



Exploring Emotional Labour at Work

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ABSTRACT

People in the 21st Century organisation determine the preferred future of the organisation and they are involved in Vital Connections, rather than processes. People will define themselves through their sense of self and the purpose of their work: "I am (name) and I help...." Their happiness will stem from the harmony that is possible when work has a purpose and that purpose is attainable through their commitments and endeavours" - David Clancy & Robert Webber -Roses & Rust.

Businesses are made up of people. People experience varying degrees of emotional engagements.

Emotions are the things that drive people drive into behaviors and actions that can either lead to job satisfaction or burnout; the two ends of the emotional labour continuum. Those very things, that everyone would like to deny, are just the things that need to be zeroed in on. The emotional workforce is the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display, emotional workforce is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value. This management requires regulation of one's emotion to comply with occupational or organizational norms known as "emotional labour". The statement becomes more relevant in case of the service sector as "engagement" is the premise of this sector.

Engagement" is a recent and emerging term that started to come into prominence in the early 2000's and is now gaining currency in mainstream business conversations around excellence. "Intent to stay" surveys are based on a rational or industrial mindset that believes people will perform at work, provided you give them enough rational reasons to stay at work such as competitive pay, monetary incentives and packaged benefits.

In a post modern world people want to be engaged emotionally in their work, they want to experience their work making a real difference to someone and see for themselves how they contribute to the organisation's purpose. It is not enough for people to simply "comply" with some third party standards regime or managerial direction and expect them to engage. People are looking for organizations and leaders who will engage them in the quest for meaningful work and this is a conversation around emotional engagement, not rational compliance.

Keywords : Emotional Engagement, Sense Of Self And The Purpose Of Their Work, Publicly Observable Facial And Bodily Display, Emotions Have An Exchange Value, Relationship Organization

Introduction to the Concept

The service sector is a conversation between people- what sort of conversation are you having with your employees, your customers and your regulators? Is it a conversation based on compliance or contribution? Are your relationships with your employees, customers or regulators adversarial in nature and low on trust or are they partnership based, creative and hopeful in their content and based on high trust? Are your conversations meaningful and full of possibilities for the future?

The above aspects essentially govern the service sector at large. For instance take the case of Hospitality Sector. It has regular interactions with customers / clients, bosses and employees. One has to come up with an organizationally acceptable frame of mind, a publicly observable facial and bodily display; Hochschild (1983, p7) thus requiring management of feelings. The effort or labour the employee puts in to bring out the lively interaction that lies at the core of customers perception of service quality is called Emotional Labour.

If we want our people to buy into any business changes, such as improved processes, quality goals or productivity improvements, and be really passionate and committed to these changes, we need to engage our people emotionally.

Traditional rational engagement strategies such as "change management or "quality compliance" are no longer cutting it with either employees or customers who want to be engaged emotionally. Some of the needs our employees and customers are looking for from us are rational and essential, such as the need for accuracy and availability in services and products. But this is not enough. Our enterprise stakeholders are telling us they need more from their engagement with us- they need emotional connection with our enterprise. Emotional engagement is the bigger idea if we are serious about delivering excellence in our enterprises.

"There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about." – It is the driving force behind service sector

Margaret J. Wheatley author of Turning to One Another, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009 is of the view point that many business improvement projects fail because they do not engage people emotionally and the almost exclusive focus on rational reasons for change such as automation, process improvement or regulatory compliance, rather than the search for meaning and purpose, often leads to a worse business outcome than before the project started. The fundamental proposition of this paper is that true business transformations

succeed when the collective voice of the organisation is emotionally engaged in a shared creative process of discovering what it is to experience meaningful work. There is no better platform in an organisation to engage people in the pursuit of meaningful work than the business processes which flow across the organisation, connecting internal and external customers and suppliers. Unfortunately, too often, efforts to improve business processes fail to realise the desired benefits because they do not truly engage the "hearts" of employees who operate these processes and the customers who receive the services.

Emotional commitment is the ever-elusive love of your job and love of your manager or organization ... Our data [have] proven, year after year, that the emotional side of engagement is actually four times more powerful than the rational side when it comes to driving the business impacts we care about ... When employees move from being disengaged to being highly engaged, their productivity improves 20 percentage points in performance levels. —Jean Martin, Executive Director, Corporate Leadership Council.

The above are methodologies to create an emotionally engaged workforce in an essentially closely interwoven "relationship organization" as relationships today form the premise for business excellence. The idea is to build service providers as contributors or bailers at the time of difficulty. But somewhere down the line the bottom line / front office operations or in general the managerial pyramid is run by human who have emotions of their own. "Smiling faces earn revenue but emotional turmoil beneath those friendly faces lead to burnout and emotional exhaustion. The service sector has the highest attrition rate as employees emotional display is no longer a private experience but a public act that is controlled by employer supervision. Thus emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value in terms of wages/salaries/tips/incentives but everytime finding a purpose, a helping hand by the service provider is impractical.

The service providers need to be courteous to customers in accordance with both social and occupational norms but customers have no obligation to return that empathy or even a courtesy for that matter. The need of today is to provide formal and informal ways to ventilate employees' anger thus

healing employees' wounds when they are hurt or insulted by customers. The time has come when some labour should be put into managing employees' emotions. Peter Senge's book the Fifth Discipline gave to the business world the liberating vision of a learning organisation as any group of people who are continually enhancing their capabilities to create what they want to create and to do this together.

For Peter Senge, says M.J. Smith, real learning gets to the heart of what it is to be human. We become able to re-create ourselves from who we are. This applies to both individuals and organisations. Thus, for a learning organisation it is not enough to survive. Survival learning, or what is more often termed adaptive learning, is important; indeed it is necessary. But for a learning organisation, adaptive learning must be joined by generative learning, learning that enhances our capacity to create and innovate something new from an understanding of who we are and where we have come from. If you want to make substantial changes to any business process, engage all the affected parties in a shared conversation around meaningful work: this is much more than back end modeling by a business analyst or consultant- it about facilitating deep conversations and fostering more authentic and creative relationships between people. It follows that in order for businesses to be truly transformed, the whole living organisational system of relationships needs to be engaged on the change journey. These living systems are the Relational Organisation organised in formulated, interconnected and interdependent personal relationships and work processes which are drawn together in order to get meaningful work done.

The goal of business excellence is to release an experience for continuous creation around meaningful work from first knowing as individuals, teams or the whole organisation, who we are and where we have come from. This is very different from the prevailing industrial mindset which defines people as the part they play as some cog in a static business process or business analyst/ consultant driven re engineering or automation of work without reference to the core identity of the Relational Organisation. Process Improvement should be a meaningful conversation about me, about you, about us and what can we become.

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