

# Exploration of Emotional Labor Among Human Resources

## Specialists

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### ABSTRACT

This study concentrates on human resource (HR) professionals, exploring their experiences with emotional labor. It examines the antecedents of emotional labor, including organizational culture from the managerial perspective and interpersonal relationships from a personal standpoint, as well as the outcomes of emotional labor, such as retention intentions and work-life balance. The study aims to identify the relationships between these factors and their impact on Human Resources Specialists.

The study applies the "literature analysis" and "interview methods." In addition to collecting and reviewing relevant academic literature, interviews were conducted with several Human Resources Specialists working in varied organizations. By using these two corresponding research methods, the study aims to enrich its reliability and validity while providing a more exhaustive exploration of the point.

The research findings show that a positive corporate culture has a favorable impact on the emotions of Human Resources Specialists, while work experiences have extreme influences on their emotional well-being. Personal work experiences are closely related to interpersonal relationships and workplace perceptions, with a positive correlation between workplace perceptions and retention intentions. Finally, the study also explores the relationship between negative work emotions and work-life balance among Human Resources Specialists. These findings will help future researchers further investigate the impact of emotional labor on Human Resources Specialists and furnish recommendations for improving the work environment, increasing employee job satisfaction, and encouraging work-life balance.

**KEYWORDS:** Emotional Labor; Human Resources Specialist

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of emotional labor has become a focal point of scholarly attention, initially centered on frontline airline staff who, due to their frequent customer interactions, are particularly susceptible to emotional labor. As research has evolved, the scope has broadened to encompass organizational employees, who encounter emotional challenges in their everyday work and interactions with peers, including supervisors and subordinates,

highlighting the relevance of emotional issues within organizational contexts (Wu & Cheng, 2003). A growing body of literature suggests that the study of emotional labor should not be confined to frontline service roles but should also include the interactions among all organizational members (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Humphrey, 2008; Wu & Hu, 2013).

In human resources, personnel frequently engage with various organizational levels and units, serving as an internal support service and focusing primarily on employee-related services. In performing their roles, human resources professionals often undertake emotional labor to boost employee satisfaction and foster a deeper affiliation with the organization, thereby bolstering support for organizational policies and enhancing overall job satisfaction.

This research aims to examine the conditions of emotional labor among human resources personnel through the application of documentary analysis, interviews, and case studies. Documentary analysis involves collecting and synthesizing information related to market data, survey reports, and industry dynamics to thoroughly and accurately address the research topic. This method entails gathering an extensive range of documents—including government reports, business studies, record databases, organizational documents, library books, scholarly articles, and newspapers—and involves processes of reading, organizing, describing, classifying, and interpreting (translated by Chu, 2000). The interview method, or conversational technique, serves as a fundamental psychological research tool that involves direct interaction between the researcher and the subject to explore the latter's psychological and behavioral responses. Depending on the research needs, interviews can be structured or unstructured, allowing for a broad application across complex research topics by capturing a wide range of qualitative data. This flexibility and the ability to manage diverse information make the interview method highly valued.

The case study method, widely utilized across disciplines, helps in deeply understanding specific cases and is instrumental in deriving generalizations from individual instances (McLeod, 2008).

To ensure the alignment of participants with the research theme, this study employed judgment sampling to select its subjects based on specific criteria: 1) engagement in human resources within a corporation; 2) at least one year of tenure at the company, providing them with an in-depth understanding of the organization; 3) the ability to communicate fluently in Chinese and respond appropriately to interview questions. Consequently, three human resources professionals meeting these criteria were chosen as subjects for detailed case studies. These individuals, each from different companies and holding varied HR-related roles, had all been with their respective companies for more than a year and possessed a thorough understanding of their organizational operations. Interviews were conducted over a period from December 15 to December 24, 2024.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

## 2.1 Emotional Labor

The notion of "Emotional Labor" was first articulated in Hochschild's seminal work, *The Managed Heart* (1983). In this influential text, Hochschild not only introduced emotional dynamics into discussions of organizational frameworks but also examined how employees perform emotional labor in various work settings. According to Hochschild (1983), emotional labor is defined as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value." This definition underscores the necessity for employees, across diverse work environments, to display emotions, facial expressions, and body language that align with organizational expectations during interactions with clients or service recipients.

