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Enhancing emotional performance and customer service through human resources practices: A systems perspective☆

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ABSTRACT

Although many scholars and practitioners articulate the importance of managing employee emotions in service-based organizations, research related to the intricacies surrounding human resource (HR) practices targeted at employee emotional performance has failed to keep up. This is surprising, given the strong links established between employee emotional performance (i.e., expressive behaviors congruent with emotional expectations) and customer service outcomes such as customer satisfaction, intentions to return, and recommendation intentions. In light of this gap, in the current review we adopt a systems perspective of HR and develop an integrated model highlighting how HR practices related to three broad HR domains—skill-, motivation-, and opportunity-enhancing—should elevate emotional performance by increasing the motivation and ability of service employees to engage in intrapersonal and/or interpersonal emotion regulation. Departing from a “more is better” approach, we theorize how different combinations of the three HR domains may yield beneficial outcomes depending upon (1) the extent to which rewards are tied to emotional labor and (2) the nature of typical employee–customer exchanges. In doing so, we articulate which HR practices are likely mandatory, and which can be viewed as substitutable. Implications for measurement and applications to customer service are discussed.

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1. Introduction

As the service industry continues to grow (Henderson, 2012; Ryan & Ployhart, 2003), organizations are faced with the challenge of providing exceptional customer service to generate bottom-line outcomes (Liao & Chuang, 2007). In doing so, organizations have relied on front-line employees to be the face of the organization, delivering ‘service with a smile’ via emotional labor (i.e., regulating one’s emotions to adhere to emotional display expectations; Hochschild, 1983) to positively influence customer outcomes (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000). One way organizations can influence emotional labor is via human resource (HR) practices (Pugh, Diefendorff, & Moran, 2013) such as training how to display appropriate emotions or incentive structures that reward emotional performance. Yet, despite the importance of HR systems, integrative theory for HR systems applied to emotional labor is underdeveloped.

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Pugh et al. (2013) reviewed what is known in regards to the impact HR has on emotional labor, revealing that the majority of research has been qualitative (e.g., Leidner, 1993; Poster, 2011; Sutton, 1991; Winiecki & Wigman, 2007) or focused on one organizational influence at a time (e.g., Diefendorff & Croyle, 2008; Grandey, Foo, Groth, & Goodwin, 2012; Holman, Chissek, & Totterdell, 2002; Totterdell & Parkinson, 1999). Although focusing on HR practices in isolation and/or qualitatively offers benefits, these approaches hardly speak to the intricacies of how HR practices work conjointly, leaving many questions unanswered. Will performance management systems be effective at eliciting desired displays in the absence of training? Is compensation for emotional performance (e.g., tips, commission) necessary when employees are given autonomy regarding the emotions they display to customers? Can we train employees who have been selected without emotional abilities in mind? What is lacking is a focus on how different HR practices interact to affect employees' emotional labor and, subsequently, emotional performance and customer service.

To explore this area and address a call raised by Pugh et al. (2013), we build from the strategic management literature to explore how bundles of HR practices enhance emotional labor, ultimately influencing emotional performance (i.e., emotional displays that are congruent with organizational expectations; Bono & Vey, 2007) and customer service. Expanding upon models of emotional labor (Grandey, 2000; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015), we address how HR practices may affect employees' emotional abilities (e.g., emotional intelligence, emotional labor self-efficacy, emotion demands-abilities fit) and motivation to engage in intrapersonal and interpersonal emotion regulation. Extending ideas by Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al. (2012), Jiang, Lepak, Hu, et al. (2012) (see also Lepak, Liao, Chun, & Harden, 2006), we argue that HR practices are nested within HR domains that affect: (1) knowledge, skills, and abilities related to emotional labor (*skill-enhancing*), (2) motivation and effort to perform (*motivation-enhancing*), and (3) opportunities to contribute (*opportunity-enhancing*). Our guiding model which we elaborate on is displayed in Fig. 1.

2. Overview of emotional performance in service occupations

Emotional performance occurs when employees display emotions congruent with the expectations of the work role (Bono & Vey, 2007; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). In understanding what factors influence emotional performance, many researchers study *emotional labor*, or processes related to employees managing their emotions to meet such organizational expectations (Hochschild, 1983). Most models of emotional labor entail a three-part process involving emotional display rules, emotion regulation, and emotional displays (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003; Grandey, 2000; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). In many service jobs, employees are expected to conform to integrative display rules, where positive emotional expressions are encouraged and negative emotional expressions are discouraged (Wharton & Erickson, 1993); such positive emotional displays should bring people (i.e., employees and customers) together.

Research has considered factors that affect an employee's ability to adhere to display rules. For instance, researchers have considered emotional intelligence, or one's ability to identify and understand one's own and others' emotions (Salovey & Mayer, 1989). Strong links exist between emotional intelligence and emotional performance (Gabbott, Tsarenko, & Mok, 2011; Lopes et al., 2004), with evidence demonstrating that emotional intelligence is the strongest predictor of performance (Joseph & Newman, 2010) and customer satisfaction (Giardini & Frese, 2008) in emotional labor jobs. Additional abilities include one's fit with the job's emotional

