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## Emotional Labour in the Lifeworld of Indian Hospitality Employees: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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### Abstract

In this study we explore the lived experience of emotional labour of ten hospitality employees and tries to get a deeper understanding of how they interpret it in their life world. In-depth interviews were conducted with the front-line employees 4,5-star hotels and high-end restaurants in the city of Pune in Western Indian state of Maharashtra. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyse the data, the findings threw up some convergent as well as divergent themes about how the employees interpret the experience in their life world and how they feel about it. Emotional maneuverability, ambivalent disposition, spillover of emotions emerged as some of the key interpretations of emotional labour as a lived experience. It also emerged that a collective effort needs to be put in place to help the employees cope with the consequences of emotional labour. This study can help hospitality industry leaders with a fresh perspective about understanding and tackling the negative consequences of emotional labour amongst their employees.

### Keywords

emotional labour, lived experience, hospitality, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), presenteeism

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# Emotional Labour in the Lifeworld of Indian Hospitality Employees: A Phenomenological Inquiry

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In this study we explore the lived experience of emotional labour of ten hospitality employees and tries to get a deeper understanding of how they interpret it in their life world. In-depth interviews were conducted with the front-line employees 4,5-star hotels and high-end restaurants in the city of Pune in Western Indian state of Maharashtra. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyse the data, the findings threw up some convergent as well as divergent themes about how the employees interpret the experience in their life world and how they feel about it. Emotional maneuverability, ambivalent disposition, spillover of emotions emerged as some of the key interpretations of emotional labour as a lived experience. It also emerged that a collective effort needs to be put in place to help the employees cope with the consequences of emotional labour. This study can help hospitality industry leaders with a fresh perspective about understanding and tackling the negative consequences of emotional labour amongst their employees.

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## Introduction

“Service with a smile” is a common slogan one comes across in reference to hospitality service organisations. The same also applies to our mental image/model of hotels and/or restaurants. When someone visits a hotel or a good restaurant, they not only expect to avail the products or services on offer, but they also expect the right amount of hospitality accompanied with it as well. The notion of hospitality generally differs from person to person. However, for the organisations in hospitality industry, there are certain common minimum norms that they feel should be put on offer for the customers. Hence, it is not only about hiring mere employees who can do the job, but do it with the right dose of attitude, sincerity, and concern for the customers. Expressing the right amount of organisationally desired emotions in front of the guests is also a key feature here. Which may have to be mandatorily done even to the complete suppression of one’s felt emotions. This is a functional and a quintessential element of emotional labour.

The expectations are not unfounded as far as organisations are concerned. Smiling faces are widely accepted as having a high correlation with revenue and repeat business (Ash, 1984; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). The friendlier and enthusiastic the service personnel are, the better would be the satisfaction of the customers they serve. That would eventually mean an increase in sales and repeat business by the customers resulting into financial success of the organisation (Hochschild, 1983; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987, 1989). Consequently, this action transforms an individual’s emotional display from a private experience to an act for public viewing orchestrated and supervised by organisational mandate. Which, through practice and experience, employees master over a period. In this context, factors like importance accorded

to the job as a resource for socio-economic status and the tenet of investment of resources do play an important role as well.

In her study of flight attendants, Arlie Hochschild (1983) first coined the term emotional labour to explain this phenomenon of organisations demanding their employees display emotions that are approved by and are in the best interest of the organisation. According to her, emotional labour is sold for a wage and thus has an exchange value (p. 7). Wherein people deliberately hide and suppress their felt emotions to express something that is to the liking of their organisation. Which has its own set of positive as well as negative consequences and every individual develops his/her own set of lenses to interpret it according to their own principle of affective realism and assign meaning and essence in their life world. Affective realism refers to the idea that people's experience of the world around them is always constructed by their affective feelings (Anderson et al., 2012; Barrett & Bar, 2009). It is the tendency of our feelings to influence what we see and not what we think you see). It is the lived experience of this existential reality that makes each and everyone's definition of emotional labour different with varied layers of expression and consequences. It prompts everyone to differentially develop their own ways of coping with the negative consequence of emotional labour.

Hence, an effort has been taken in this study to venture into the lived experience of emotional labour of the employees of hospitality service in India and try to understand how they interpret the essence of it as a part of their lifeworld, how it impacts their lives, their jobs, and people around them. An attempt to draw plausible insights about emotional labour as experienced in life by people. Thereby bringing us closer to the reality of emotional labour in a deeper and fuller manner. Broadly, this study may help industry leaders and researchers alike to draw deeper insights into the experiences of people and understand and internalise the differential nature of emotional labour as a phenomenon. The deeper insights may present a real-time picture of an employee's experience and ensuing expectations from his/her employer to help them cope with the consequences of such a lived experience, which may end up influencing organisations to engage in various individual centric as well as group-based interventions in this direction.

The objective of the research is threefold:

- To understand emotional labour through the lived experiences of the employees in hospitality service organisations.
- To interpret the life world – both work and personal life, of the hospitality service organisation' employees in India Vis – a – Vis emotional labour.
- To comprehend the essence of the coping mechanism of living through emotional labour as interpreted by the hospitality service employees.

