

Emotional Labour, Emotional Intelligence, and Psychological Distress

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The purpose of the study was to explore (1) whether employees differing in emotional intelligence level would differ in their emotional labour styles and (2) whether these styles would mediate the impact of emotional labour on psychological distress. To test the relationships, data was collected from employees of three public sector organizations situated in Quetta, Pakistan. After establishing the psychometric properties of the scales hypotheses were tested through Partial Least Squares (PLS) path modelling algorithm. The results of this study indicated that (a) emotional intelligence was positively and significantly related to deep acting; (b) surface acting was positively and significantly related to psychological distress, and; (c) neither surface acting nor deep acting mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological distress.

Keywords: Emotional Labour, Emotional Intelligence, Psychological Distress,

Hochschild (1983) coined the term *emotional labour* and defined EL as ‘the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display to keep up with job requirements. EL is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value’. Since 1983, EL has become an increasingly popular topic within the fields of psychology and management (e.g., Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000; Grandey, 2000; Grandey & Brauburger, 2002; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Zapf, 2002). In explanatory models of emotional labour (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Grandey, 2000), surface (SA) and deep acting (DA) are the two most frequently studied EL strategies. In DA, employee attempts to *deeply modify* internal feelings to match the required organizational display rules. DA involves changing inner feelings by altering something more than outward appearance. Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) referred to this act as “faking in good faith” because employees’ intent is to seem authentic to the audience. In SA, employee modifies outward displays to be consistent with display rules without shaping inner

feelings. In other words, employee hide felt emotions or fake unfelt emotions. Hence, SA is termed as “faking in bad faith” (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987).

EL has been found to be associated with emotional intelligence (EI) (Austin, Dore, & O’Donovan, 2008; Giardini & Frese, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Johnson & Spector, 2007; Mikolajczak, Menil, & Lumient, 2007; Totterdell & Holman, 2003). Mayer and Salovey (1997) defined EI as “the ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth”. There is accumulating evidence that EI abilities and traits influence numerous psychological adjustment variables such as psychological distress and depression (e.g., Besharat, 2007; Dawda & Hart, 2000; Slaski & Cartwright, 2002; Tsaousis & Nikolaou, 2005; Martinez-Pons, 1997). However, to our knowledge, there is no study testing the extent to which

EL strategies may mediate such a connection. Theories of EL (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005; Grandey, 2000; Zapf, Seifert, Schmutte, Mertini, & Holz, 2001) suggest that EL strategies at work are key vehicles of personality and organizational influences on numerous psychological adjustment variables (e.g., distress, anxiety, stress, coping).

The main objective of this study was to build and test on prior research the theoretical links between EL, EI, and psychological distress. In general, (1) employees with higher levels of EI were expected to engage more in the less destructive form of EL (i.e., DA) and; (2) EL strategies were expected to mediate the relationship between EI and psychological distress.

EL and EI

Various, empirical studies have explored the association between EI and EL strategies (e.g., Austin et al., 2008; Giardini & Frese, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Johnson & Spector, 2007; Mikolajczak et al., 2007; Totterdell & Holman, 2003). Austin et al. (2008) found no association between EI and DA and negative relationship between EI and SA. Giardini and Frese (2006) found that emotional competence was a significant personal resource in moderating associations between EL and job/health outcome. Johnson (2007) found a significant positive relationship between EI and DA. Johnson and Spector (2007) found that EI did not moderate the relationship between the EL strategies and personal outcomes (well-being). Mikolajczak et al. (2007) found negative relationship between EI and DA. Thus, further investigation is needed to unravel associations between EI and different EL strategies.

While there are numerous models and measures of EI, a number of EI dimensions are common across measures. In particular, self-emotion appraisal, others' emotional appraisal, the regulation of emotion, and the

use of emotion are dimensions that appear on almost every EI measure (e.g., Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Wong & Law, 2002).

Self-emotional appraisal relates to the individual's ability to understand their deep emotions and be able to express these emotions naturally, whereas others' emotional appraisal relates to peoples' ability to perceive and understand the emotions of those people around them (Wong & Law, 2002). These abilities form the major aspects of emotional work (Zapf et al., 2001). It is expected that emotionally intelligent employees will deep act more because they are better able to perceive the emotional display rules cues within the work settings, have knowledge what people around them feel, read people emotions accurately, and don't always maintain neutral expressions (i.e., smiles when happy or pleasant) (Caruso & Salovey, 2004).