Since Hochschild's initial introduction of the concept in 1983, scholars worldwide have dedicated considerable efforts to further developing and refining the theory of emotional labor. In Taiwan, research on emotional labor has largely drawn from Hochschild's foundational ideas while adapting definitions to fit specific research populations. For instance, Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) focused on frontline service employees, highlighting the roles they play in customer interactions. They argued that emotional labor involves the expression of appropriate emotions, emphasizing that such displays must conform to organizational norms. Morris and Feldman (1996) expanded on this by defining emotional labor as the effort, planning, and regulation required to achieve the emotions expected by the organization during interpersonal interactions.

Grandey (2000) synthesized the ideas proposed by Hochschild (1983), Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), and Morris and Feldman (1996), incorporating Gross's (1998) emotion regulation theory to offer a more comprehensive definition. She described emotional labor as "the process by which individuals regulate their internal feelings and external emotional expressions to achieve organizational goals." In Taiwan, Wu and Lin (2005) conceptualized emotional labor as a deliberate effort to control emotions, language, and body movements to create a workplace atmosphere that fosters feelings of care, safety, and comfort among customers.

## 2.2 Measurement of Emotional Labor

### 2.2.1 Emotional Labor Display

According to Bailey (1996), emotional labor involves employees deliberately managing and performing emotions in ways that meet the expectations set by their employers within the workplace. Morris and Feldman (1996) refined this concept by identifying four core components of emotional labor: the frequency of emotional display, adherence to display rules, the type of emotions required, and emotional dissonance. These components are outlined in detail below:

- (1) **Frequency of Emotional Display:** This dimension refers to how often employees interact with customers. As the frequency of contact increases, so does the expectation to display appropriate emotional expressions, intensifying the need for emotional labor.
- (2) **Adherence to Display Rules:** The extent to which individuals must follow organizational emotional display guidelines grows with the length and intensity of interactions. The longer the interaction duration, the more

emotional labor employees are required to perform.

- (3) **Types of Emotions Required:** This element pertains to the specific emotional responses employees are expected to exhibit. The emotions expressed often vary depending on the people, situations, or contexts they encounter, requiring individuals to adjust their emotional presentations accordingly.
- (4) **Emotional Dissonance:** Emotional dissonance occurs when there is a significant discrepancy between an employee's internal emotional state and the outward emotional expressions mandated by the organization. The severity of this dissonance is positively correlated with the gap between genuine feelings and required emotional displays — the greater the gap, the more demanding the emotional labor.

### 2.2.2 Degree of Emotional Labor

The conceptualization of emotional labor has progressively shifted toward recognizing it as a marketable commodity within the service industry, where emotional expression is regarded as an essential component of service delivery. In 1997, Morris and Feldman refined their framework, condensing emotional labor into three core dimensions: frequency of interactions, duration of interactions, and emotional dissonance. Brotheridge and Grandey (2002) expanded on this by categorizing emotional labor into two primary focuses: job-focused and employee-focused.

The job-focused dimension includes the frequency, intensity, duration, and clarity of emotional display rules, encompassing both the expression of positive emotions and the suppression of negative emotions. In contrast, the employee-focused dimension addresses the processes of surface acting and deep acting that employees undertake to regulate their emotions.