### **Literature Review**

Hospitality, as a human exchange process, is voluntary in nature along with being contemporaneous and mutually beneficial (Brotherton, 2002), so much so, the definition of human morality across religions reckons "being hospitable" as one its key defining features (Lashley, 2015). Religious texts pertaining to Christianity and Islam dissociate the commercial connotation from hospitality. In Islamic parlance, offering hospitality to a stranger is seen as an act of honour and respect towards God by a true believer (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Which is not governed by any thoughts of reciprocal gains whatsoever (Meehan, 2012). However, in non-religious parlance, it surely is not devoid of its adequate commercial connotations that

come along. Whereby, an element of exchange of money is involved depending on the duration of and the ability to pay by the guest (Ashness & Lashley, 1995). Strengthening the commercial connotation of hospitality which is very much existent within its realm (Pechlaner et al., 2016).

Being a process firmly dependent on human exchange (Brotherton, 1999), hospitality service puts a lot of importance on emotional regulation and displaying organisationally suitable behaviour (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 2003). The act thus performed by the employees to manage their feelings and express unfelt emotions by subduing their felt ones is termed as emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983). This act is so fundamental to hospitality jobs that if someone fails to engage in emotional labour is deemed to have failed to do his/her job (Hsieh & Guy, 2009). Hochschild (2003) opines emotional labour is about the performing the right kind of emotions as expected by the organisation which does have an exchange value quantifiable on monetary terms (Hochschild, 2003), and, as it may seem, be an act of surrendering one's own emotions as felt from within for the benefit of the organisation. Serving the purpose of the organisation that already has developed internal standards of normative behaviour for employees to simply simulate some specific emotions only through facial or verbal manifestations (Hall et al., 2015). In order to purportedly optimise the bringer-consumer interaction and create a desirable experience for the customer and elicit a favourable response thereupon (Li et al., 2018). Hospitality organisations associate objectives like customer satisfaction, intent to return, and positive word-of-mouth publicity with desired positive emotions displayed by their employees (Chi et al., 2011; Johanson & Woods, 2008; Soederlund & Rosengren, 2008; Tsai, 2001). Contrariwise, display of negative emotions are thoroughly discouraged as they are deemed to have a negative effect on the satisfaction of the customer with respect to service (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Gross & John, 2003). Thus, to have a positive outcome of bringer-consumer interaction, certain specific emotions are encouraged by organisations to be displayed by their employees. Parasuraman et al. (1985) has recognised emotional labour as a key dimension of service quality which plays a key role in contributing to organisational goals (Grandey et al., 2002).

Hence, in dispensing their duties, employees resort to expressing only those emotions which are congruent with their organisational directives. In doing so, they either traverse through a discordant emotional state or a congruent emotional state (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2011). Resorting to a strategy that's response focussed and is shallow in the former case. Often termed as "surface acting," wherein their internal feelings are in complete discord with their outward expressed feelings (Hochschild, 1983; Johnson & Spector, 2007). In the latter case, the internal feeling tends to be in congruence and harmony with the expressed feelings. Often termed as "deep acting," this is a process through which the individual modifies and/or adjusts his internal feelings to match up with the expressed ones (Hochschild, 1983; Spencer & Rupp, 2009), much like the third wheel in the cart, which too finds its rightful place is the spontaneous and genuine emotional labour (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Glomb & Tews, 2004) filled with genuine expressions fulfilling organisational requirements. Age and experience also play a pivotal role in prompting employees to express felt emotions that are natural (Dahling & Perez, 2010). Normally, employees would resort to expressing genuine emotions. If that fails to achieve the result they want, only then they take refuge in deep or surface acting (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003). Surface acting may lead to burnout (Bono & Vey, 2004), emotional exhaustion, and decreased job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2009). Whereas deep acting tends to have a warm and friendly affect in the minds of the customer (Grandey, 2003) and is more effective in eliciting a favourable customer reaction (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011). However, the adoption of any of the three strategies remains an individual's choice, depending upon their current state-of-affairs in their lifeworld.

Conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) generalises this choice towards the tenet of striving to protect, retain, and build resources which one deems valuable in life (Hobfoll, 1989). In this case, the resources for example, one is trying to protect and retain can be self-esteem (Rosenberg, 2015) or socio-economic status (Worden & Sobel, 1978) which one has been able to acquire by dint of the present job. Hence if, due to any circumstantial causation, there is a threat of depletion or loss of these resources, people try their best to retain/protect them (Hobfoll, 1989); as these resources eventually assist people to define their perception about who they are (Brown & Andrews, 1986; Erikson, 1968). So, we can see that the reality surrounding our own perception about ourselves is dependent on the possession and retention of resources that we value. Now, reality may not be what we directly perceive something that is out there in the world (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009; Lambie & Marcel, 2002). Rather, the real-time experiences of the world that we have and the way it affects us, shapes our perception of the reality as per the tenets of affective realism hypothesis (Wormwood et al., 2019). That is why different people adopt different coping strategies to protect and retain their resources. Involving resource investment in order to prevent resource loss in the future (Ito & Brotheridge, 2003; Vinokur & Schul, 2002); which can otherwise gravely impact job satisfaction, performance and inter-personal relations at work (Wheeler et al., 2013).