The regulation of emotion relates to the ability of people to regulate their emotions, which enables them to recover rapidly from psychological distress (Wong & Law, 2002). Emotionally Intelligent people effectively manage emotions in oneself and others by moderating negative emotions and enhancing pleasant ones (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Effective regulation of emotions allows an individual to induce and sustain a positive affective state, which subsequently promotes helping behaviour and motivation (Joseph & Newman, 2010). According to Butler et al. (2003), people with high ability to regulate emotions are less likely to adopt the strategy of emotion suppression (i.e., SA) and instead engage in a more effective strategy, such as cognitive appraisal. It is expected that emotionally intelligent employees would be more prone toward employing the DA strategy, because they can "psych up", calm down, or maintain a good mood as desirable and can cheers others up, calm others down, or manage others feelings appropriately (Caruso & Salovey, 2004).

Finally, the use of emotion relates to the ability of individuals to make use of their emotions by directing them towards constructive activities and personal performance (Wong & Law, 2002). Emotionally intelligent employees are better able to prioritize thinking with the help of emotions, generate emotions as an aid to judgment, and consider multiple points of view (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). It is expected that emotionally intelligent people would engage themselves more in deep acting (than surface acting) because by effectively using emotions they are able to swing their moods from negative to positive in order to enhance persistence during difficult times (e.g.; encountering a difficult customer) or stimulating creativity in solving difficult problems (e.g., choosing among different alternatives for satisfying the difficult customer) (Carmeli, 2003).

Hypothesis 1a: Individuals with high emotional intelligence will be less likely than others to surface act.

Hypothesis 1b: Individuals with high emotional intelligence will be more likely than others to deep act.

EL and Psychological Distress

SA (i.e., modification of facial expression) requires more attention and effort than does DA (i.e., modification of inner feelings) (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003; Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003). SA is positively related to emotional dissonance and felt inauthenticity (Liu, Prati, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2008). Emotional dissonance is an aversive psychological state in which one experiences a sense of discrepancy between one's real self and expressed emotions. According to Wharton (1999), the major reason for this discrepancy is that, the organizational display rules prevent employees from interacting with customers based on spontaneous intuition, which compel employees to replace and suppress their own emotional response by an organizationally sanctioned response.

Because individuals are motivated to maintain or enhance a sense of oneness and SA leads to inauthentic/fake emotional displays (increases emotional dissonance), it has been argued that SA results in psychological distress (i.e., depression) (Liu et al., 2008). Grandey (2003) asserts that, "DA minimizes emotional dissonance by bringing feelings in line with expressions, so DA's relationship with emotional exhaustion should be weaker than the relationship between SA and emotional exhaustion" (p. 89). Emotional exhaustion (a key component of burnout) closely resembles traditional stress reactions that are studied in occupational stress research, such as job-related depression and anxiety (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Research has demonstrated that SA is more positively and strongly related to emotional exhaustion than DA (Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Totterdell & Holman, 2003).

Hypothesis 2: DA's relationship with psychological distress is weaker than the relationship between SA and psychological distress.

In general, a given variable functions as a mediator to the extent that it accounts for the relationship between the predictor and the criterion (Baron & Kenny, 1986). This study predicts that DA and SA will mediate the relationship between EI and psychological distress.

Research suggests that EI abilities and traits contribute to good physical and psychological health (e.g., Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer, 1999). For example, people who do not recognize and understand their own emotions well are more prone to depression and anxiety (Ciarrochi, Scott, Deane, & Heaven, 2003), substance use disorders, eating disorders, and somatic complaints (Taylor, 2001; Conrad, Schilling, Langenbuch, Haidl, & Liedtke, 2001). In a study conducted on clinically depressed patients, Downey et al. (2008) found significant associations between severity of depression

and the EI dimensions of Emotional Management ($r = -0.56$) and Emotional Control ($r = -0.62$). In addition, various empirical studies have well documented the significant negative relationship between overall EI and psychological distress (e.g., Besharat, 2007; Tsousis & Nikolaou, 2005).