The antecedents of emotional labor are influenced not only by external factors within the work environment but also by personal characteristics (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). In Taiwan, Lin (2000) synthesized the interpretations of emotional labor provided by Hochschild and Adelman, as well as the framework proposed by Morris and Feldman (1996), to identify five key dimensions of emotional labor: basic emotional expression, surface emotional control, deep emotional acting, emotional diversity, and degree of interpersonal interaction. These dimensions are described as follows:

- (1) **Basic Emotional Expression:** The more individual's express emotions in their roles, the higher their emotional labor burden becomes (Hochschild, 1983).
- (2) **Surface Emotional Control:** When individuals exert minimal control over their emotions, the impact on their genuine emotional state is relatively minor.
- (3) **Deep Emotional Acting:** A higher degree of emotional regulation indicates that individuals experience more internal emotional conflict as they align their inner feelings with expected displays. The greater the deep acting required, the heavier the emotional labor burden.
- (4) **Emotional Diversity:** This dimension refers to the variety of emotional responses employees are required to display in different scenarios. Increased emotional diversity necessitates greater adaptability, thereby

intensifying the emotional labor burden.

- (5) Degree of Interpersonal Interaction: As the frequency and duration of employees' interactions with others increase, so does the need for face-to-face or other forms of direct communication. Consequently, a higher degree of interpersonal interaction leads to a greater emotional labor burden.

### 2.2.3 Summary of Emotional Labor

A review of various scholarly perspectives on emotional labor highlights two key themes. First, building on Hochschild's framework, emotional labor is recognized as a skill with economic value, wherein workers cultivate the ability to regulate their emotions to meet organizational expectations for emotional display. Second, emotional labor is an inherent requirement in any job involving interpersonal interactions. As a result, organizations must implement clear emotional display guidelines to assist employees in managing their emotional expressions effectively, particularly when engaging with customers. In summary, emotional labor is viewed as a valuable economic skill, and organizations should provide appropriate support and guidance to help employees navigate the emotional demands of interpersonal interactions.

## 2.3 Antecedents of Emotional Labor

### (1) Organizational Perspective – Organizational Culture

Schein (2004) argues that organizational culture is formed through a learning process within organizations to address challenges related to external adaptation and internal integration. This culture comprises shared basic assumptions that are deemed valid because of their proven effectiveness in problem-solving. These assumptions are passed on to new members as guiding principles for addressing similar issues in the future. Schein highlights that organizational culture profoundly influences members' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors through various mechanisms, including formal rules, language, symbols, rituals, stories, taboos, and group norms.

### (2) Individual Perspective – Interpersonal Relationships

Grandey and Brauburger (2002) emphasize that interpersonal conflict is a key emotional event that can evoke negative emotional responses. Such conflicts not only induce negative emotions but also have the potential to cause a range of adverse effects on individuals. Frone (2000) found that conflicts with supervisors are linked to negative work attitudes, while conflicts with colleagues are associated with elevated psychological stress. These negative emotional reactions stemming from interpersonal conflicts can impede employees' ability to express positive emotions and may result in the occurrence of emotional labor (Grandey & Brauburger, 2002).

## 2.4 Outcomes of Emotional Labor

### (1) Retention Intention

Retention intention refers to an employee's desire or willingness to remain employed with their current organization. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, this concept can be divided into two components: "retention" and "intention". Retention involves maintaining one's employment status, avoiding resignation, and continuing the existing work arrangement, while intention reflects an individual's internal motivation or preference to stay. Therefore, retention intention represents the degree to which an employee is committed to remaining in their current role.

Mowday, Porer, and Steers (1982) outline three key elements of retention intention: (A) the desire to stay, which reflects an employee’s positive sentiment toward their organization or position; (B) the tendency to stay, which occurs when an employee remains in their role due to a lack of alternative job opportunities; and (C) actual retention, which indicates an active decision to continue working in the current position. Tsai and Lu (1998) note that employees often consider their professional skills and areas of expertise when evaluating their willingness to stay with their current employer. Lin (2005) emphasizes that retention intention focuses on employees’ commitment to maintaining their existing jobs and highlights the importance of organizational identification and high-performance behavior in fostering this commitment.

(2) Work-Family Balance

Work-family balance refers to an individual’s capacity to achieve a harmonious equilibrium between the demands of work and family life. Barnett (1998) defines work-family balance as the effective coordination of responsibilities across both domains. Similarly, Clark (2000) asserts that work-family balance involves reducing role conflicts, thereby enabling individuals to attain high levels of satisfaction in both work and family settings.