Emotional labour is equally tiring process like any other kind of labour. An excess of it, may have adverse effects on the psychic as well somatic well-being of an individual (Gelderens et al., 2007; Karim, 2009). Poorly affecting their attitude towards their job and performance under certain conditions (Cropanzano et al., 2004; Diefendorff & Gosslerand, 2003; Grandey, 2000; Grandey et al., 2002). In a way, taking a huge toll on customer satisfaction and experience. Hence, understanding how people interpret their lived experiences of emotional labour, adopt their coping mechanisms to retain, and preserve their valuable resources, can help hospitality organisations to define their human capital strategy towards encouraging better job performance, job satisfaction and person-job fit (Bhattacharya & Dasgupta, 2018). Especially from an Indian hospitality industry perspective, where quality resources are still in heavy demand, this also helps to avoid turnover intentions arising out of the divergence between employee's characteristics and. Behavioural competencies essential for the job (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984).

Having spent a brief period working with a five-star rated hotel in India, I experienced emotional labour and its consequences first-hand. It was perhaps my incapability to come to terms with the consequences of the phenomenon and cope with it, prompted me to quit this industry and find employment elsewhere. I always felt that emotional labour needs to be researched from an individual's perspective as it is experienced in the life world. Hence, I took up this research as a part of my doctoral research and this paper is a part of that research.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Method**

I chose a qualitative research method to acquire information about emotional labour as a phenomenon in the context of hospitality service. As a quantitative study was felt to be a method that may prove to be unable to account for richness of the social settings including interactions and their effects (Cronbach, 1975; Hoepfl, 1997). The intent was purely based on gaining knowledge about the phenomenon as it is experienced by those who live through it. It was never intended to predict antecedents and/or provide remedial measures to countermand the negative effects (if any) of the consequences. A phenomenological approach helped

understand the emotional labour from the point of view of the hospitality service employees as they experience and interpret it in their life world.

Phenomenological research method was used as a part of this inductive study as it was intended to gain a deeper understanding of emotional labour as a phenomenon in its real time setting wherein no manipulative strategy was attempted towards phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2001, p. 39), hospitality service organisations being the context in this case. So, to augment the thickness and depth of the primary data, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used. At first, the participant interpreted their lived experience of emotional labour in course of the in-depth interview with the researcher. Following which, the researcher interpreted the data thus acquired to make sense of the lived experience of the participant. This double hermeneutic process or the art of interpretation of IPA aided the study further in capturing the interpretation of the “lived experience” of the participants. In IPA research, there is no attempt to test a predetermined hypothesis of the researcher; rather the aim is to explore flexibly and in detail, an area of concern (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53). The main rationale behind choosing IPA was that emotional labour is a phenomenon that exists in the world of hospitality service, lived and experienced by the employees (Hochschild, 1983). Phenomenological research seeks to study the individual lived experiences and perceptions of a phenomenon in great depths and represent it from an individual perspective (Lester, 1999) and IPA is a hermeneutic research technique that can ably aid this study.

### **Data Collection and Sampling**

Data for this research was collected from the frontline staff of the food and beverage service department and front office department of 4, 5-star hotels and high-end restaurants in the city of Pune in Western Indian state of Maharashtra. As one of the major IT and manufacturing hub of India, Pune houses 4- and 5-star hotels from Hyatt, J.W. Marriott, Ibis, Radisson, Holiday Inn, Lemontree hotels, etc. Similarly, the city also has high end restaurants to cater to the taste of Indian as well as foreign nationals who throng this city owing to the presence of large multi-national companies in the city. For phenomenological research, a minimum sample of 6 is necessary (Morse, 1994). Whereas Boyd (2001) posits that to reach data saturation, two to ten participants are sufficient. However, Creswell (1998, p. 64) states that it can be anywhere between 5 and 25 for a qualitative study. Clarke (2010) says it should be between 4 and 10; whereas Coyle (2014) posits that a sufficient sample in this regard should be between 1 and 12. A purposive sampling technique was adopted as a primary measure to identify and select individuals who have undergone and experienced the circumstances (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) of emotional labour at hospitality service organisations. The inclusion criteria included employees from food and beverage service departments, with a minimum work experience of five years. Hence, for this study, an initial sample of twelve participants was finalised. However, in course of conducting the interviews, two of the participants backed out from the process. Hence, the study went ahead with ten participants. Of whom, 6 were from 4, 5-star hotels and 4 were from high-end fine dining restaurants with 7 male and 3 female employees. The average age of the participants was 30.2 years with a minimum work experience of 6 years and a maximum experience of 17 years. The details of the participants are enumerated in Table 1 below. This was a sufficient sample for an IPA study because of the idiographic nature of IPA, whose main aim is to understand a phenomenon in a specific context (Smith et al., 2009) and not hypothesize or generalise the findings.