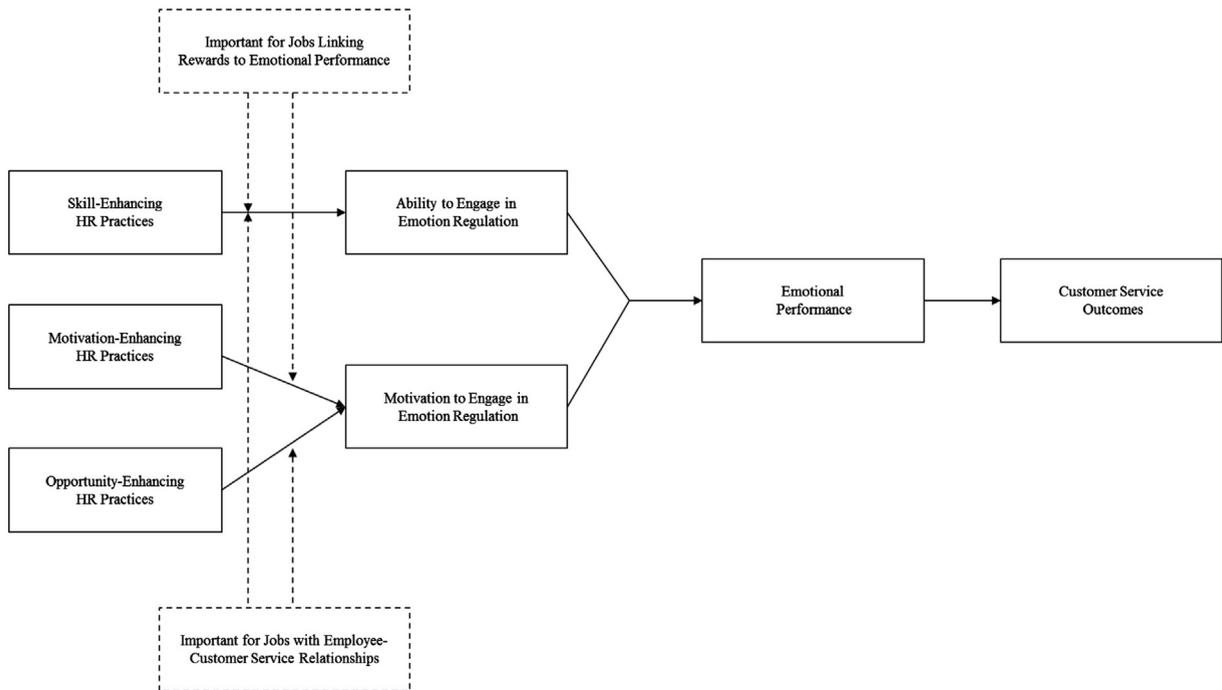


Fig. 1. Theoretical Model Note. In the above model, emotional performance is achieved as a function of skills (i.e., ability to engage in emotion regulation) × (motivation + opportunity) / 2. Dashed lines/boxes represent contingencies surrounding the effectiveness of different HR practices.

demands, coined emotion demands-abilities fit (Diefendorff, Greguras, & Fleenor, 2014), one's propensity to value delivering quality customer service, or customer orientation (Allen, Pugh, Grandey, & Groth, 2010), and one's level of efficacy in regulating emotions (Pugh, Groth, & Hennig-Thurau, 2011). Other research has focused on extraversion, finding that extraverted employees have greater ease in regulating their emotions (Chi, Grandey, Diamond, & Krimmel, 2011; Judge, Woolf, & Hurst, 2009). A meta-analysis by Kammeyer-Mueller and colleagues (2013) also highlighted that dispositional affect influences emotion regulation choices: those higher on dispositional positive affect tend to utilize deep acting, whereas those who are higher on dispositional negative affect tend to rely on surface acting.

Even after considering one's abilities, employees still may not feel the emotions they are required to express during customer exchanges. For instance, employees may receive negative social feedback—like incivility—from customers about their emotional performance (Côté, 2005) increasing felt negative emotions that are incongruent with display rules in many service occupations. Or, employees may simply feel diffuse negative mood states (e.g., Schwarz & Clore, 1983) that make it difficult to express positive emotions. When such a discrepancy occurs, employees may engage in emotion regulation to achieve the desired display (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). Two strategies have captured the attention of emotional labor scholars: surface acting and deep acting. *Surface acting* involves a faking process, where employees display the expected emotion without necessarily changing how they feel (i.e., 'pasting' on a smile; Grandey, Chi, & Diamond, 2013; Grandey, Diefendorff, & Rupp, 2013; Hochschild, 1983). Conversely, *deep acting* is a more effortful process, with employees changing how they feel to more authentically display required emotions (i.e., actually feeling positively to express positive emotions; Grandey, Chi, et al., 2013; Grandey, Diefendorff, et al., 2013; Hochschild, 1983). Ideally, both strategies will generate expressions that are in line with display rules (Hochschild, 1983), to which customers then have the opportunity to react (Côté, 2005; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Van Kleef, 2009; Van Kleef, Homan, & Cheshin, 2012).

Much research has been devoted to understanding how these strategies impact employee well-being and performance. Many studies have found that surface acting leads to problematic outcomes for employees, including burnout, psychosomatic complaints, reduced job satisfaction, and lower ratings of emotional performance (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Memser-Magnus, DeChurch, & Wax, 2012). The results for deep acting are mixed. Deep acting has been linked to improved emotional performance (Grandey, 2003; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011) and, in some studies, reduced emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). However, others have found problems associated with deep acting including psychosomatic complaints (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011) and reduced positive affect (Judge et al., 2009), resonating with original theory by Hochschild (1983) that deep acting, given its level of effort, can still be harmful.

