

## **EMPLOYEE EMOTIONAL DISSONANCE: WORK-RELATED SOCIAL ACTIONS AND THE EMERGING COMPLICATIONS IN ORGANISATIONS**

**Dumo Nkesi Opara (Ph.D)**  
**Department of Office and Information Management**  
**Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.**

*Email: [dumopara@gmail.com](mailto:dumopara@gmail.com)*

### **ABSTRACT**

This work is an opinion paper that theoretically discussed the concept of employee emotional dissonance, its causative agents, factors that affect it, and as well as its work-related social actions and the emerging complications. The method used was the review of secondary data and qualitative analysis of content. From the review of literature, the study revealed that emotional dissonance, though ignored at times, can be a major cause behind organization as well as employee ineffectiveness. It also showed that not only all the key organizational performance indicators of employee which affect organizational efficiency are influenced by employee emotional dissonance, but also employee personal and professional relationship and his well being are equally being affected. It was also revealed that emotional dissonance is no longer confined to service sector only, but in turn influences the individuals irrespective of their location/sector they are working in. The work therefore concluded that employee emotional dissonance can result to employee and organizational ineffectiveness, employee and customer dissatisfaction, employee wellbeing, burnout, work strain, etc. The study recommended that organizations should abandon emotional display rule/norms and focus instead on supporting and valuing employee, engraving positive work climate and develop a positive workforce.

***Keywords: Emotional dissonance, employee emotional dissonance, social actions, emerging complications.***

### **INTRODUCTION**

Naturally, humans want to feel exactly the way they wish, especially through the emotions they express. This is why it becomes very easy most at times to know someone who is angry – the expression on their face shows it. But the case is different in most workplaces, especially in service organizations. Employees are not allowed to express their feelings of anger or dissatisfaction through their emotions, especially as this is going to affect their employee-customer interaction. In other words, an employee who is displaying anger in their facial expression and attitude is prone to dissatisfy a customer, and worse still, lead to loss of customer. Therefore, employee emotional dissonance becomes the difference in the way an employee truly feels and the way the organization demands that the employee feels.

It is true that emotion drives the activity of human beings, no matter where they are. While organization can measure skills, knowledge and other abilities, emotion being subjective in nature is difficult to measure. Every organization has values, goals and objectives clearly communicated to employees. However, the emotion of the organization is always downplayed and thereby is never accounted anywhere. In an organization, different employees have different emotions and can never be aligned to organizations desired emotions until it is communicated by some other means. This difference in emotions is what we call emotional dissonance i.e., emotional dissonance is the separation of felt emotion from expressed emotion to meet external expectation (Gross, 2015).

Furthermore, there appears that in some service organizations, quality service delivery, goal attainment and customer time saving are not maximized amongst employees. Employees have lost consciousness of their constant duty of controlling their emotions in a way that customers will

always see the smiling face, and not anger or depression. Some of them no longer feel the need to hide their frowning faces completely in the workplace; some even display emotional deviance right in front of customers, not minding the consequences. This is capable of telling negatively on the performance of a service organization, resulting to delivery of substandard services to customers, failure on daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly goals, unnecessarily wastage of customers' time, and inefficient time usage. Supportively, employee emotional dissonance was found to be extremely harmful for personal well being of employee (Morris & Feldman, 2013), especially if developed as a result of surface acting (Jamie & Taxer, 2017) as it makes them devalue themselves. Schirmer and Adolphs (2017) found that employee emotional dissonance also causes burnout due to discordant emotional labour state, resulting in impaired performance as dissonance is a result of emotionally demanding situation. Following, employee emotional dissonance has impact on job outcomes, namely customer oriented behavior and job satisfaction as more is the feeling of duplicity and lesser is the job satisfaction yielding negative customer oriented behavior (Craig, 2008).