To conduct this study involving human subjects, an ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the Academic Integrity Committee (AIC) of SCMHRD, Pune. The clearance entailed that the safety, privacy, and confidentiality of the participants will always be maintained, and no information will be disclosed or shared with anyone which may disclose

their identity wholly or partially. All the names of the participants mentioned in this study are fictitious and bears no resemblance to the real participants.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis or IPA is intended to induce a deeper and more felt meaning of the experiences that an individual assign to his/her facets of life in a subjective manner (Smith et al., 2009; Wedlock, 2016). To do so, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand their world views as interpreted by the participants by engaging in in-depth dialogue with them (Osborn & Smith, 2008). The semi-structured interview schedule constituted of open-ended questions prepared well ahead basis the hermeneutic expectations of the researchers as stated earlier and the lived experiences of the participants in conjunction with the research objectives as specified for the study (Osborn & Smith, 2008).

### **Semi-Structured Interview**

The questions of the interview were exploratory in nature and were divided into four parts. Part 1 was intended to understand why and how the participants joined hospitality industry and why they continue to work here (their motivation – both intrinsic and extrinsic). Part 2 concentrated on understanding their perception about emotional labour and their interpretation of its necessity in the world of hospitality service. Part 3 completely concentrated on their lived experience of emotional labour as lived and interpreted by them. The participants were probed further based on their responses to primary as well as anchoring questions. Finally in Part 4, the focus was on understanding how the participants cope with the various consequences of EI and what their expectations are from their organisations towards this end.

The in-depth, face-to-face interviews lasted anywhere between 45 to 60 minutes. All the interviews were recorded through a voice recorder application in the mobile phone. The interviews were based on an interview schedule of open-ended questions pertaining to their interpretation of their lived experience of emotional labour in their life world. Follow up questions were asked based on their responses. Questions were also asked to understand their feelings about the same and how they think they cope with it and how could they be better poised to do the same. To maintain confidentiality of the identity of the participants, all the real names have been masked and made-up names have been used all throughout the research. Also, no detail of their employing organisations has been divulged anywhere.

### **Results and Analysis**

Upon completion of the interviews, the transcripts were read multiple times in order to get immersed in the data available at hand. Then the transcripts were analysed with the help of interpretative phenomenological analysis or IPA (Osborn & Smith, 2008). IPA is a multi-step process wherein the researcher moves from a unique to perceived shared experiences by the participants, understanding the point of view of the participants through interpretations and personal meaning making within a given context (Smith, 2007).

As a part of the IPA process, the researchers first read all the transcripts to get an overall idea and understanding of the accounts of the participants related to emotional labour. This was then followed by an in-depth reading of the first transcript. In doing so, descriptive notes and comments were made to summarise the detailed narration by the participant and highlight things which seemed significant. Once done, the transcript was read multiple times and the essence of the participant's experience could now be tentatively interpreted. Which, started to give shape to emerging themes. The same process was then repeated for all the remaining nine interview transcripts. All the emerging themes were then read and re-read before being grouped under the super-ordinate themes. However, at this juncture the transcripts were revisited in



order to ascertain a meaningful connection between the themes thus arrived at and the primal verbatim therein. Just so that these two should concur and reflect the true essence of the interpretation of lived experience of the participants. The themes were a manifestation of the researcher's interpretation of the participant's interpretation of their lived experience as described through thoughts and words. While developing the themes, the comments made by the participants which were descriptive and conceptual in nature were used as supporting data by the researchers. Multiple rounds of exchange of notes were carried out by the researchers in order to ensure consistency in terms of the analysis and interpretation of the participants lived experience as stated in the research question. All the observations, right from the beginning, were discussed thoroughly between both the researchers to ensure concurrence.

As per Hoyt and Bhati (2007), trustworthiness is the premise on which a qualitative enquiry rests and the same can be ensured through various means. For the purpose of this research, the following criteria were put to action to ensure trustworthiness: integrity, equilibrium between subjectivity and reflexivity, and clear reporting of the unearthed findings (Williams & Morrow, 2009). The integrity of the data was ensured by selecting participants from different star rated hotels as well as restaurants with differing years of experience. This ensured a diversity of viewpoints as well as experience. Data saturation also provided for the adequacy (or integrity) in this case. The subjectivity/reflexivity was ensured through feedback from the participants at relevant stages of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to check the coherence between their interpretation of reality and the understanding of the researchers. Finally, to present a clear reporting, thick descriptions are provided along with the findings along with verbatim statements from interview transcripts.

A double-hermeneutic approach was adopted to interpret the lived experiences of emotional labour as experienced, interpreted and subsequently articulated by the participants in relation to the research objective of this study (Dallmayr, 2009). The emergent themes and their analysis, thereupon, presents four broad themes. First, these four themes are individually discussed, followed by a composite discussion making sense of the lived experiences in tandem with the existing literature.

### **Theme 1: Emotional Manoeuvrability as a Key Constituent of EL Paradigm**

All the participants almost unanimously converged upon the agreement that manoeuvrability with emotions is a quintessential element that this profession demands. Both from the service giver's as well as consumer's point of view. It essentially implies that the employees should be flexible enough to shift from one emotion (felt) to another (organisationally expected form of expressed emotion) in a smooth manner without ruffling much of feathers. So, the disparity between felt and expressed emotions, though having internal consequences, may not be made apparently visible in wider public eye. Which calls for "surface acting." Fiona concurs to this by saying, "Our hotel has some display rules to ensure a consistent response, so we always do a specific surface acting in all situations. For instance, even when dealing with an angry client, we are instructed to be pleasant and polite."