In addition to intrapersonal emotion regulation, recent attention is being paid to interpersonal emotion regulation. In customer service, a key part of emotional performance is *extrinsic affect-improving* emotion management (Niven, Totterdell, Holman, & Headley, 2012), given its emphasis on influencing the emotions of others (i.e., customers), which is the goal of emotional labor (Wharton & Erickson, 1993). Although different interpersonal strategies have been suggested, Niven, Totterdell, and Holman (2009) review two: *engagement* and *relationship-oriented* strategies. Engagement strategies include allowing a customer to vent (*affective engagement*), listening to the customer's complaints (*problem-focused*), helping the customer see positive characteristics of the situation (*target-focused*), and giving the customer advice on how to solve the problem in order to change his/her emotions (*cognitive engagement*). Relationship-oriented strategies include an employee expressing that he/she wants to help the customer (*attention*), making the customer feel special (*valuing*), offering the customer a future discount (*distraction*), and joking with the customer (*humor*). Niven et al. (2012) found that affect-improving emotion management was positively related to employee well-being, suggesting possible gains for employees who engage in such tactics.

Combined, emotional labor abilities and emotion regulation (both intrapersonal and interpersonal) should impact emotional performance. Past research has shown that emotional performance (i.e., positive displays) relates to customer outcomes such as satisfaction, word of mouth recommendations, and intentions to return (Barger & Grandey, 2006; Gabriel, Acosta, & Grandey, 2015; Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002). Given the value of emotional performance for customer service, it is surprising that little comprehensive work exists highlighting how organizations can positively influence employees' abilities and regulation. Although some work has demonstrated that various HR practices can reduce employee emotional exhaustion (Chen & Lin, 2009), such work is only a first step toward a more holistic view of emotional labor HR practices. In the current review, we turn to the strategic HR literature and review how a systems perspective of HR practices can summarize the little we know about HR practices and emotional performance.

3. A systems perspective of HR practices

According to Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al. (2012): "strategic human resource management (HRM) researchers argue for a focus on the bundles of human resource (HR) practices in place, rather than individual practices, as a primary unit of analysis when examining the impact of HR systems on individual and organizational performance" (p. 73; italics added for emphasis). By doing so, researchers have the opportunity to explore how complementary, and somewhat overlapping, HR practices can come together and reflect a philosophy of a given organization (Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000). As Kepes and Delery (2007) articulate, HR practices must operate synergistically, given that such synergy will yield positive organizational outcomes and incongruent HR practices could create combinations that undermine their effectiveness. Embedded in HR bundles is theory related to internal fit (Delery & Doty, 1996; Kepes & Delery, 2007). Internal fit (as opposed to external fit; Delery & Doty, 1996) refers to the extent to which HR systems work conjointly to influence criteria of interest. Related to internal fit, HR practices should complement each other, ultimately achieving equifinality in which different combinations of HR systems can achieve positive work-related outcomes (Kepes & Delery, 2007).

There are levels of abstraction in HR research (Kepes & Delery, 2006, 2007), three of which were the focus in Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al. (2012): HR systems, HR policies, and HR practices. HR systems (also referred to as HR policy domains; Jiang, Lepak, Hu, et al., 2012), are coordinated sets of HR policies and related activities that are employed to achieve organizational goals. One level lower is HR policies that make up HR systems; Jiang, Lepak, Hu, et al. (2012) state that “an HR policy is an employee-focused program that impacts choices regarding HR practices” (p. 75). As such, HR policies set the stage for what guidelines should be adhered to within HR systems. Finally, at the lowest level of abstraction are HR practices that fit into a specific HR policy and the overarching HR system. For instance, using a personality inventory and a cognitive ability test would represent selection practices that fit into the broader selection policy.

Beyond the three levels of abstraction, researchers have also begun forming policy domains, or groupings of the various policies. Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al. (2012), Jiang, Lepak, Hu, et al. (2012) emphasized work (Lepak et al., 2006; Subramony, 2009) indicating that HR practices and the policies they feed into can be grouped together into three HR policy domains: (1) *skill-enhancing HR practices* (recruitment, selection, training) help ensure employees have relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) for the job; (2) *motivation-enhancing HR practices* (performance management, compensation, incentives) help motivate employees to perform on the job; and (3) *opportunity-enhancing HR practices* (employee involvement, job design) help empower employees to use their KSAs to maximize performance and help organizations achieve bottom-line outcomes. These three policy domains should help employees achieve high levels of performance, similar to the benefits offered by high performance work systems (e.g., Batt, 2002).

What makes Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al.'s (2012) framework for policy domains appealing is that it allows researchers to specify various relations among practices, policies, and policy domains (i.e., systems). For instance, practices within a given HR policy can have *additive* or *substitutive* effects. Additive effects indicate that practices have non-overlapping outcomes, meaning that a given outcome will be greater with multiple policies in place; this idea is similar to an additive index that has been used in previous HR research (e.g., Batt, 2002). A substitutive effect occurs when practices share the same outcome, meaning that only one practice is needed; stated differently, substitutive practices can achieve equifinality. Across the various HR policies, Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al. (2012) articulate that there are likely to be additive effects in addition to the possibility of *synergistic* effects. Synergistic effects relate back to the importance of internal fit in HR systems (Kepes & Delery, 2007) and go a step further than additive effects, given that synergistic effects indicate that the impact of one policy (e.g., recruitment) depends upon the effectiveness of another policy (e.g., training). In this case, the synergistic relationship between recruitment and training would be positive, given that both policies are aimed at having employees with strong KSAs prior to entering the job. There is the possibility that synergy can be negative if there is poor fit among the policies (i.e., recruitment materials are misaligned with the goals of the training program), yielding a toxic combination (Kepes & Delery, 2006). Finally, Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al. (2012) noted that the relations between the overall policy skill-, motivation-, and opportunity-enhancing domains are also likely to be synergistic in the same positive or negative manner.

Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al.'s (2012), Jiang, Lepak, Hu, et al. (2012) work provided a unique integrative framework to apply to emotional labor contexts. Fitting with this sentiment, Pugh et al. (2013) stated, “we expect [HR practices to] interrelate and probably combine in bundles of practices aimed at producing particular employee emotional displays” (p. 214). In the current review, we cluster past research relating HR practices to emotional labor into skill-, motivation-, and opportunity-enhancing HR policy domains. Rather than rehashing whether additive or synergistic effects emerge (a point that is already articulated by Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al., 2012), we articulate how different combinations of emotional labor HR policy domains may be more or less effective. In doing so, we build from classic job characteristics research from Hackman and Oldham (1976) that suggests how different components of the job, such as HR policy domains, can be designed to increase the motivation and performance of employees. By integrating such an idea with the current view of HR systems, we are able to articulate different combinations of HR policy domains that may be more or less effective in generating emotional performance. We also consider whether certain jobs may preclude the necessity of different HR policy domains.

4. Skill-enhancing emotional performance HR practices

In customer service occupations, skill-enhancing HR practices focus on ensuring employees have the emotional abilities necessary to deliver appropriate emotional performance, in addition to the knowledge and skills necessary to regulate one's emotions effectively across a variety of service interactions. Scholars have recommended recruiting and selecting individuals whose skills match the emotional display rules for a specific organization and/or role (Constanti & Gibbs, 2005; Glomb, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Rotundo, 2004), with Sutton (1991) suggesting that recruitment and selection are preferable to rewards (i.e., motivating-enhancing HR). Making display rules and emotional expectations explicit during recruitment should create expectations about emotional performance (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Unfortunately, many organizations lack explicit policies regarding emotional displays and rely on norms to guide customer service behaviors, with some referring to them only vaguely in their mission statements (Zapf, 2002). Constanti and Gibbs (2005) claimed that emotional labor expectations are often “tacit, fuzzy and implicit” (p. 107) and not formally put forth by the organization. Relatedly, Rogers, Clow, and Kash (1994) stated that “job satisfaction of service employees can be increased by enhancing role clarity, decreasing role conflict, and reducing job tension” (p. 14).

As an empirical example, Bartram, Casimir, Djurkovic, Leggat, and Stanton (2012; see also Chen & Lin, 2009) demonstrated that when employees are selected to perform emotional labor, burnout is reduced. Related work from Callaghan and Thompson (2002) highlighted that competencies rooted in personality (e.g., positive attitude, sense of humor, enthusiasm), technical skills (e.g., keyboard, navigation), and communication (e.g., energy, fluency, rapport, warmth, tone, pitch) should be used for selection in emotionally-laden jobs. Callaghan and Thompson (2002) stated that “the rigour of selection...may have something to do with identifying people with survival as well as communication skills; not least those who have the stamina and guile to get through 120 repetitive calls a day while being scripted and scrutinized” (p. 251).

Although limited work has tested the validity of traits and abilities in selection for jobs requiring emotional labor, several have been identified as viable candidates. In support of emotional intelligence, Joseph and Newman (2010) stated that “all types of [emotional intelligence] measures exhibit validity and incremental validity over cognitive ability and personality” for jobs requiring emotional labor (p. 72). Additional candidates for consideration include personality traits like extraversion (Chi et al., 2011; Judge et al., 2009), customer orientation (Allen et al., 2010), emotional labor self-efficacy (Pugh et al., 2011), and emotion demands-abilities fit (Diefendorff et al., 2014), which has recently been linked to more adaptive forms of emotion regulation (Gabriel, Daniels, Diefendorff, & Greguras, 2015). Even dispositional states of positive affect tend to be predictors of engaging in deep acting as opposed to surface acting on the job (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). As such, organizations may focus on maximizing person-job congruence in order to ensure that employees can regulate their emotions and have successful emotional performance (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015).

A bit more attention has been paid to training. Employees can be trained on interpersonal skills (Taylor, Russ-Eft, & Chan, 2005) and emotional competencies (Kunannatt, 2004), with Pugh et al. (2013) stating that organizations specifically can enhance the practice of ‘good’ emotional labor in employees by promoting the use of deep acting and discouraging the use of surface acting. Qualitative accounts exist on training to enhance emotional performance, from original work by Hochschild (1983) focused on training programs Delta Airlines flight attendants went through, to insurance sales (Leidner, 1993) and employees at The Body Shop (Martin, Knopoff, & Beckman, 1998). Quantitative research has found some success of training programs for emotional labor. Totterdell and Parkinson (1999) utilized experience sampling to test whether teachers could be trained on different emotion regulation techniques (e.g., engagement strategies [doing something relaxing]; diversion strategies [not thinking about stressful events during work hours]). Results demonstrated that teachers trained on engagement strategies were more likely to have improved moods than those in the diversion condition. Focusing on abilities tied to emotional performance, there is evidence that emotional intelligence can be improved via training (Boyatzis, Stubbs, & Taylor, 2002; Groves, McEnrue, & Shen, 2008), with programs such as the Micro-Expressions Training Tool (Ekman, 2002) being useful to help increase recognition of emotional displays. More generally, research has found that emotion recognition training is successful in occupations such as law enforcement and counseling psychology where detecting appropriate emotions is critical (e.g., Ennett, 2013; Morrison & Bellack, 1981).