As noted above, the primary value of understanding EI lies in the prediction of certain outcomes such as psychological distress. The previous discussion about the relationship between EL strategies and psychological distress shows that EL strategies may affect the level of psychological distress. Thus, EI is related to psychological distress because EI affects emotional labour, in that EI is a vital characteristic that enables an individual to appropriately match the EL strategy (DA vs. SA) to the situation. Consequently, the EL has a direct impact on the psychological distress level. The above discussion suggests the hypothesis that EL will mediate the effects of EI on psychological distress.

Hypothesis 3a: SA will mediate the relationship between EI and psychological distress

Hypothesis 3b: DA will mediate the relationship between EI and psychological distress

Method

Participants:

The sample for this study consisted of 200 employees from three public sector organizations situated in the province of Balochistan, Pakistan. 92 participants of the total sample (46 percent) were males and 108 (54 percent) were females. The mean age for this sample was 31.48 years ($SD = 8.10$). All participants were treated in accordance with the "Ethical principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" (American Psychological Association, 2002). Administration of the questionnaires was carried out by post graduate students who acted as research

assistants and no monetary incentive was provided.

Measures:

Psychological distress. Psychological distress was measured by Chan's (2005) twenty item scale. This scale measures psychological distress in terms of current non-psychotic symptoms in the five symptom areas represented by scales of health concerns, sleep problems, anxiety, dysphoria, and suicidal ideas. Respondents were requested to rate each symptom statement on a 5-point scale (*not at all* to *extremely*) by comparing themselves during the past 2 weeks with their 'usual selves'. Coefficients alphas for the five dimensions were: health concerns: .75; sleep problems: .68; anxiety: .60; dysphoria: .86; and suicidal ideas: .78.

Emotional Labour. SA was measured by three items adopted from Grandey's (2003) EL scale. The sample items include, "I just pretend to have the emotions I need to display for my job". DA was measured by three items adopted from Brotheridge and Lee (1998) EL scale. The sample items include, "I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others". The response scale has been seven point Likert-type scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree).

Emotional intelligence. Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS: Wong & Law, 2002), one of self-report measures based on Salovey and Mayer's model (1990), taps individuals' knowledge about their emotional abilities. Specifically, the WLEIS is a measure of beliefs concerning self-emotional appraisal (ability to understand one's deep emotions and be able to express these emotions naturally), others' emotional appraisal (ability to perceive and understand the emotions of other people), regulation of emotion (ability to regulate one's own emotions), and use of emotion (ability to make use of one's emotions by directing them toward constructive activities and personal

performance). The response scale has been seven point Likert-type scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree).

Design and Analysis

Inspection of skewness and kurtosis statistics revealed non normality for most of the items. Because of nonnormal data we resorted to *Partial Least Squares* (PLS) path modelling algorithm. PLS is far less restrictive in its distributional assumptions and sample size restrictions as compared to covariance-based structural equation modelling (CBSEM) (Fornell & Cha, 1994).

In line with Henseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics (2009) recommendations, PLS model was analyzed and interpreted in two stages: the measurement model and the structural model. The measurement model relates to the relations between manifest variables (observed items) and latent variables. The measurement model is tested by assessing the validity and reliability of the items and constructs in the model. Individual item reliability was assessed by examining the loadings of respective items on their respective latent construct (Hulland, 1999), whereas Composite reliability ($\hat{\rho}_c$) (Werts, Linn, & Joreskog, 1974) and Cronbach's alpha (1951) were used to assess the reliability of scales. Convergent and discriminant validity of constructs were assessed via Fornell and Larcker's (1981) AVE test. An AVE value greater than 0.50 indicates that a latent variable is able to explain more than half of the variance of its indicators on average. Evidence of the discriminant validity occurs when square root of the variance extracted exceed the correlations between the factors making each pair (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Regarding structural model, the nonparametric bootstrapping procedure using 1000 subsamples was performed to evaluate the statistical significance of each path coefficient and to provide confidence intervals for all parameter estimates. Goodness-of-fit (GoF) (Tenenhaus, Esposito

Vinzi, Chatelin, & Lauro, 2005) was employed to assess the overall fit of the model. GoF is normed between 0 and 1, where a higher value represents better path model estimations.

