

Enhancing Frontline Employee Performance: Recovering from
Emotional Exhaustion

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Abstract

In line with the increasing need of promoting a good quality service to customers, frontline service employees are increasingly engaging in acting to conform their job role and to display rules (e.g. to smile). Previous research (Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983) shown that this acting approach might predict emotional exhaustion on these workers. Moreover, it might have detrimental impacts on workers' performance. However, "when employees are able to recover from work demands they benefit from improved well-being and enhanced performance capacity" (Fritz and Ellis, 2015). Can recovery experiences blur the impact of emotional demands on workers' performance?

Firstly, this study assessed the relationship between surface acting with employees' service performance in the mediation effect of emotional exhaustion. Then, it was measured the impact of having mastery experiences during work breaks on the previous mediation. To do so, questionnaires were developed and applied in the retail sector to a 91-sample composed by frontline service employees from a Portuguese food distribution company.

The results indicated that surface acting is positively related with emotional exhaustion and emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between surface acting and employees' service performance. Regarding the mastery experiences, this study suggested that when employees recover from surface acting by having high mastery experiences, in the indirect effect of emotional exhaustion, they will benefit from an increased customer service performance. Lastly, this research provided evidence that when workers have low mastery experiences during their breaks, the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and service performance, in the indirect effect of emotional exhaustion, is higher.

Keywords: surface acting; emotional exhaustion; customer service performance; mastery experiences.

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Resumo

A par com a crescente necessidade de promover um bom serviço ao cliente, os colaboradores de atendimento ao público têm, cada vez mais, utilizado a representação para agir em conformidade com a sua função e cumprir regras (por exemplo, sorrir). Estudos anteriores (Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983) mostram que esta abordagem pode levar à exaustão emocional dos mesmos. Adicionalmente, tal pode impactar negativamente o desempenho dos colaboradores. No entanto, "quando os colaboradores são capazes de recuperar das exigências do trabalho, estes beneficiam de bem-estar melhorado e de uma maior capacidade de desempenho" (Fritz e Ellis, 2015). Poderão as experiências de recuperação esbater o impacto das exigências emocionais no desempenho dos trabalhadores?

Primeiramente, este estudo avaliou a relação entre *surface acting* e o desempenho dos colaboradores na prestação de serviço sob o efeito de mediação da exaustão emocional. De seguida, foi medido o impacto de ter *mastery experiences* durante as pausas do trabalho na mediação anterior. Para tal, foram desenvolvidos questionários e aplicados no sector do retalho a uma amostra de 91 indivíduos, composta por colaboradores de atendimento ao cliente de uma empresa portuguesa de distribuição alimentar.

Os resultados indicaram que o *surface acting* está positivamente relacionado com a exaustão emocional e que a exaustão emocional medeia a relação entre o *surface acting* e o desempenho dos trabalhadores na prestação de serviço. No que diz respeito às *mastery experiences*, este estudo sugere que quando os colaboradores recuperam do *surface acting* por terem elevadas *mastery experiences*, no efeito indireto da exaustão emocional, estes beneficiam de um desempenho melhorado no atendimento ao cliente. Por fim, esta investigação evidenciou que quando os trabalhadores têm poucas *mastery experiences* durante as pausas, a relação negativa entre a exaustão emocional e desempenho no serviço, no efeito indireto da exaustão emocional, é maior.

Palavras-chave: *surface acting*; exaustão emocional; desempenho no atendimento ao cliente; *mastery experiences*.

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1. Introduction

There is an increasing concern in many organizations, especially on service sector, to provide customers the best service experience (Hochschild, 1983; Totterdell and Holman, 2003). It became possible by defining the desired emotions and behaviours that employees with interpersonal contact with customers must express and display, and how and when they should do it (Lee, 2018; Pugh, 2001; Totterdell and Holman, 2003). Affective delivery is defined as “act of expressing socially desired emotions during service transactions” (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993: 88–89) and it is said in the literature to be positively related with organizations’ outcomes (Lee, 2018, Tsai and Huang, 2002). Thus, affective delivery is considered part of service providers’ job role and it is seen as a fundamental way to satisfy and engage customers. Besides, it has a huge impact in the customers’ perception of service quality and willingness to recommend to others (Grandey, 2003; Lee, 2018; Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001).

“When people regulate or manage their emotions in exchange for a wage, they are said to be undertaking emotional labor” (Totterdell and Holman, 2003: 55). Although emotional labour is performed to improve the organization’s results (Grandey, 2000; Lee, 2018), it may have negative impacts on employees, namely it may result in emotional exhaustion and burnout (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). There are two main strategies of emotional regulation: deep acting (antecedent-focused strategy: modifying feelings) and surface acting (respondent-focused strategy: changing expressions) (Grandey, 2000). Surface acting has been also associated with emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2003; Iñigo *et al.*, 2007). Emotional exhaustion can be defined as state of depleted emotional resources and negative feelings, and it may negatively affect employees’ service performance (Maslach, 1981). The present study aims to clarify the relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion and its relationship with employees’ service performance.