However, though far and few, a contrary standpoint does exist too. Wherein, employees are not only made to understand the necessity of manoeuvrability of emotions keeping in mind the business context but are also empowered to stand up to unacceptable behaviour from the customers. Priyanka share her thought by saying:

I would like to share even, for example, someone is shouting at us or using bad words. Yes, I have experienced this as well... so...telling me cuss words in Hindi language and all. Earlier the trend was - Guest is God, but now things are changing, industry is recognising the needs of the employees and more

supportive in fact. So then in such situations, we say, “Excuse me Sir! Please don’t use such swear words since we are not liking it,” “We understand you are facing a genuine problem and we are here to fix the same but do not scream or shout on us!”

From a business standpoint the imperative is justified with the conjecture that it creates a sense of uniformity of response and/or standards of service for the customers irrespective of the property they visit within the same group at any point of time. Which, in turn leads to a good experience as per their expectations leading to the prospect of repeat business in the future. Also, the possibility of a favourable word-of-mouth publicity cannot be left to chance. Ashok states, “once they enter the restaurant, our target is to serve them in the best possible way to give them a great experience and make sure they do visit us back. Just so that we have a good customer base.”

Inasmuch the participants may agree to the premise that an expression of organisationally approved emotions is in the best interest of the organisation; some do feel that a non-adherence can have its fair share of retributions. Which possibly, lends a visage of enforcement to the phenomenon of emotional labour in the minds of the people living through it in their lifeworld. The perceived fear of retributions adds an iota of apprehension to the overall vignette of emotional labour. Sagar shares his side of the reality:

We have accepted the reality of our job. We feel that if we don’t have a smile on our faces and look happy while serving customers, then we would be simply thrown out and replaced by someone else. That’s the reality of our job.

The fear of retributions does make a heavy impact on the overall psyche of the employee. The fear of losing job for not smiling and being hospitable is quite a clear and present as stated by Sagar.

## **Theme 2: Ambivalent Disposition with a Collective Consensus on Imperiousness of Experience**

The collective response of the participants to emotional labour is that of ambivalence, though, at an individual level opinion, is divided. However, collectively it seems as if there are mixed feelings about emotional labour. On one hand participants feel that by living through and mastering (with experience over time) emotional labour, they have become calm, composed, and empathetic. However, on the other hand they feel that it is quite inhuman at times for organisations to force their employees to behave in a manner which they don’t feel to do from within. Which then snowballs into anger and frustration. Fiona narrates a situation:

My father fell ill at that point of time. I had to ask my boss for leave and my boss refused...I was very much upset because physically I might had been at work but mentally, I was still at home worrying for my father...I was trying to smile and receive the guest but inside my mind, I was worried, tense, frustrated and angry at my boss.

Adding to the premise of ambivalence, it also emerged that employee’s capacity of relative indifference to inappropriate behaviour by the customers is also a key takeaway from living and experiencing emotional labour over a period. Priyanka says:

We try and not take it to our hearts whatever the guests say. We don't get too much emotionally involved; we act that we are paying attention and listen to them, so that guests feel that yes somebody is listening to them.

Also, the way the standards of expected emotional display are implemented by the organisation, it surely leaves an impact in the heart and minds of the people. Sometimes the forceful nature of the implementation coupled with perceived ramifications tend to instil a subtle sense of fear in them. Which then tends to have its effect over the lived experience of emotional labour by the employee because of his/her mental disposition towards the phenomenon based on their affective realism towards the same. Overall, one thing everyone concurred to is the amount of stress (physical, mental and emotional) that the nature of the job and emotional labour therein generates for the individual. Almost all the participants agreed to this premise. Coupled with that, the apprehension of non-adherence to organisational standards and the possible retributions thereupon tends to play on the minds of the employees. Which also contributes to the imperiousness of emotional labour.

### **Theme 3: Spill-Over of Emotions Lending Hues to Affective Realism**

Some of the participants felt that sometimes issues arising at work have such deep impact on them, that they carry the negative emotions of the same back home after work. Similarly, issues arising at home tends to make it tougher for them to execute a favourable display of positive emotions at work, which then takes a toll on their mental and emotional well-being. Hence, emotional spill-over not only stands out because of emotional labour but also as a detractor for them indulge in 'deep acting' while at work. Sagar says:

When it's the personal issue affecting our work, it become difficult to put on the smiling face all the time and the capacity to bear anything that comes from the customer reduces... in case something unexpected happened at work, it gets spilled over to the family.

Ashok feels:

It's like a vicious circle. What happens here affect our personal lives and what happens in the personal lives affect our work life. It's all interrelated. If the day went well at work, it's also a happy atmosphere at home and vice-versa.

In fact, sometimes, due to this spill-over, people tend to drift away from their family members. Their inability to cope with the consequences of spill-over leads to a sense of dissociation from the immediate surrounding. Wherein, personal and family relations tend to take a hit. Priyanka thinks:

It sometimes does get to us. At times, this constant dealing of emotions and this emotional management makes us distant from our close ones, when we don't end up sharing our real and raw emotions with them mostly due to lack of time and distance. This hampers our relationships back at home to quite an extent.

