the customers. However if they are able to cope with it, they may become more matured. Thus, the organisation may give them a session to share their experience as well as one way to show appreciation to the employees.

In conclusion, emotions at the workplace are an important part of service that organisations need to fully pay attention to. By helping the front-line service employees understand their reactions of emotional labour and emotional intelligence, this can help in understanding the facets of emotional exhaustion. As a result, these are ways to improve overall organisational performance as well as employees' satisfaction, motivation and commitment.

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