Furthermore, emotional exhaustion, as a job demand, may be associated with the employee’s need to recover (Fritz and Ellis, 2015; Fritz and Sonnentag, 2005; Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010). The concept of recovery is associated with the experience of switching off from work and its related demands (Fritz and Ellis, 2015). “One goal of recovery from work demands is to ensure performance when returning back to work.” (Fritz and

Sonnentag, 2005: 188). Thus, recovery experiences are beneficial both for employees' health and well-being and for organizational performance (Fritz and Sonnentag, 2005; Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010). Although there are different types of recovery experiences, this study is going to investigate the impact of employees engaging in mastery experiences. Mastery experiences are challenging activities that help individuals to learn something new and to develop new internal resources, namely skills and self-efficacy (Ellis, 2015; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007).

This study aims both to analyse the relationship between surface acting (modifying expressions to meet the organizational requirements) and the provided service performance, as well as to understand the mediational effect of the emotional exhaustion predicted by surface acting on the service performance. Although there are already studies concerning the impact of surface acting on emotional dissonance and exhaustion (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000; Grandey, 2000; Grandey, 2003; Iñigo *et al.*, 2007) and the impact of surface acting on employees' performance (Grandey, 2000; Grandey, 2003), as far as I know, there is no research evidence about the mediational relationship proposed. Further, it aims to measure the impact of engaging in recovery experiences (specifically, the mastery experiences) during work breaks on the previous relationship. Besides, the main innovation of this study is to analyse the mastery experiences as moderators of the previous mediation relationship. Thus, the purpose of this study is to join two different research areas – emotional displays and recovery experiences – by integrating them on the Job Demand-Resources model theory. It involved measuring the impacts of the emotional displays (via surface acting) on frontline employees' health (emotional exhaustion) and performance, and the effect of engaging in recovery experiences (mastery experiences) as a tool to improve performance and to blur the detrimental effects of acting. The research used two questionnaires applied to frontline employees and their direct supervisors from eight stores of a Portuguese food retail and distribution company. Thus, the study applied both self-reported measures and measures reported by employees' direct supervisors.

The next chapter comprises definitions of concepts and empirical evidence from past researches on the topics of this study, which supported the development of the chosen research model. It is followed by the presentation of the model and its hypotheses. Then, the used methodology will be explained and the obtained results will be analysed. Lastly,

a discussion based on the results will be presented and the conclusions taken from the study will be highlighted.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Service jobs and the contact with customers

There are several jobs, especially service occupations, which involve continuous direct interaction with customers or clients (Grandey, 2003; Leidner, 1999). In the human service companies, the way workers interact with customers may be considered the central part of their job role (Grandey, 2003).

There are some aspects which are considered part of human contact service personnel's role, namely: to follow a script, to display a positive attitude or to appear approachable. Moreover, the frontline employees are expected to express positive emotions to the customers (Grandey, 2003; Pugh, 2001). The reason behind this is that some of these behaviours – for instance, to smile and to convey friendliness – are seen by having positive impact in customers and in the organisation outcomes (Grandey, 2003). It is possible to highlight some of the positive outcomes: clients' satisfaction, loyalty and intention to recommend to others and the customers' perception of service quality (Grandey, 2003; Iñigo *et al.*, 2007).

Therefore, the emotional displays have been recognised as “an important requirement in an increasing number of jobs due to their role in influencing work-related outcomes for employees and organizations” (Iñigo *et al.*, 2007: 30). Thus, there are strategies, through emotional regulation, that allow employees to meet the affective job requirements/ rules (Grandey, 2000; Grandey, 2003).

2.2. Emotional regulation strategies

Although the organizations requirements and job rules, employees do not always feel positive (Grandey, 2003). Thus, employees have to engage/ display different emotions from the ones experienced because certain expressions and feelings should be shown to customers and others should not be (Grandey, 2000). Previous research has verified that in order to perform their function and to achieve the organisational goals, employees engage in acting to express the desired/ required emotions (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003; Grandey, 2000).

There are two aspects of an employee's job which have been related with high levels of acting: display rules and job dissatisfaction (Grandey, 2003). Thus, the acting is needed when somehow the employees' true feelings does not match with the ones required by their job role (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000) and/ or when employees are displeased with their jobs (Grandey, 2003). Additionally, previous research has shown that the workers who frequently suppress their feelings tend to be less satisfied with their job (Grandey, 2000).