The above empirical studies revealed that employee emotional dissonance can impact negatively on the organization. There is need to find ways to close the gap in employee felt emotion from expressed emotion, which is done in order to meet external expectation. It therefore becomes pertinent to theoretically dissect the concept of employee emotional dissonance, its causative agents, factors that affect it, and as well as its work-related social actions and the emerging complications.

### **EMPLOYEE EMOTIONAL DISSONANCE**

Employee emotional dissonance is the conflict between experienced emotions and emotions expressed to conform to display rules (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Emotional dissonance is one dimensions of emotion work and considered as a stressor present in client-driven work environments (Zapf, 2012). Although the causal relationships between emotional dissonance and employee health needs to be further clarified, it has been suggested that emotional dissonance may lead to negative health outcomes due to costs of regulating emotions in order to display the desired emotion (Zohar et al., 2003; Grandey & Melloy, 2017). In other words, the act of reducing emotional dissonance can result to emotional labour, especially surface acting. Grandey and Melloy (2017) stated that managing emotional expressions as part of one's job is described as a complex, transient, and dynamic interpersonal process which includes all of the efforts to increase, maintain, or decrease one or more components of an emotion (Gross, 2015). Consequently, in line with the health impairment process, regulating emotions to express a desired display may be an effortful process that drain mental resources and thereby enhances strain (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Ceschi et al., 2016; Grandey, 2003; Coté, 2005). Strain, in an organizational setting, is looked at as a set of psychological, physiological, and behavioral reactions to work stressors (Coté, 2005). Emotional dissonance occurs whenever expressed emotions are in conformity with organizational norms, but are clashing with true feelings (Paige & Rutner, 2008). According to Kahn et al. (1964) and Rebecca Abraham (1999), emotional dissonance is a form of person-role conflict, in which a person's response conflicts with role expectations of the desired level of emotion. Thus, emotional dissonance is a state where substitute feelings are preventing the authentic feelings to make human life flourish (Santhosh & Krishnankutty, 2011). Iszat and Lodge (2011) found that emotional dissonance was not just confined to service sector jobs. She then by drawing concept of ulterior transaction, script and game theory described emotional dissonance within leadership role. As per script theory, emotional dissonance occur when something in the here and now resembles a significant situation from childhood, and the individuals adult strategies to achieve the complex ongoing goals become subsumed by their unconscious strategies to achieve the survival goals of childhood hence leading to decision getting affected by script behavior and bad feeling that result from game and stressful element of emotional dissonance (Iszat & Lodge, 2011).

The issue of employee emotional dissonance can result to the emotional labour of surface acting. This is suffered so much by employees in service delivery organizations such as banks, hospitals, sales companies, etc. Diefendorff et al. (2016) defined surface acting as faking positive emotions and sometimes suppressing negative felt emotions, so that positive display would follow. In other words, surface acting is hiding one's inner feelings and forging emotional expressions in response to display rules. For example, when a worker smiles at a customer even when he/she does not feel like, he or she is surface acting. Ashforth and Humphrey (2017) stated that surface acting is when unfelt emotion is disguised by the worker and was completed through careful presentation of verbal and non-verbal cues such as facial expression, gestures, and voice tone. This is done because the employee wants to close the gap in emotional dissonance. As a matter of fact, employee emotional dissonance can have a number of negative impacts on both the employee and the organization. Thus, surface acting is an employee's displayed emotion which is not the authentic feeling. Surface acting involves employees simulating emotions that are not actually felt, by changing their outward appearances (i.e., facial expression, gestures, or voice tone) when exhibiting required emotions. Using the surface acting technique, people alter the outward expression of emotion in the service of altering their inner feelings. By changing facial or bodily expressions, such as slumped shoulders, bowed head, or drooping mouth, inner feelings can be altered to a corresponding state (Hochschild, 1993).