One persistent element of this theme remains in the fact that the spill-over does not seem to be a recurring issue. Rather, it is majorly dependent on incidents of unpalatable experiences at work or at home. Or, arising out of intermittent issues which tends to get sorted over time and/or with experience. Whichever the case may be. However, one of the participants feels

spill-over is a real-time problem which everyone should understand and accept as a part of the profession. Efforts should be afoot at an individual level to try and mitigate them. He goes on to say: “I have seen a lot of my co-workers breaking down or venting out their frustration on their family members.”

It tends to leave a bad taste in the mouth for some time. However, spill-over of emotions can also be true for customers as well. One of the participants felt the causation of foul mood of the customer can be of external causation. Only the negative emotion gets misplaced which can then have a negative impact on the waiter serving that guest. Hence, one person’s emotional spill-over can become someone else’s cause for negative emotional spill-over, but, to cut the vicious circle here, the person at the receiving end may try to either empathise with the person or simply remain grossly indifferent to the behaviour, which again is dependent on the disposition of the waiter/service personnel and their perception of the “affective realism” in their life world at that point in time. Experience also plays its part in situations like this. However, spill-over of emotions does seem like a clear and present constituent of emotional labour in the lifeworld of these people.

Having had to accommodate emotional labour as a permanent fixture in their lifeworld, some of the participants felt they owed their positions to their lack of education. Due to which, they had no option to choose a career other than this, which, in turn, led them to a life of expressing unfelt emotions at work and suppressing felt emotions, and then clouds their vision as to how they perceive the existential reality of emotional labour in their lifeworld. Their lack of education affects their reality, which in turn showcases emotional labour as a more overbearing personification of their lower-self-worth. Though experience has taught them some ways to live with it, but, deep down inside, they perceive it as their fait accompli arising out of their limited education. Accompanied by a perceived lack of respect for their profession by some section of the customers, it creates a lower self-worth in their minds. Sagar states:

We understand that we are not very educated to expect too much; we are simple graduates. Hence, when I got a job in this industry, I accepted it as it was much needed for me to pay for expenses of my family.

Kushal states:

I’ve got less marks in 10<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup>. So, the options for me to get to other professions were limited and to be bluntly honest, I don’t have any other choice.

Also, there seems to be a feeling of the hospitality industry being dependent majorly on human interaction and relationships, has a definite scope for people with lesser academic acumen and qualification, which is why some of them feel they have an employment in this industry. However, they also feel it is their fate, and they have accepted it as it is, which in a way helps them to cope with the negative consequences of emotional labour. At the same time, intermittently, this very same acceptance of fate leads to spill-over of negative emotions from work into their personal lives. Hence, it is worth noting here that a multitude of factors like lesser academic qualification in a stratification conscious society like India, perception of self, lower self-worth, and perception about jobs are responsible for shaping the affective realism paradigm of an individual, which, then contributes to his/her interpretation about their lived experience of a phenomenon.

#### **Theme 4: Collective Nature of Coping Mechanism**

Coping with the negative consequences of emotional labour leaves a lot of room for diverse thought processes. Some participants are of the opinion that coping must be an individual driven process where the onus completely lies with the individual as they are the one who have chosen this career for themselves. Whereas some participants feel the organisation too needs to play a pivotal role in this continuum. They should have certain fall-back measures like employee assistance programme, creating a more supportive work environment, incentivising various behavioural attributes for their employees to be able to cope better and faster with the consequences of emotional labour, which will then enable them to re-energise and take on the challenges with greater vigour and positivity. Kushal feels:

One way to handle emotional labour at work could be to create a better and more supportive work environment for us. one more way to manage emotional labour at work in a better manner could be that the management could bring up something which is sort of an open house session where employees are able to share their problems more openly be it personal or professional.

Fiona thinks her employer should have:

A staff assistance program which would take care of the employees' issues outside of work and in turn help them to return to work faster and without the stress of personal issues thus allowing them to perform more effectively.

Sagar feels:

Some incentives can be attached exclusively to the way a staff handles stress situations and customers to help them motivate doing what they do. They would feel recognised and appreciated as well.

Ashok is of the opinion:

Whatever needs to be done, should be done to make sure that the emotional turbulence that we have to go through leads to the thought that we are not worth anything... this should not happen. It needs to be made sure that we are happy, or at least not stressed.

Priyanka, however, feels:

With experience and time, we learn a lot and become emotionally stronger, However, the ones who newly join us tend to take things to heart, hence there needs to be greater attention that needs to be paid to them.

The basic essence of their lived experiences suggests quite a lot is expected from the leadership of the organisation in order to create the right environment for their employees to express unfelt emotions at work and cope with the negative consequences thereof. However, everyone did agree with the fact that with experience everyone tends to get a hold of themselves and figure out a way that best suits themselves to cope with the consequences. Anil feels:

If I get too angry, I play with my kids or cook food. This gives me comfort.

Whereas, Ashok says:

I cry out loud. It helps me to start afresh. For minor stresses, I take a break, try not to concentrate on that and watch some funny videos like – *The Kapil Sharma Show* on YouTube.

Sagar says:

To control my emotions, I generally count from 1 to 10 backwards and the anger mellows down. Some of my colleagues listen to music or “bhajans” (devotional songs), some talk to their family members.