It is said in the literature that the service sector – specifically when dealing with patients or clients – may need an employee to engage in or experience emotions that they do not have with the aim of matching/ aligning his/ her feelings and emotions with the needs/ requirements of the job role (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000). This strategy is an emotional regulation process. Emotional regulation is defined as the process of modifying feelings or expressions and influencing emotions (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000; Grandey and Gabriel, 2015). Accordingly, “affective requirements enjoin service agents to display a certain range, intensity and frequency of emotions for a given duration, whether or not the display matches the agents' internal feelings.” (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000: 184). Thus, workers manage and regulate their emotions in their interactions with others to achieve their companies' goals – emotional labour (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003; Hochschild, 1983). In contrast, if the employees do not express positive mood to clients or co-workers it might impact negatively their performance (Grandey, 2000).

This emotional regulation process influences several dimensions of individuals' emotions (Inigo *et al.*, 2007). It could be an automatic – automatic way of emotional regulation, using natural feelings and authentic emotions – or a controlled process – using the acting approach (Gross, 1998; Inigo *et al.*, 2007). The literature on this topic has been focused mainly on the second strategy (Inigo *et al.*, 2007). Thus, the acting approach is commonly addressed by two different dimensions (both controlled forms): deep and surface acting (Grandey, 2003).

On the one hand, employees can modify their feelings to match expressions and align emotional experiences with job rules by expressing a genuine feeling: deep acting (Grandey, 2003; Lee and Woo, 2017). When engaging in deep acting, the employees try to change their feelings according to companies' expectations (Okabe, 2017). It is an antecedent-focused format – the one tries to feel the desired emotion – and the intent seems authentic to the clients (Grandey, 2000; Grandey, 2003; Gross 1998).

On the other hand, employees can modify (to fake) their expressions – both verbal and/ or non-verbal, for example facial expression and voice tone – and leave their feelings unchanged: surface acting (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000; Grandey, 2003). It might be useful for the organizations because the workers may express the desired requirements even they do not feel it and the others (customers) cannot see it (Okabe, 2017). In this dimension, “there is a discrepancy between true feeling and expressed feeling” (Lee and Woo, 2017: 138). This strategy is a response-focused format – the one feels the emotion and adapt the behaviour – and it might be considered fake (Grandey, 2000; Grandey, 2003; Gross 1998).

2.3. Impacts of surface and deep acting

In human-service roles the emotional dissonance is commonly experienced (Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010). It is experienced when the individual’s emotional expression does not match with the individual’s actual feelings (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000); in other words, the one’s inner feelings and the displayed ones are inconsistent (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002). Grandey (2000: 97) refers that “although dissonance is a negative state of being, surface and deep acting are processes that may have positive or negative results. This allows researchers to explain negative outcomes such as individual stress and health problems, and positive results such as customer service.”.

The employees who face this job stressor need to invest more effort and have to regulate their emotions in order to meet the job requirements (Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010). The emotional dissonance is stated by having a positive relationship with emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction in several jobs and industries, since it drains the employees’ emotions (Abraham, 1998; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002).

Moreover, previous research has shown that emotional labour is associated with job burnout (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Kammeyer-Mueller *et al.*, 2013). Burnout might be defined as “a chronic state of work related psychological stress that is characterized by exhaustion (i.e., feeling emotionally drained and used up), mental distancing (i.e., cynicism and lack of enthusiasm), and reduced personal efficacy (i.e., doubting about one’s competence and contribution at work)” (Schaufeli, 2017: 120). In other words, it is a state of cynicism and exhaustion towards work which promotes health outcomes (Bakker *et al.*, 2014). Research by Demerouti *et al.* (2001: 508) has provided the evidence

that “burned-out human service professionals may feel exhausted by the emotionally demanding contacts with their patients or clients and treat them in a depersonalized way.”. Emotional exhaustion is considered the central strain dimension of burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 2016).

Emotional exhaustion has also been studied by burnout researchers whom stated that emotional exhaustion arises due to high job demands and overload (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Maslach and Leiter, 2016) and it is referred as one of emotional labour outcomes (Lee and Woo, 2017). When employees face high job demands, it is predicted that they would experience increased exhaustion (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). Emotional exhaustion is defined as a lack of feelings and energy resulting from physical and emotional depletion (Maslach *et al.*, 1996) and it results from feelings of being emotionally drained by one’s contact with other people (Bakker *et al.*, 2014). Thus, the demands of human service roles drain the workers’ emotional resources and energy (Grandey, 2000).

Regarding its impacts, emotional exhaustion as a burnout dimension, is associated to employees’ detachment and negative reactions to people and the job – depersonalization or cynicism. (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Maslach and Leiter, 2016). Furthermore, it promotes employees’ feelings of inadequacy and failure at work (less personal accomplishment and/ or professional inefficacy) (Maslach and Leiter, 2016). Additionally, the researchers said that there is an overlap between emotional exhaustion and stress reactions (such as, anxiety and fatigue) and they have been related to the same job stressors: role problems and workload (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). In order to assess emotional exhaustion, the literature has been taking into account some measures: physical fatigue, need to rest, feelings of emptiness and overloading from work (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001).