Employee emotional dissonance is found to be the major cause behind organization as well as employee ineffectiveness. It affects not only all the key organizational performance indicators of employee but also employee personal wellbeing. It has widened its spread from service oriented job to almost all the jobs as display rule vary not just across customer, peer, supervisor, etc., but also across individual difference in social culture, varied work status and industry (Kraft, 2013). Also display norms no longer seemed to be clearly defined instead are both at overt as well covert level due to cross-functional projects, shift to flat organization structure and virtual team-working. Thus, it is extremely important to first focus on studying the feeling state rather than stress, burnout and job satisfaction as they are the resultant of emotions felt by employees (Subhash & Kundu, 2017). Also, Briner (2016) stressed on studying emotions as transaction rather than cause and effect as transactional analysis training was found to reduce emotional dissonance.

As the use of emotional labour strategies were found to be the stepping stone for emotional dissonance, Kinman et al. (2011) found that in order to exhibit emotional labor, surface acting is more frequently used than deep acting resulting in employee going home emotionally drained which could be supported by the findings of Hüscher and Schewe (2011) who found that suppressing thought increases the frequency of that though. But on the contrary, there were studies that supported the use of denial of responsibility to reduce dissonance i.e., suppressing of felt emotions.

The act of deep acting requires much more emotional strength to execute and keep up with (Schirmer & Adolphs, 2017). Deep acting (DA) is a form of real feelings that has been self-induced (Hochschild, 1983). Deep acting relates to changing one's feelings regarding an interaction so that emotional expressions naturally fall in line with expectations (Grandey et al., 2013). So, rather than mere faking unfelt feelings, individuals actively alter inner feelings to express the emotion they wish to display or that is required by a job (Mann & Cowburn, 2015). Ashforth and Humphrey (2017) posit that employees need to put effort to stimulate memories, images or thoughts to feel or suppress specific emotions at the workplace. This will help to achieve deep acting. By doing so, they will be able to feel, think and act organizationally desired emotions (Schirmer & Adolphs, 2017). For instance, bankers may induce pleasant memories to alter feelings of irritating in the course of attending to customers. Within this process, they would have re-defined any disturbing situation.

In surface acting individuals manipulate expressions; in deep acting they manage emotions. Although deep acting is considered less demanding than surface acting (Goldberg & Grandey, 2017), it is nonetheless effortful (Beal & Trougakos, 2019) and consumes emotional resources

(Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; Hüssheger & Schewe, 2011). The idea that deep acting is effortful has been recognized in the early work of Hochschild (1983), reinforced later by authors who pointed out its excessive energy requirements (Schaufeli & Enzmann, 2015), and refined more recently by Grandey and Gabriel (2015) who noted the hidden toll taken by the deep actor's constant change of internal emotional signals. Thus, Bonanno (2014) found that there is significance of both suppression as well as expression of emotion for wellbeing of an individual hence it is highly significant to know when to suppress emotions and when to express it which clearly highlights the significance of studying emotions and emotional dissonance.

### **CAUSATIVE AGENTS OF EMPLOYEE EMOTIONAL DISSONANCE**

Employee emotional dissonance can be viewed as a feeling of unease that occurs when an employee evaluates an emotional experience as a threat to his or her identity, thus whenever he feels his identity is jeopardized there is unease resulting in emotional dissonance (Jansz, 2012). However, there are factors that are deemed to be responsible for employee emotional dissonance as discussed below by Iyer and Yadav (2018):

**Work Exhaustion:** Nonetheless, it is believed by employers that employees who do not enjoy job are the only main victims to emotional dissonance but a recent study on school teachers proved this notion wrong (Kraft, 2013). It was found that due to work exhaustion caused by job, there was decrease in enjoyment level and thus caused increase in frequency of feeling of anger felt by teachers thereby resulting in teachers being forced to perform emotional labor which in turn lead to emotional dissonance (Melanie & Keller, 2014). Hence work exhaustion is not just a resultant of emotional dissonance but it is vice-versa too.

**Emotionally Demanding Situation:** There are various studies that support the fact that emotionally demanding situation also results in emotional dissonance (Arnold B. Bakker & Ellen Heuven, 2006). The work factors like role incongruence, lack of support, role conflict, organization culture and lack of appreciation give rise to negative emotion as well to the negative effect of emotional work (Botma, 2009). Also, emotional dissonance along with these factors, when coupled with emotionally demanding situation, worsen emotional dissonance.