5. Motivation-enhancing emotional performance HR practices

Performance management, compensation, and incentive systems are all believed to enhance employee motivation on the job (Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al., 2012; Jiang, Lepak, Hu, et al., 2012) by clarifying expectations related to emotional labor and offering proper rewards for displaying appropriate emotions with customers. As highlighted by Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al. (2012), practices within the motivation-enhancing domain primarily are extrinsic in nature in comparison to opportunity-enhancing HR practices (e.g., job design, employee involvement), which we review in the next section.

Recently, researchers have recognized the importance of giving emotional performance weight comparable to task performance. As Constanti and Gibbs (2004) stated, “in order to consider value we need to clarify whether emotional labour is of the same nature as physical and intellectual labour, and can therefore be measured by the same metrics. Each contributes to the effort extended by the employee for the wages, provided each can affect the well-being of the worker beyond the present transactional cost of the labour” (p. 246). For instance, performance monitoring entails observing employee behavior in service interactions (Leidner, 1993), with organizations using such monitoring to score the calls for emotional performance criteria such as friendliness (Winiacki & Wigman, 2007). Organizations that prefer a more objective approach to evaluating the emotional performance of employees in service interactions might prefer to use software described by Poster (2011) that picks up on wave frequencies in the human voice and certain words in conversations (e.g., angry, frustrated) to discern emotional content. As an additional example, some service organizations may employ ‘undercover customers’ that go into service organizations to directly evaluate employees (Morris & Feldman, 1996).

Importantly, quantitative research has yet to clarify the outcomes of such monitoring systems. It might be argued that performance monitoring gives a more objective portrait of an employee’s performance than annual performance appraisals (e.g., Grant & Higgins, 1989). In fact, Holman et al. (2002) demonstrated that monitoring positively predicted employee well-being, regardless of whether it was for developmental purposes or performance evaluation. Related to customer service, Chuang and Liao (2010) found that the establishment of a high-performance work system resulted in greater concern for customers, greater service performance, and ultimately improved market performance. However, employee perceptions of the intensity of monitoring have been negatively associated with employee well-being (Holman et al., 2002). Thus, although some research has accumulated related to the association between performance management systems and emotional labor, more research is needed to discern whether these systems can positively influence emotional performance without negatively impacting well-being.

Tied to performance management naturally comes the discussion of compensation and incentives for performance. The compensation systems of jobs requiring emotional performance have been discussed since Hochschild’s (1983) original work articulating that emotions in jobs requiring emotional labor are “sold for a wage” (p. 7), with Glomb et al. (2004) further stating that “[emotional labor] skills have been considered increasingly important in the growing service economy, and the presence or development of these skills may facilitate meeting emotional labor demands and be a basis for higher compensation” (p. 702). Unfortunately, individuals in many emotional labor jobs are often in entry-level positions (e.g., front-line food services, Barger & Grandey, 2006; retail, Tsai, 2001), signaling that actual compensation may not increase as a function of emotional labor demands. A recent surge of work, however, illustrates that non-salary based incentives can provide benefit to employees. Incentives for emotional displays have been positively associated with employee motivation and commitment to adhere to display rules (Diefendorff & Croyle, 2008). Moreover, work from the lab and field also suggests that financial incentives for emotional performance can buffer employees from the strain of emotional labor

(Grandey, Chi, et al., 2013), such that performance-contingent rewards enhance laborers' ability to engage in emotional performance as opposed to being an extrinsic hindrance.

6. Opportunity-enhancing emotional performance HR practices

In comparison to the skill- and motivation-enhancing HR policy domains, much less work in the emotional labor area has been conducted on opportunity-enhancing HR. Broadly, Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al. (2012) grouped opportunity-enhancing HR practices into two categories—job involvement and job design—articulating that individual practices such as empowerment, voice, employee participation, and information sharing all would fall within this policy domain. Moreover, Jiang, Lepak, Hu, et al. (2012) highlighted that these practices tend to target intrinsic motivation for engaging in emotional labor, given that these practices encourage employees to grow and seek challenges at work. Such practices resonate with the importance of identity in emotional labor jobs. According to Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), when workers identify with their work role, the negative effects of emotional labor can be obviated and positive effects can be enhanced. Empirically this finding has been supported, with Schaubroeck and Jones (2000) demonstrating that high levels of job identification buffered service employees from ill-being. Thus, to the extent that opportunity-enhancing practices help employees become intrinsically motivated and better identify with the emotional labor demands embedded within their jobs, many benefits can be gained.

Some theoretical attention has been paid to job design in emotional labor jobs. Grandey and Diamond (2010) highlighted the ways job design theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) and more contemporary job characteristics models (e.g., Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007) contradict many of the norms in customer service jobs. For instance, whereas job design models focus on how interactions with the public can provide direct information about task performance, emotional labor theorists view the customer as a source of affective information. Moreover, job design theories encourage establishment of relationships with customers to increase motivation and performance (i.e., repeated interactions between employees and customers; Gabriel, Acosta, et al., 2015; Gutek, Bhappu, Liao-Troth, & Cherry, 1999; Wang & Groth, 2014), whereas emotional labor has largely focused on encounters (i.e., single-time interactions; Gabriel, Acosta, et al., 2015; Wang & Groth, 2014). Job design views also encourage voluntary behaviors, whereas emotional display rules associated with emotional performance are prescribed as in-role expectations (Diefendorff et al., 2006). Finally, job design theory often encourages customized exchanges, while most emotional labor research views interactions as standardized. As Grandey and Diamond (2010) stated, “future research must ‘bridge the gap’ and better integrate job design and [emotional labor] perspectives to best understand how interactions with the public influence employee motivation and well-being” (p. 346).