Greenhaus et al. (2003) describe work-family balance as a state in which individuals are fully engaged in both work and family roles, resulting in a sense of fulfillment and a clear sense of purpose across these commitments. Grzywacz and Carlson (2007) further elaborate that work-family balance involves the alignment and mutual accommodation of responsibilities in both domains, allowing individuals to meet the expectations associated with their respective roles. In summary, scholars broadly agree that work-family balance represents an individual’s ability to achieve satisfaction and maintain harmony between the distinct spheres of work and family life.

**3. RESEARCH ANALYSIS**

3.1 Corporate Culture and Work Emotions: Alignment and Challenges

The participants in this study include three human resources (HR) professionals from different companies. Their ages range from 24 to 26 years, all are male, and their work experience varies from one to two years. All participants hold a university degree. The basic demographic information of the interviewees is shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Interviewees' Basic Information

Code	Gender	Age	Work Category	Job Title	Work Experience
A	Male	24	Human Resource Management	Recruitment Specialist	1 year
B	Male	26	Human Resource Management	HR Specialist	2 years
C	Male	25	Human Resource Management	HR Intern	1 year

(1) Corporate Culture and Employee Perceptions

Interviewee A expressed a strong sense of alignment with the corporate culture of his current company, noting that it prioritizes employees and adopts a people-centered approach. He found this value particularly appealing. A people-centered corporate culture typically signifies that the company values employees' needs and well-being, creating a positive work environment that enhances employee satisfaction and engagement.

Interviewee B highlighted the company's recent implementation of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policy, which emphasizes the importance of promoting diversity and fostering a harmonious environment. This policy reflects the company's commitment to respecting various cultural backgrounds and identities, thereby strengthening employees' sense of belonging and overall well-being.

Similarly, Interviewee C emphasized the company's focus on employee diversity, believing that such an approach allows the organization to gain insights from a variety of perspectives, which is beneficial for the company's growth and development. These responses reveal that corporate culture significantly influences employees' emotions and work attitudes. A positive corporate culture can enhance employee engagement and job satisfaction, thereby improving work performance and productivity. Additionally, a company's focus on diversity and inclusion can foster a collaborative work environment, reducing unnecessary conflicts and tensions and improving overall team cohesion and productivity.

### (2) Negative Work Experiences and Emotional Impact

Despite the positive aspects of corporate culture, interviewees also shared negative work experiences that impacted their emotions. Interviewee A mentioned encountering unfriendly attitudes from job applicants during interviews. These negative experiences directly affected his emotional well-being, reducing his job satisfaction and engagement.

Interviewee B noted that when he was required to assist with tasks that should have been handled by supervisors or others, it caused emotional strain. This highlights how work-related stress and workload can impact employees' emotions. Interviewee C pointed out that interactions with external personnel sometimes involved encountering poor attitudes, which negatively affected his emotional state and work performance. These accounts demonstrate that negative work experiences can have a direct impact on employees' emotional well-being, job satisfaction, and productivity.

### (3) Recommendations for Enhancing Corporate Culture and Work Experience

To address these challenges, companies should continuously strengthen positive corporate culture by promoting and practicing values such as people-centered approaches, diversity, and inclusion. In addition, companies should pay close attention to employees' work experiences and actively create a positive work environment to improve employee satisfaction and emotional well-being. By fostering a supportive and inclusive corporate culture and addressing negative work experiences, companies can enhance long-term employee engagement, job performance,

and organizational growth.

### 3.2 The Impact of Work Experience on Workplace Emotions and Retention Intention

An individual's work experience plays a crucial role in shaping their interpersonal relationships, workplace perceptions, and retention intention. These influences are rooted in how individuals perceive and experience their company's corporate culture, work environment, and job responsibilities.

**4.** Interviewee A exhibited a positive outlook on internal interpersonal interactions, describing his work environment as both friendly and satisfactory. His favorable workplace perception was primarily driven by alignment with the company's people-centered culture, which prioritizes employee needs and contributions. This positive work experience reduced the potential for interpersonal conflicts to negatively affect his emotions and increased his commitment to remaining with the organization. Additionally, he expressed optimism regarding his future career development, reflecting a strong intention to stay.