**Workload and Customer Verbal Aggression:** Also, workload and customer verbal aggression was found to cause emotional dissonance which in turn resulted in affective discomfort. Although, it was found that job autonomy buffered the negative effect of emotional dissonance (Molino, 2016). As each individual is different from one another so is the impact of emotional dissonance. In one of Abraham (2017) studies , it was found job control and self efficacy jointly effect emotional dissonance. Also, high self efficacy individual were satisfied with low job control and low self efficacy individual favour job autonomy, and thus leading to varying dissonance from individual to individual (Abraham, 2017).

**Identity Jeopardy:** The feeling of identity being jeopardized is also a result of presence of mixed feelings or conflicting emotions which in turn lead to emotional dissonance. Few studies have supported the fact that individuals who are less acceptable to this duality feeling are more prone to dissonance leading to generation of more negative attitude than those who are more acceptable to this duality feeling. Emotional dissonance is a resultant of emotional labour. Out of the two emotional labour state namely congruent emotional labour state and discordant emotional labour state, the later one has harmful effect on health and performance of employee and results in emotional dissonance. Also, discordant emotional labor state yield burnout while the congruent one has no effect (Mesmer-Magnus, 2011).

**Display Rule:** Talking about emotional dissonance in leadership role, script theory explains that emotional dissonance occurs when something in the here and now resembles a significant situation from childhood, and the leader's adult strategies to achieve the complex ongoing goals of leadership becomes subsumed by their unconscious strategies to achieve the survival goals of childhood, hence leading to leader's decision getting affected by script behavior and bad feeling

that result from game and stressful element of emotional dissonance (Iszat & Lodge, 2011). Hence, it is evident that emotional dissonance is no longer confined to service-oriented roles. Therefore, today employee emotional dissonance has become a part and parcel of every employee's life as every job requires some amount of emotional labor to be exhibited or in other words everyone is forced to abide by some organization desired display rule. But it is not just the display rule that is the real cause of emotional dissonance but instead it is the range of different types of display rules that employees are to follow as the display rule varies not just across customer, peer, supervisor, etc., but also across individual difference in social culture, varied work status and industry (Kraft, 2013). Thus, it can be stated that the variation in display rule across customer, peer, supervisor, individual differences in social culture, varied work status, industry, etc. are more responsible for emotional dissonance than the presumed cause i.e., display rule.

**Unresolved Personal Issue:** Everyone today is struggling to have a work life balance and this struggle worsen if there are few unresolved personal issues. It is found that employee with unresolved personal issue were more prone to experience emotional dissonance when the later was source of motivation for work (Glass, 2015) and thus putting up professional face became crucial which in turn followed a vicious cycle as by putting up of professional face implied performing emotional labour which caused emotional dissonance and resulted in feeling of discomfort and this gave rise to negative emotions which made handling unresolved personal issue tougher and thus the cycle continued resulting in making not just professional life and personal life a mess but also deeply effecting employee well-being.

**Emotional Strategies:** Emotional labour strategies namely surface acting, deep acting, emotional regulation have always been encouraged by employers and also followed by employees to perform emotional labour. But in a study by Arshadi and Piryaei (2016), it was found that these emotional labour strategies give rise to emotional dissonance which in turn reduce occupational well being.