Some research has emerged suggesting that factors related to job involvement or job control can offer benefits to employees in emotionally laden service work. For instance, Pugliesi (1999) found that job control (e.g., “I make decisions about how to do my work,” p. 153) and complexity (e.g., “I keep learning new things in my position,” p. 153) were positively related to job satisfaction in jobs requiring emotional labor. Feelings of control were also negatively related to stress. Similar results were found by Erickson and Wharton (1997) who demonstrated that having control over one's work was negatively related to felt inauthenticity and depressed mood. Combined with the nascent work done on job design, it is promising that opportunity-enhancing HR practices have the potential to positively affect employees' well-being in emotional labor jobs. To the extent that employees are provided autonomy in emotional displays (Grandey et al., 2012)—perhaps by encouraging the development of service relationships (Gabriel, Acosta, et al., 2015; Gutek et al., 1999) or allowing employees to display naturally felt emotions (Diefendorff et al., 2005)—intrinsic forms of motivation to regulate one's emotions could be enhanced, positively affecting one's overall motivation to display appropriate emotions.

7. Relations of HR policy domains with emotional labor

Although each of the three HR domains has the potential to positively affect employees' emotional labor processes, Jiang, Lepak, Hu, et al. (2012) clarify that each set of practices may exhibit unique relationships on human capital (i.e., abilities) and motivation. Skill-enhancing HR practices are more likely to influence emotional labor abilities, given that the focus is to identify traits and develop abilities that will make employees more equipped to handle emotional labor demands. Conversely, motivation- and opportunity-enhancing HR practices are more likely to affect how motivated employees are to engage in emotion regulation, with motivation-enhancing HR practices targeting extrinsic sources of motivation, and opportunity-enhancing HR practices targeting intrinsic sources. This distinction is important, as it suggests that organizations cannot expect a single HR practice to address all aspects of emotional labor. Thus, research that has solely looked at the influence of one practice may be overrepresenting its benefits. For researchers to explore the influence of the three HR policy domains on emotional labor abilities and emotion regulation, we present the following propositions:

Proposition 1. *Skill-enhancing HR practices will exhibit a stronger relationship with emotional labor abilities than (a) motivation-enhancing HR practices or (b) opportunity-enhancing HR practices.*

Proposition 2. *(a) Motivation-enhancing HR practices and (b) opportunity-enhancing HR practices will exhibit a stronger relationship with motivation to engage in emotion regulation than skill-enhancing HR practices.*

Importantly, performance is a function of motivation and ability (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, et al., 2012). Côté, DeCelles, McCarthy, Van Kleef, and Hideg (2011) identified that emotional intelligence can affect prosocial behaviors or interpersonal deviance depending upon the source of motivation (e.g., morality versus Machiavellianism). Additionally, Maneotis, Grandey, and Krauss (2014) explored the “why” and “how” of emotional labor, looking at the intersection of prosocial motives and emotion regulation. Maneotis et al. (2014) argued

that prosocial motives—motives that drive employees to help others—are likely attributes that employees bring with them to the job. This view of motives places them into the category of being a possible emotional labor ability that could be recruited and even trained. Although prosocial motives should enhance performance (in this case, customer-focused interpersonal performance), [Maneotis et al. \(2014\)](#) thought deep acting would strengthen the relation, whereas surface acting would weaken it, given that the motives underlying deep acting more closely aligned with prosocial motives, and the motives underlying surface acting were incongruent. Results were supportive only of the latter: when surface acting was higher, the relation between prosocial motives and performance was non-significant; when surface acting was lower, the relation was strong and positive. Thus, it is not just employees' ability to enact emotional labor and achieve emotional performance, but also the motivation to actually engage such efforts. As such, we present the following proposition:

Proposition 3. *Emotional labor abilities and motivation to engage in emotion regulation interact to predict emotional performance.*

Beyond these basic relations, one may question whether certain combinations of practices are more or less beneficial for emotional labor processes and emotional performance. [Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al. \(2012\)](#) stated that HR policy domains should have synergistic effects, and that such synergy can be positive or negative relating back to the importance of fit among HR systems ([Kepes & Delery, 2007](#)). Emotional labor occupations are, by their very nature, draining of employees' emotional and cognitive resources ([Goldberg & Grandey, 2007](#); [Hülshager & Schewe, 2011](#)); in this view, all three HR systems are likely necessary to ensure that employees have both the skill and will to enact emotional labor on a day-to-day basis. That is, having the skills will not be enough if extrinsic rewards are not in place to motivate employees to display organizationally-desired emotions, and, without intrinsic motivation, employees may not feel the desire to go above and beyond to ensure customers have a positive experience. As such, if skill-enhancing HR practices are present, but motivation- and opportunity-enhancing HR practices are not in place, the effects of skill-enhancing HR practices will likely be mitigated. Moreover, in the absence of motivation- and opportunity-enhancing HR practices, skill-enhancing HR practices could yield negative outcomes, such as employee withdrawal and turnover, given that employees' emotional labor abilities would not be recognized or fully valued. As another example, having motivation-enhancing HR practices without skill-enhancing or opportunity-enhancing HR practices present could cause rewards tied to emotional labor to go to waste given that employees lack a minimum level of ability needed to perform. Even further, motivation-enhancing practices could lead to increased levels of employee frustration given that, without skills, it will be a struggle to maintain an acceptable level of performance, in addition to there being little intrinsic incentive to partake in the emotional labor process.