In contrast, Interviewee B experienced negative work incidents that impacted his interpersonal relationships and workplace perceptions. He reported feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration, particularly about company policy decisions, which diminished his emotional engagement and work commitment. These negative experiences introduced uncertainty regarding his retention intention. Although he currently plans to remain with the company, his loyalty and long-term commitment are likely to be influenced by future developments within the organization.

Interviewee C presented a more neutral perspective. While he acknowledged that his work experiences affected him, they had a relatively minor impact on his interpersonal interactions within the company. He maintained a generally positive attitude toward his job, describing his workplace and colleagues as friendly and supportive. This overall satisfaction contributed to a relatively high retention intention.

These findings indicate that an individual's work experience is a critical factor in shaping workplace relationships, perceptions, and retention intention. Positive work experiences, characterized by supportive environments and strong organizational values, foster greater loyalty and commitment, ultimately improving job performance and contributing to organizational stability. Conversely, negative experiences can lead to dissatisfaction, reduced engagement, and uncertainty, potentially affecting job performance and the organization's overall functioning.

Therefore, organizations should actively seek to improve the work environment to enhance employee satisfaction and strengthen retention intention. This can be achieved by promoting a positive corporate culture, fostering healthy interpersonal relationships, offering competitive working conditions and professional development opportunities, and maintaining open and transparent communication channels. Such measures not only enhance employee well-being and performance but also contribute to the organization's long-term success and sustainability.

### 3.3 Exploring Negative Work Emotions and Work-Family Balance Among HR Professionals



Interviewee A noted that he engages in relaxing activities, such as exercising or listening to music, as a way to manage negative emotions and role conflicts encountered at work. These activities not only help him reduce the effects of negative emotions but also enable him to achieve a sense of balance between his professional and personal life. His approach underscores the importance he places on self-care and mental health, recognizing that effective emotional management is essential for sustaining a positive and productive work state.

Interviewee B highlighted the significance of maintaining a clear separation between work and family life. He believes that individuals should perform their professional responsibilities diligently while also striving to be supportive family members and reliable colleagues. His ability to adjust his mindset and maintain role boundaries demonstrates his efforts to achieve work-life balance. This perspective reflects his values concerning both work and family, showing his commitment to maintaining strong performance and healthy relationships across various roles.

Interviewee C, by contrast, prefers to address role conflicts privately, ensuring that his work-related stress or emotions do not affect his family. He seeks personal space to process work pressures and emotional challenges, demonstrating his desire to shield his family from negative emotional spillover. His approach reveals a strong sense of care and responsibility toward his family, as well as his respect for maintaining distinct boundaries between work and home life.

These different coping strategies illustrate the participants' psychological characteristics and their capacity to manage workplace stress. On one hand, they highlight the importance of emotional regulation and mental well-being in sustaining a positive work attitude. On the other hand, they demonstrate the distinct ways individuals respond to conflicts and emotional challenges. This variety in coping mechanisms contributes to enhancing team diversity and inclusivity, improving overall efficiency, and fostering stronger team cohesion.

In today's workplace, achieving a balance between work and personal life has become increasingly critical. For HR professionals, whose roles involve frequent interpersonal interactions and emotional management, maintaining this balance is particularly essential. The strategies and values demonstrated by the interviewees illustrate how individuals navigate the challenges of balancing work and family life, which in turn affects their overall well-being and job performance.

Therefore, organizations should place a greater emphasis on supporting employees' psychological well-being and promoting work-family balance. By providing appropriate resources and creating an environment that values mental health and emotional resilience, companies can enhance employee engagement, improve performance outcomes, and foster a more sustainable and productive workforce.