### **FACTORS THAT AFFECT EMPLOYEE EMOTIONAL DISSONANCE**

Employee emotional dissonance can be affected by diverse factors. For instance, in Zapf (2012) work, it was found that emotional dissonance decreases with job control and organization support, while frequency of emotional expression and sensitivity to others was found to increase as well as decrease emotional dissonance, and organization problem instead seemed to worsen emotional dissonance. Even frequent change programme was also found to result in signs of depression in employee as emotion act as barrier to change, resulting in emotional exhaustion (Eriksson, 2013). Hence, organization should prepare employee mentally for change and should adopt massive level change programme only when required to prevent worsening the effect of emotional dissonance. Also, the positive and negative effects of emotional work depend on whether a self selection into demanding emotional work is done (Sharma, 2015). Age of an employee also seemed to have an effect on his emotional dissonance. Older age where more prone to emotional dissonance and emotional dissonance in them was negatively associated with job satisfaction, on the other hand no relation between emotional dissonance and job satisfaction in younger people was found (Scheibea & Stamov-Roßnagelb, 2015), thus showing emotional dissonance varies across age group.

Incidental mood state also seemed to have an impact on employee emotional dissonance. It was seen that people with negative incidental mood state were not able to reduce dissonance as dissonance reduction was caused by attitude change. And people with negative incidental mood state had less resources to attitude change (Amélie & Almecija, 2017).

Researchers from different climes support the fact that emotion regulation strategy may seem to make perception of delivery easy as per supervisor but it was found that it makes task tougher on individual basis (Iyer & Yadav, 2018). Also, surface acting was found to be harmful for personal well being of employee as it makes them devalue themselves and by using surface acting, they find difficulty managing display rule which in turn yields negative emotions and lower their self

perception of delivery. Hence, though surface acting makes emotional labour easy on episode-to-episode basis but an employees who use surface acting find each episode tougher than those who do not use surface acting (Daniel & Beal, 2016).

Further, few studies support use of deep acting as they found use of deep acting more frequently by employee over surface acting during service encounters, has a positive correlation with employee emotional well being in comparison to surface acting (Rathi, 2013). But even deep acting was found to have negative impact. Therefore, there is the need to use genuine emotions for emotional labour as use of surface acting and deep acting yield negative effect on well being of employee (Joo & Young, 2009) by giving rise to emotional dissonance. Thus, use of genuine emotion is must for well being of employee. But in order to display genuine emotions, it was found that self-efficacy of employee plays a crucial role as self-efficacy of employee moderate the negative effect of surface acting and help display authentic emotion (Briner, 2016).

Furthermore, few studies have also found relationship among empowerment, emotional dissonance, customer satisfaction and service quality. Empowerment was found to have a role in managing employee emotions at workplace (Aziz, 2008) and thus has an impact on emotional dissonance. Studies also support the finding that works characteristic determine emotional dissonance (Cheung & Tang, 2010). Organization culture too plays a crucial role in determining the emotional dissonance across organization as display rule vary across culture and so does the display rule, which in turn affects emotional dissonance experienced by employee. In one of the study, it was found that USA organization culture is stricter in terms of display rule than Japan (Briner, 2016). Hence the display norms should be liberal if the culture requirement are a bit forgiving and accepting of negative emotions. Management must be aware of cultural differences in emotions and emotion norms, to improve the experience of employees of globalized service organizations (Grandey & Melloy, 2017).

Finally, employee emotional dissonance has wide range and the range depends upon life experience and work experience of each individual (Tupou, 2011). The support to the previous statement is found in a study where nurses with unresolved personal issues were more found to experience greater emotional dissonance when the later was source of motivation for work (Glass, 2015).

## **WORK-RELATED SOCIAL ACTIONS AND THE EMERGING COMPLICATIONS OF EMPLOYEE EMOTIONAL DISSONANCE**

In today's work environment, there is no escape from the clutches of emotional dissonance. It is evident from the fact that if employees abide by organization display norms, it results in feeling of duplicity due to emotional dissonance and if employees resist organization display norms to avoid emotional dissonance, they are under organization pressure. Hence, employee emotional dissonance is found to affect employee organizational commitment in either ways (Abraham, 2017).

Emotional dissonance was found to be extremely harmful for personal well being of employee (Morris & Feldman, 2013), especially if developed as a result of surface acting (Jamie & Taxer, 2017) as it makes them devalue themselves. They find difficulty in managing display rule yielding negative emotion and develop a low self perception of delivery in employee (Sharma, 2015).