However, given that motivation- and opportunity-enhancing HR practices focus on the same part of emotional labor (i.e., motivation to regulate emotions), these domains may be substitutable. This idea resonates with research on job characteristics ([Hackman & Oldham, 1976](#)), which articulated that some job characteristics are required (e.g., autonomy, feedback) and others are substitutable (e.g., skill variety, task identity, task significance). When combined, these characteristics represent a *motivating potential score*. According to [Hackman and Oldham \(1976\)](#), when a required characteristic is missing, the motivating potential score will be zero. However, when a substitutable variable is missing, the motivating score can still be positive if another substitutable variable is present. Applying this logic to HR policy domains, as opposed to all domains being necessary, it may be the case that motivation- or opportunity-enhancing HR practices can interact with skill-enhancing HR practices to promote emotional performance. As such, the influence of HR policy domains on emotional performance could be written as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Motivation} + \text{Opportunity}}{2} \times \text{Skills} = \text{Emotional Performance}$$

In this case, skills—or emotional labor abilities—are necessary to ensure successful emotional performance. Motivation- and opportunity-enhancing HR practices, which should affect motivation to engage in emotion regulation, are substitutable.

Proposition 4. *Motivation- and opportunity-enhancing HR practices aimed at enhancing emotion regulation motivation are substitutable, whereas skills-enhancing HR practices are not substitutable and must be present when predicting emotional performance.*

Fitting with this idea, we believe the importance of each of these motivation-based domains may be contingent upon two key characteristics described in the emotional labor literature: (1) the extent to which emotional performance is clearly linked to financial rewards, and (2) the extent to which employees typically engage in service encounters or relationships.

8. Emotional performance and financial rewards

Occupations can vary in how close the connection is between financial rewards (e.g., tips, commission) and emotional performance ([Grandey, Chi, et al., 2013](#)). To explore this, Grandey et al. devised four categories of emotional labor jobs that varied as a function of emotional job requirements (i.e., customer contact, positive display expectations) and financial rewards tied to service performance. Jobs high on emotional labor requirements and financial rewards included bank tellers, hairstylists, restaurant servers, personal trainers, and sales clerks; jobs high on emotional labor requirements but low on financial rewards for service performance included medical services, nurses, physicians/surgeons, and school secretaries. The remaining categories clustered jobs that had lower emotional labor requirements (e.g., marketing consultant for the high financial reward group; graphic designer for the low financial reward group). For jobs in the high emotional labor job requirements/high financial rewards cluster, rewards were viewed as competency valuing ([Staw, Calder, Hess, & Sandelands, 1980](#); [Eisenberger, Rhoades, & Cameron, 1999](#)) and not undermining of one's overall

motivation. As such, in service jobs where (a) emotional labor demands are high and (b) there is a clear tie between emotional performance and rewards, skill-enhancing HR practices paired with motivation-enhancing HR practices may run paramount to having opportunity-enhancing HR practices present.

For jobs where financial rewards are not contingent on emotional performance, motivation-enhancing HR practices may be less effective compared to opportunity-enhancing HR practices. Occupations such as being a nurse or teacher that Grandey, Chi, et al. (2013), Grandey, Diefendorff, et al. (2013) described as having low financial rewards tied to emotional performance often require greater variability in the emotions displayed. In a sample of nurses, Moran (2013) illustrated that empathy display rules (e.g., reassuring patients who are upset, remaining calm, expressing sympathy) also exist in addition to demands to display positive emotions and suppress negative emotions. As such, opportunity-enhancing HR practices such as job involvement and job design may have greater weight since these occupations need added flexibility in handling patient or client demands.

Given these differences between emotional labor jobs in the extent to which financial rewards are contingent on emotional performance, we posit the following for future research:

Proposition 5. *Motivation-enhancing HR practices are more critical in jobs where a strong link exists between emotional performance and financial rewards.*

Proposition 6. *Opportunity-enhancing HR practices are more critical in jobs where a strong link does not exist between emotional performance and financial rewards.*

9. Service encounters versus relationships

Another difference among emotional labor occupations is the extent to which service encounters versus relationships are typical. According to Gutek (1995), service encounters involve one-time employee–customer interactions; service relationships, on the other hand, are long-term relationships that develop through repeat contact (e.g., employees having “regulars” as their customers). Certain emotional labor jobs lend themselves to encounters or relationships. For instance, as reviewed by Gabriel, Acosta, et al. (2015), relationships are more likely to occur in hair salons as opposed to front-line food services. Within the hair salon industry, certain types of stores—such as boutiques or “fast cut” chains—may also dictate the likelihood of a service relationship, in addition to the store location (e.g., small town versus large town).

With service relationships come potential for flexibility with emotional displays. Gabriel, Acosta, et al. (2015) found that employee positive displays (e.g., smiling, eye contact, vocal tone) mattered more for customer service evaluations (e.g., customer satisfaction, perceived employee friendliness) in service encounters as opposed to relationships. In light of these findings, the researchers stated that “managers’ approach to motivating employees’ emotional displays toward customers should be aligned with the service delivery mode” (p. 12), meaning that different norms can exist depending upon the frequency with which service encounters or relationships occur. If service relationships occur, Gabriel, Acosta, et al. (2015) noted that managers should allow more personalized exchanges involving relaxed display rules. Recent work by Wang and Groth (2014) mirrored these sentiments, finding again that the negative relationship between suppressed negative emotions and customer outcomes was buffered by being in a service relationship, suggesting that “building a climate that rewards employees for strengthening customer bonds may mitigate the negative impact of suppressing negative emotions” (p. 348).