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#### **4. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### 4.1 Research Conclusions

Following a literature review and case interviews, this study has identified several key conclusions regarding emotional labor among HR professionals, as outlined below:

##### (1) Positive Corporate Culture Has a Favorable Impact on Employee Emotions

All three interviewees expressed satisfaction with their companies' corporate culture and policies. This satisfaction stems from the positive characteristics of the corporate culture and the rationality of the policies implemented. When employees resonate with the values and cultural principles of their organization, they feel respected and valued, resulting in a stronger sense of identification and engagement with their work. This positive impact manifests in improved workplace attitudes, enhanced emotional well-being, and increased job satisfaction. Consequently, a positive corporate culture not only boosts employees' work performance but also enhances their career development intentions. The alignment between organizational values and employee needs is critical for fostering a robust talent management system and a supportive workplace environment.

##### (2) Work Experience Has a Profound Influence on Work Emotions

Negative work experiences can have a significant impact on employees' emotions. For instance, encountering unfriendly attitudes from job applicants or facing unreasonable work demands from the company may cause frustration, disappointment, or anger. These negative emotions can affect employees' engagement and workplace attitudes, potentially leading to work-related stress or emotional distress. Employees dissatisfied with their work environment may consider leaving their jobs or experience burnout. Therefore, creating a positive work experience and fostering a supportive work environment are essential for maintaining employees' emotional health and motivation.

##### (3) Personal Work Experience is Linked to Interpersonal Relationships and Workplace Perceptions

The interviewees' personal work experiences significantly influenced their interpersonal relationships and perceptions of the workplace. Work experiences, including the work environment, job responsibilities, and interactions with colleagues, directly affect employees' job satisfaction and emotional state. For example, employees with positive work experiences and strong interpersonal relationships tend to feel more satisfied and have a favorable perception of their workplace. Conversely, employees facing work challenges or interpersonal conflicts may experience dissatisfaction and stress. Therefore, personal work experience is a key factor in shaping interpersonal relationships and workplace perceptions.

##### (4) Positive Workplace Perceptions are Positively Correlated with Retention Intention

Employees who have positive workplace perceptions are more likely to demonstrate higher loyalty to their organizations and stronger retention intentions. When individuals are satisfied with their work environment, relationships with colleagues, and job responsibilities, they are more inclined to remain in their current positions long-term. Positive workplace perceptions increase employee engagement and participation, leading to improved job performance and satisfaction. Conversely, negative workplace perceptions, such as excessive work pressure,

strained interpersonal relationships, or unsuitable job responsibilities, may prompt employees to seek alternative job opportunities or leave their current roles, thereby reducing retention intentions. Thus, creating a supportive work environment and promoting positive workplace perceptions is essential for enhancing employee retention.

#### (5) Exploration of Negative Emotions and Work-Family Balance Among HR Professionals

The interviewees displayed diverse approaches to managing negative emotions and role conflicts in the workplace. Some participants preferred external relaxation methods, such as exercising or listening to music, to divert their attention and reduce negative emotions. Others focused on internal mindset adjustments, striving to achieve a balance between work and family life. These diverse coping strategies reflect the participants' varied perspectives on work-family balance and their unique ways of managing emotional challenges.

#### 4.2 Research Recommendations

This study aims to explore the causes and effects of emotional labor among HR professionals. Due to the limited sample size, future research could expand the number of interviewees to include more diverse cases, thereby enhancing the study's representativeness and reliability. A broader sample would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the commonalities and differences in emotional labor experiences among HR professionals, shedding further light on the causes and influencing factors of emotional labor.

Future studies could also adopt quantitative methods to examine the impact of emotional labor on HR professionals' job satisfaction, workplace attitudes, and organizational atmosphere. This approach would offer practical insights and solutions for corporate managers to improve HR management practices and support measures, thereby enhancing the overall efficiency of human resources management.

Additionally, research on emotional labor management strategies and intervention measures would be valuable in analyzing their effectiveness in mitigating the impact of emotional labor on HR professionals. Practical recommendations could be provided to organizations to better manage emotional labor challenges in the workplace.

Finally, the scope of research could be extended to explore related topics such as emotional intelligence and stress management. These areas offer valuable guidance for corporate management, promoting mutually beneficial outcomes for both organizations and their employees.

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