Results

Measurement Model

The factor loadings from the final PLS measurement models are reported in Figure 1. PD5 (Sleep problem) due to factor loading of less than .50 was dropped from further analysis. All remaining items loaded significantly (> .50) on their respective factors which was an indication of indicator reliability. Composite reliability ($\hat{\rho}_c$) (Werts et al., 1974) and Cronbach's alpha (1951) values for all scales exceeded the minimum threshold level of 0.70, thus indicating the reliability of all scales used in this study (Table 1). Results revealed that the variance extracted for all factors exceeded the minimum threshold value of 0.50 which was an indication of convergent validity of all scales (Table 1). Fornell and Larcker's (1981) test for discriminant validity revealed relatively high variances extracted for each factor compared to the inter-scale correlations, which was an indication of discriminant validity of four constructs (i.e., EI, psychological distress, SA, and DA) (Table 1).

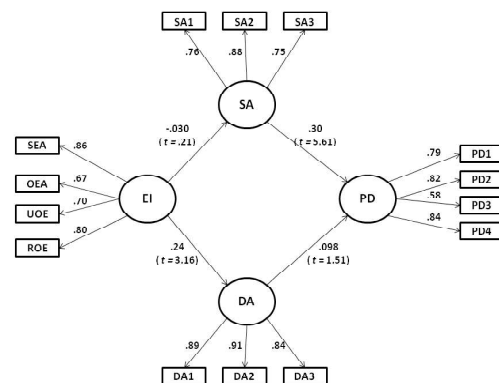


Figure 1. Structural Model.

EI = Emotional intelligence; PD = Psychological distress; SA = Surface acting; DA = Deep acting.

Table 1. Reliability, Convergent and Discriminant Validity

	Correlations				CR ^b	α ^c	AVE ^d
	1	2	3	4			
1. DA	.88 ^a			.91	.86	.78	
2. EI	.24	.76		.85	.77	.59	
3. PD	.20	-.18	.77	.86	.76	.60	
4. SA	.36	-.02	.33	0.80	.72	.64	

EI = Emotional intelligence; PD = Psychological distress; SA = Surface acting; DA = Deep acting.

^a square root of AVE. ^b Composite reliability (ρ_c) = $(\sum \lambda_i)^2 / [(\sum \lambda_i)^2 + \sum Var(\epsilon_i)]$, where λ_i is the outer factor loading, and $Var(\epsilon_i) = 1 - \lambda_i$, is the measurement error or the error variance associated with the individual indicator variable(s) for that given factor (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

^c α = Cronbach Alpha (Cronbach, 1951). ^d Average variance extracted (AVE) = $(\sum \lambda_i^2) / [(\sum \lambda_i^2) + \sum Var(\epsilon_i)]$, where where λ_i is the outer factor loading, and $Var(\epsilon_i) = 1 - \lambda_i$, is the measurement error or the error variance associated with the individual indicator variable(s) for that given factor (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Structural Model

The results shown in Figure 1 supported hypothesis 1a and 1b: the coefficient of the path from EI to SA was insignificant [$\hat{\alpha} = -.03, t = 0.21, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI}: (-.26) - (.21)$] and the coefficient of the path from EI to DA was significant [$\hat{\alpha} = .23, t = 3.16, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI}: (.08) - (.39)$]. Regarding hypothesis 2, SA had a significant direct impact on psychological distress [$\hat{\alpha} = .30, t = 5.56, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI}: (.20) - (.41), f^2 = .067$] and the impact of DA on psychological distress was insignificant [$\hat{\alpha} = .09, t = 1.51, p > .05, 95\% \text{ CI}: (-.02) - (.22), f^2 = .010$].

Exogenous variables in the model (i.e., DA, and SA) explained low amounts of variance of psychological distress ($R^2 = .12$). The value of R^2 may be decomposed in terms of the multiple regression coefficients and correlations between the dependent variable and the explanatory ones (Tenenhaus et al., 2005). This decomposition allows understanding the contribution of each explanatory variable to the prediction of the dependent one. For this model, SA was the most important variable in the prediction of psychological distress, contributing to 82.5 %

of the R^2 . On the contrary, DA contribution was only 16.33 % (far less than SA) (Table 2). The goodness-of-fit (GoF) (Tenenhaus et al., 2005) index for the PLS model was 0.21, which indicated an acceptable data-model fit.