### Discussion

Emotional labour as a phenomenon is not only a reality of the hospitality service profession but is also a necessity as far as organisations in the industry are concerned. Being friendly to the customer is a generally accepted to act as a value-added proposition to the product being offered in the hospitality industry (Bowen & Schneider, 1995). Hence, being able to manoeuvre within the realm of emotions as expected to be displayed by the organisation, to the suppression of the felt one, is not only a mapped competency of the job role but a mandate as well. There seemed to be a convergence of thought amongst all the participants in this respect. All of them agreed that being courteous and pleasant to the guest is a non-negotiable term of their job role. Hence, a quintessential element of their lifeworld surrounding their job. Adherence to the same must be complied with even to the peril of self-comfort, which, at times takes a toll on their physical as well as emotional well-being. Expressing unfelt emotions as a lived experience generally becomes a part of life for almost everyone as time passes. Also, the frequency of interaction and time spent on such interactions help them to get acquainted to the phenomenon of emotional labour. Thereby, making them accept this phenomenon as a part of their lifeworld. Pretty much corroborating the propositions put forth by Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) and Morris and Feldman's (1996) four-dimensional model of emotional labour. Keeping aside the inevitability aspect of emotional labour, the element of avoidance of concurrent retributions for non-avoidance also emerged as a key element of the lived experience. The participants felt that nonadherence may lead to termination, and, thus, they choose to resort to acquiescence silence (Harlos, 2016). Wherein, they accept the organisational stance and take their situations for granted while remaining relatively oblivious to alternatives. Lending a support to this line of thought is the relatively low self-worth as experienced by some of them due to their lack of educational qualification and perceived lack of respect for their profession by the customers. This conjecture, though not empirically examined, has left quite a deep impression in the minds of some of the participants. Thereby moderating their reality and their customer orientation which constantly shapes their perception about the job and their job attitude (Zablah et al., 2012).

The experience of enacting and experiencing emotional labour in the lifeworld turns out to be largely ambivalent. The experience and the consequences arising thereupon has had both constructive as well as negative impact on the participants. Most of the participants felt that the regular nature of this phenomenon has instilled in them a sense of empathy and understanding of other's emotional state. To which, they vector their responses and act them out accordingly. Overarching presence of a developed emotional intelligence is a definitive takeaway for most of them. Some of them feel they have developed a lot of patience, calmness, and maturity in handling adverse situations. Some even feel a sense of joy and pride to be able

to experience and meticulously execute emotional labour daily as a part of their job. However, the negative consequences do make their presence felt as well. Feelings of stress, burnout, emotional exhaustion and dissociation are prevalent as well. Their degree of presence keeps on shifting dependent on various factors. Some of it intrinsic and some extrinsic. They also feel that spill-over of the effects of emotional labour do happen from work to home which sometimes causes issues at home and their family members end up bearing the brunt of the same. Like a vicious circle, the same then circles back to work life again, quite in line with Wagner et al. (2014) argued that acting out unfelt emotions at work may have a spill-over into a person's personal life and vice versa. Thereby leading to possible strains in family relations. Meaning, even after one is away from workplace, things experienced at work keeps on influencing them (Eby et al., 2010; Ilies et al., 2009). One of the participants felt that, due to its nature of implementation at the organisational level, emotional labour breeds presenteeism amongst employees. She herself narrated a few instances where she reported to work despite being physically ill. Just because she could not take a leave and there was lot of rush at work. She also did not want her colleagues to get burdened by her share of the work.

All the participants agreed to the fact that coping with the consequences of living with emotional labour should be a bi-directional process with onus equally distributed between the individual as well as the organisation. Everyone has their own ways of adapting to this phenomenon and its consequences at a personal level. However, they felt that it is the leadership that needs to play a greater role here. They felt organisations need to acknowledge and recognise the negative consequences of emotional labour and devise interventions for employees to be able to better cope with this phenomenon and equally contribute at work to the best of their abilities. Developing a collective conscience at the organisational level will work wonders at a mutually beneficial level.

Emotional labour, along with its antecedents and consequences, has been studied thoroughly over the years and is very well understood. Its quintessential existence in the hospitality service is also very well understood and is largely accepted. It fits in very well within the paradigm of the service profit-chain theory (Heskett et al., 1994) as well as the emotional contagion theory (Hatfield et al., 1992, 1994). However, every individual is different. With different perception about an experience of a phenomenon in their lifeworld. Hence, a study of the lived experience of emotional labour as experienced by people in their lifeworld becomes very important.