Schirmer and Adolphs (2017) found that employee emotional dissonance also causes burnout due to discordant emotional labour state, resulting in impaired performance as dissonance is a result of emotionally demanding situation. Employee emotional dissonance has impact on job outcomes, namely customer oriented behavior and job satisfaction as more is the feeling of duplicity and lesser is the job satisfaction yielding negative customer oriented behavior (Craig, 2008).

Employee emotional dissonance was also found to be negatively associated with work resources i.e., job reward and satisfactory work relation and positively associated with display rule, burnout (Cheung & Tang, 2010), job satisfaction. The negative association with job reward and satisfactory work relation is due to the fact that the former act as a source of motivation for emotional labor

while the later acts as support in performing emotional labor as a result both help reduce emotional dissonance caused by emotional labor.

Going further, employee emotional dissonance is negatively associated with empowerment, hence if employee feel empowered, emotional dissonance impact is lessened which in turn affects customer satisfaction and service quality positively. Empowerment was found to have a role in managing employee emotions at workplace (Aziz, 2008). Thus, employee emotional dissonance has an impact on customer satisfaction and service quality via empowerment.

Employee emotional dissonance determines work strain where the latter affects job satisfaction. That is, work strain affects job satisfaction (Cheung & Tang, 2010). Hence, employee emotional dissonance results in work exhaustion along with role ambiguity causing reduced job satisfaction, increased turnover intention which is partially responsible for organization deviance (Subhash & Kundu, 2017) and absenteeism. Also, employee emotional dissonance is found to be a better predictor of work exhaustion (Paige & Rutner, 2008). There are studies that support the fact that employee emotional dissonance worsens emotional tolerance at high organization demand (Tupou, 2011), which is evident as emotional dissonance leads to increased work strain, work exhaustion, burnout as well as increased turnover intention which somewhere reduces tolerance level at subconscious level thus leading to decrease in organizational commitment.

Usually, the emotional regulation strategies of surface acting and deep acting are used for positive display of emotion but in one of the study the adaptation of same for negative emotions was checked for police officers. Result suggested that use of deep acting for negative display of emotion ensure greater job involvement than using deep acting for positive display of emotions but in either case surface acting resulted in emotional exhaustion (Briner, 2016). Thus, where emotional regulation strategies should be discouraged in case of positive display of emotion, it should be motivated for negative display of emotions. Though most of the study support the fact that dissonance acting is harmful but few studies also found that deliberate dissonance acting not only result in strain but help in work engagement if goal is accomplished via dissonance acting (Diefendorff et al., (2016), especially in job profile of police officers. Also, it was found that burnout and job engagement are more affected by service climate than emotional dissonance (Kraft, 2013).

## **CONCLUSION**

From the above study, it is crystal clear that emotional dissonance, though ignored at times, can be a major cause behind organization as well as employee ineffectiveness. It is evident that not only all the key organizational performance indicators of employee which affect the organization efficiency are influenced by employee emotional dissonance, but also employee personal and professional relationship and his well being are equally being affected. Also, emotional dissonance was found to no longer be only confined to service sector, but in turn influenced the individuals irrespective of their location/sector they are working in. This work therefore concludes that employee emotional dissonance can result to employee and organizational ineffectiveness, employee and customer dissatisfaction, employee wellbeing, burnout, work strain, etc. Organizations (especially service organizations) that want to enhance their performance, as well as those of their employees, should therefore find ways to reduce emotional dissonance amongst their employees.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Management of organizations should work on ways to reduce emotional dissonance and to keep a check on it as employee well being is necessary to gain strategic advantage.
2. Management should abandon emotional display rule/norms and focus instead on supporting and valuing employee, engraving positive work climate and develop a positive workforce.
3. Managers who would like to create a competitive and strategic advantage have to give importance to the subjective well being of their employees by creating some human

resource management systems and policies to increase the well being and satisfaction of employees.

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