These ideas are suggestive that in jobs where service relationships are more common, opportunity-enhancing HR practices may be more advantageous for promoting emotional performance. Such practices will likely encourage employees to craft customized experiences for customers, which may even take away some of the demands associated with emotional labor (e.g., emotion regulation leading to burnout and turnover; Callaghan & Thompson, 2002; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011). However, in jobs where encounters are more common, motivation-enhancing HR practices may be more appropriate, as standardized encounters can help employees move efficiently through interactions, and efficiency is another component of customer service (Rafaeli, 1989). As such, we posit the following for future consideration:

Proposition 7. *Motivation-enhancing HR practices are more critical in jobs where service encounters are more common than service relationships.*

Proposition 8. *Opportunity-enhancing HR practices are more critical in jobs where service relationships are more common than service encounters.*

10. Methodological implications

The complexities associated with interrelated HR practices outlined above necessitate complex methods. We echo suggestions from Pugh et al. (2013) articulating that multilevel modeling is needed to assess how HR practices impact both between-person stable tendencies (e.g., emotional abilities, dispositional intrapersonal/interpersonal emotion regulation) and within-person aspects of emotional labor (e.g., event-level intrapersonal/interpersonal emotion regulation). Given the dynamics of emotional labor (Beal & Trougakos, 2013; Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003; Gabriel & Diefendorff, 2015), longitudinal research—including experience sampling and daily diary methods—would yield valuable insight into how stable perceptions of HR practices interrelate and affect emotional performance daily. In collecting such data, it would be of value to assess *actual* organizational practices (e.g., Batt, 2002;

Perry-Smith & Blum, 2000), as well as managerial and employee perceptions of organizational practices to test convergence of results. For instance, given that employee perceptions are likely a more proximal predictor of an employee's emotional abilities and emotion regulation, do such perceptions matter above and beyond managerial views of HR practices, as well as what the organization actually implements?

Beyond multilevel and longitudinal work, researchers should consider advanced analytic techniques to look at the conjoint effects of HR practices. One approach would be using latent profile, or latent cluster, analysis (LPA/LCA; Wang & Hanges, 2011) to capture the unobserved classes, or constellations, of HR practices. In doing so, one could test the various outcomes associated with each profile. Such an approach was used by Perry-Smith and Blum (2000) who explored work-family HR bundles with cluster analysis, an approach similar to LPA/LCA. Perry-Smith and Blum found four unique profiles: (1) low on all work-family policies, (2) leaves and less traditional dependent care (e.g., monetary assistance with day care, monetary assistance with elder care), (3) leaves and traditional dependent care (e.g., day care, flex scheduling, child care), and (4) high on all work-family policies. Results indicated that firms in the fourth profile (high on all work-family policies) yielded higher market performance and profit-sales growth, adding to the discussion of how family-friendly policies can yield companies a competitive advantage. In the current context, one could not only test whether unique profiles of HR practices exist, but whether profiles that are high on all three HR areas yield positive outcomes such as employee emotional abilities, effective emotion regulation, higher emotional performance, and positive customer outcomes, or, as we have theorized, if profiles only needed to have skill-enhancing and either motivation- or opportunity-enhancing HR practices to generate emotional labor abilities and motivation. Moreover, LPA/LCA would allow factors such as emotional labor occupation (similar to the Grandey, Chi, et al., 2013; Grandey, Diefendorff, et al., 2013 classification linking emotional performance to financial rewards) and service encounter/relationship frequency to be modeled as profile antecedents, providing insight into whether motivation- and opportunity-enhancing HR are more closely tied to certain emotional labor contexts. These results would shed light on where money would be best allocated in organizations where employees engage in emotional labor, particularly if certain policy domains (e.g., motivation and opportunity) are interchangeable.

11. Practical implications

As highlighted throughout our review, there is much work to be done to bring further clarity to the proper way to structure HR practices for emotional performance and customer service. Yet, we also shed light on some practical suggestions that managers can begin using today. First, our review echoes sentiments raised by others about the importance of internal fit among HR practices and policy domains (Jiang, Lepak, Han, et al., 2012; Kepes & Delery, 2007). As such, managers in the service industry should identify sets of practices that have similar goals related to emotional performance to ensure they operate in harmony and not conflict. Second, we believe that managers can have flexibility concerning which HR policy domains they wish to enact depending upon the particular context. Based on the financial rewards offered to employees and the service relationships employees have with customers, managers could choose which motivation-based practices to invest in that can yield the best emotional performance and subsequent customer outcomes. Not only will this make HR efforts more targeted and appropriate, but it can also help cut costs tied to the implementation of HR practices that may not be useful. Finally, our review continues to underscore the necessity of skill-enhancing HR. This echoes sentiments raised by Sutton (1991), and speaks to the need of empirical testing in this area of emotional labor. Of course, future research must test the effectiveness of these different emotional performance HR policy domains to ensure that (a) the desired effects occur and (b) the policy domains are not detrimental to employee well-being and emotional performance.

12. Conclusion

Our focus was on taking stock of the literature to date that encompasses HR practices related to emotional performance. We reframed the isolated view of HR practices and provided a model highlighting how different HR practices interrelate to affect emotional performance, which can, in turn, influence customer service. In particular, we built from the strategic HR literature to develop an integrative model, with skill-enhancing HR practices targeting emotional labor abilities, and motivation- and opportunity-enhancing HR practices influencing one's motivation to adhere to display rules and regulate emotions. Moreover, we considered two unique factors—the extent to which rewards are tied to emotional labor and the frequency of service relationships or encounters—to help shed light on when certain HR practices may be more or less necessary. It is our hope that future research will attempt to better identify and assess ways in which HR practices may work conjointly, as opposed to in isolation, in order to improve the emotional experience of employees and customers alike.

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