This study does provide a fresh perspective to organisational leaders with respect to emotional labour and how it can better tackle the consequences arising out of it. Instances of presenteeism, acquiescence silence even low self-worth are some things which the leadership should investigate. Hotels and restaurants should invest more time and interest in their employees. Open house sessions can be organised for employees to voice their concerns and seek remedial assistance. Formal mentoring programmes can be started for younger staff wherein the senior and experienced staff members can fill in the shoes of mentors. Group counselling and/or group activity sessions can also be looked at to ease out the pent-up emotions resulting from emotional labour at work. Hotels can also look at enhancing the educational qualifications of their staff members through joint partnerships with hotel management schools. This would help resolve the low self-esteem issue and thereby help refine the worldview of such employees. Their affective realism perspective towards emotional labour and its consequences may also get changed. Efforts should also be made to help the employees realise their emotional intelligence level and then enhance it through various interventions. In fact, they can have certain measures in place to screen people for higher EI at the time of recruiting them. Since higher EI is a definitive sought-after quality in a hospitality service employee (Kim et al., 2019)

Lessons can also be learned from the individual experiences of camaraderie, which organisations can leverage upon to build a collective conscience surrounding the same. Hotels should take cognizance of such individuals and can appoint them as “EL Champions” to spread the word within and help in capacity building of the rest of the staff. Suggestions from the participants like incentivising critical incidents or consistently demonstrated accepted behaviour, counselling opportunities, learning, and development opportunities can be looked into while re-orienting the organisational strategy towards emotional labour and tackling its consequences. However, it starts from the basic step of acknowledging the existence of negative consequences of emotional labour and treating employees not as expendable resources.

### Limitations and Future Studies

Like every study, this too was bequeathed with limitations. The study only included participants from the private sector hospitality service organisations. Efforts can be taken to include public sector employees as well and understand their lived experiences as well. The perceived difference in the job between public and private sector may be considered while exploring their lived experiences. Also, convergent differences between the lived experience of men and women could be taken into consideration as well which did not form a part of the present study. Finally, a case study approach could be adopted to understand different organisational approaches that are adopted to help employees cope with the negative consequences of emotional labour and leverage upon the positives.

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## Appendix A

## Ethical and Similarity Index Clearance Provided by the Academic Integrity Committee, SCMHRD, Pune.

## Proforma-1

## Undertaking from SIU Authors before Communicating Manuscripts to any Journals/Books/Proceedings, etc.

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hereby give an undertaking that the manuscript entitled Emotional Labour in the Lifeworld of Indian Hospitality Service Employees: A Phenomenological Inquiry to be communicated to the journal/book/proceedings, etc. has been checked for its Similarity Index for Plagiarism through authentic Turnitin software tool; and that the document has been prepared by me/us and is my/our original work and free of any plagiarism. It was found that:

1.	The Similarity Index (SI) was: (Note: SI range: 0 to 10%; if SI is > 10%, then authors cannot communicate manuscript, attachment of SI report is mandatory)	3 %
2.	The ethical clearance for research work conducted obtained from: (Note: Name the consent obtaining body; if 'not applicable' then write no)	Academic Integrity Committee (AIC), SCMHRD
3.	The source of funding for research was: (Note: Name the funding agency; or write 'self' if no funding source is involved)	Self
4.	Conflict of interest: (Note: Tick ✓ whichever is applicable)	No
5.	The material (adopted text, tables, figures, graphs, etc.) as has been obtained from other sources, has been duly acknowledged in the ms: (Note: Tick ✓ whichever is applicable)	Yes

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Sanjay Bhattacharya

Since complete anonymity of participants have been ensured and similarity index of the manuscript is well within accepted limit, we approve the

Signature & Full Name  
of the Corresponding/Lead Author

Date: 17<sup>th</sup> August, 2020

Place: Pune

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## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Schedule**

#### **Brief explanation about the concept and purpose of the research**

Emotional labor is the process of managing feelings and expressions to fulfil the emotional requirements of a job. More specifically, workers are expected to regulate their emotions during interactions with customers, co-workers and superiors. Organisations tend to have laid down rules and regulations pertaining to the same and employees are expected to strictly adhere to them. Expressing the right kind of positive emotions can ensure customer satisfaction, repeat business opportunity, word-of-mouth publicity which ultimately impacts the profitability of the organisation.

The positives consequences related to this are – positive felt emotions, enhanced self-worth, well-being, enhanced self-efficacy, increased task effectiveness, job satisfaction, customer retention; while the negative consequences could lead to – burnout, stress, emotional exhaustion, spill-over effect, emotional dissonance, substance abuse, etc.

Initial set of questions are for getting few personal details about you and then we will get into questions related primarily to our research topic.

Feel free to refrain from answering any question you don't feel comfortable with.

#### **Key Questions:**

1. How did you come to join the hospitality sector in the first place? (reason for joining and continuing till date)
2. What drives you at work on a daily basis? (motivation - extrinsic or intrinsic? extrinsic - monetary rewards or intrinsic - personal values of service)
3. Can you help us understand your thoughts and feelings about acting out your emotions while serving guests at work? (encourage to narrate some incidents).
4. How do you feel about the need for having organisational standards of emotional displays (industry norms and service profit-chain theory, customer perception of hospitality, social construct of hospitality)?
5. Help us understand your own experience and feelings of going through emotional labour at work (surface or deep acting, conscious planning or matter of habit etc)
6. Take us through some instances to substantiate for the question above.
7. Explore about the consequences felt personally by them (burn-out, stress, emotional exhaustion and dissociation, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, self-actualisation etc.).
8. How do you think these experiences at work affect you as a person? How does it affect your family life? (self-reflect/ponder over consequences, spill-over effect and consequences thereafter).
9. Tell us more about the means and ways through which you cope with the consequences of emotional labour on a regular basis.
10. In what ways do you think your organisation can and should help you to better handle emotional labour at work.

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