Table 2. The Explanation of Psychological Distress ($R^2 = .12$)

	β_j	r	^a Contribution to R^2 (%)	f^2
SA	.30	.33	82.50	.067
DA	.09	.20	16.33	.001

^a, where β_j is the path coefficient, y is the dependent latent variable and, x_j is the independent latent variable. $f^2 = (R^2_{incl} - R^2_{excl}) / (1 - R^2_{incl})$. f^2 values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 signify small, medium, and large effects, respectively (Cohen, 1988)

To test Hypothesis 3a and 3b proposing that emotional labour mediates the effect of EI on psychological distress, multiple mediator model (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) was tested with case values of composite latent variables obtained in the PLS analysis. As can be seen in Table 3, the 95 percent confidence intervals for both paths included zero, therefore both SA and DA did not mediate the relationship between EI and psychological distress.

Table 3. Bootstrap Results for Indirect Effects

Model	Path	Indirect effect	S.E	LL 95 CI	UL 95 CI
1	EI -> SA -> PD	-.0081	0.019	-0.054	0.025
2	EI -> DA -> PD	0.050	0.024	-0.001	0.081

Note. Values are calculated through a bootstrapping routine with 200 cases and 1000 samples.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among EL, EI, and psychological distress in a sample of employees working in public sector organizations. A specific objective was to determine the mediatory role of EL in the relationship between EI and psychological distress. The majority of proposed hypothesis received considerable support, clearly demonstrating the relationships of the EL with EI and psychological distress. This is the first empirical study (to my knowledge) in a South Asian context to assess the relationship of EL strategies with other variables.

It was hypothesized that EI would be differentially related to the EL strategies, that is, emotionally intelligent employees would engage more in DA (modification of internal feelings) than SA (faking or suppression of feelings). In line with previous studies (Coté, 2005; Johnson, 2007) support was found for this hypothesis. This finding indicates that EI is a vital characteristic that enables an individual to appropriately match the EL strategy to the situation (Feldman Barrett, & Gross, 2001). Furthermore, EI enables people to deep act more that is, to understand people, be empathetic to their circumstances, and internalizes their feelings. Conversely employees low on EI are more inclined to surface act, because they are unable to accurately perceive, appraise, understand, and express emotions in order to comply with the demands of the situation as well as to internalize others feelings. In other words, it is easy for employees low on EI to suppress or fake emotions than to generate positive emotions via perceiving, understanding and regulating emotions (EI abilities).

It was hypothesized that individuals performing SA would be more susceptible to psychological distress than individuals engaged in DA. In line with previous studies (e.g., Johnson, 2007; Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Totterdell & Holman, 2003) support was found

for this hypothesis. SA was the most important variable in the prediction of psychological distress, contributing to 82.25 % of the R^2 . This finding corroborates the assertion that emotional dissonance (the difference between felt and expressed emotions) is the direct outcome of SA and leads to emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2003), which in turn positively influences many negative outcomes such as psychological distress (Panagopoulou, Kersbergen, & Maes, 2002). Furthermore, there was no relationship between DA and psychological distress and this finding was consistent with previous findings (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003). This finding suggest that employees who engage themselves in DA are better able to avoid psychological distress by actively changing their emotions (rather than just simply modifying outer expressions as in SA) in order to comply with organizational display rules.

Finally no support was found for the mediatory role of EL in the relationship between EI and psychological distress. In order to gain further understanding of the situation, second model was tested by adding an additional path from EI to psychological distress. The results indicated significant direct impact of EI on psychological distress [$\hat{\alpha} = -.24, t = 3.10, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI: } (-.36) - (-.09), f^2 = .06$]. This shows that EI directly impacts psychological distress rather than through other mediatory variables.

Implications

The current study provides several implications for practice. It is evident from the results of current study that in order to promote DA, organizations must find ways to enhance employees' EI level. This could be accomplished via cultivating a service-oriented organizational climate, training and socialization of employees. Training programs focusing on emotional regulation skills and DA techniques to cope with emotional demands of work can help in reducing the deleterious

effects of SA. Organizations must find ways to hire emotionally intelligence people against jobs that require substantial amounts of emotional work. Finally, employers can help employees to internalize their roles rather to fake the emotions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) by providing them adequate resources needed to meet the demands of the job.

Limitations

There are few limitations in this study that must be mentioned. First, the results are specific to organizations in one geographical area and may or may not be generalizable to other areas. Second, we used a cross-sectional design, which limited our ability to draw any causal references regarding the relationships found among variables in the study. The direction of causality (in cross-sectional studies) cannot be established and will have to be examined using longitudinal data. Finally, all respondents were full-time employees and these findings may not be applicable to part-time employees.

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