There are controversial studies regarding the impact of deep acting on emotional exhaustion and there is no evidence which positively correlates these variables (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003). It is suggested in the literature that deep acting is less associated with emotional exhaustion because employees engage in the required emotions and feelings, allowing consistency between their internal feelings and the displayed ones (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002). Besides, deep acting has been associated with identification with job role and personal accomplishment (Lee and Woo, 2017).

However, ample empirical evidence has mentioned that surface acting is highly positively related with emotional exhaustion (Abraham, 1998; Brotheridge and Lee, 2003; Grandey, 2003; Iñigo *et al.*, 2007) as it is a controlled strategy which requires higher levels of psychological effort by engaging in inauthentic emotions, and therefore it potentiates reduced well-being (Iñigo *et al.*, 2007). Thus, this acting approach is also associated with stressful experiences because employees are faking and not expressing their true emotions (Hochschild, 1983; Okabe, 2017). It is also positively related with depersonalization and negative affectivity and negatively related with accomplishment, positive affectivity and role identification (Lee and Woo, 2017). Moreover, it may promote reduced performance and negative responses from customers (Iñigo *et al.*, 2007). For these reasons, this study is going to focus on the surface acting strategy which is more emotionally demanding for the employees' and it has more detrimental outcomes than the deep acting approach (Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983; Iñigo *et al.*, 2007; Okabe, 2017).

The emotional dissonance experienced by service workers is “negatively related to psychological detachment from work during non-work time” (Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010: 356) and consequently, low detachment is positively associated to emotional exhaustion and need for recovery. The frontline workers experience low psychological detachment during non-work hours (out of work) by staying “mentally connected to their job”. It has a negative impact in employees' well-being (Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010).

2.4. JD-R model

Researchers with the aim of understanding burnout had presented the JD-R model. According to this model, every job has both demands and resources (Schaufeli, 2017).

Research by Demerouti and colleagues defined job demands as “those physical, social, or environmental aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs (e.g. Exhaustion)” (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001: 501). In other words, job demands refers to the bad aspects of work that drains employees' energy, namely role over-load or conflicts with others (Schaufeli, 2017).

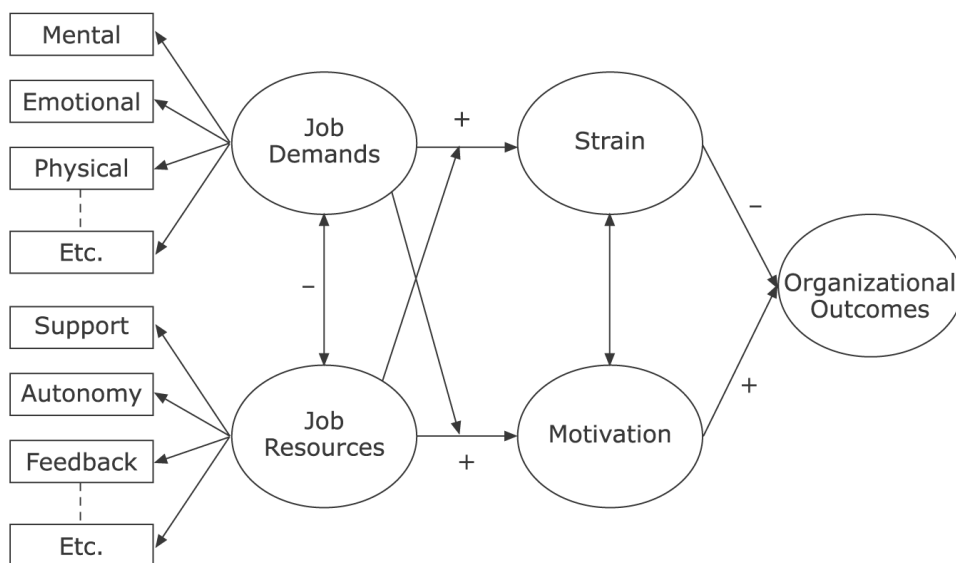
On the other hand, job resources are “those physical, social, or environmental aspects of the job that may do any of the following: a) be functional in achieving work

goals; b) reduce job demands and the associated physiological or psychological costs; c) stimulate personal growth and development” (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001: 501). Examples of job resources are the support from supervisors, feedback and participation in decision making (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Schaufeli, 2017).

The JD-R model includes two processes, a stress process and a motivational one (see Figure 1). The stress process consists in high job demands and low job resources which promote negative outcomes both for employees and for the organization (Schaufeli, 2017). It leads to workers mental exhaustion through burnout (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Schaufeli, 2017). Examples of these negative outcomes are poor performance, poor employees’ health, low commitment and work absence (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). In contrast, the second process is characterized by abundant job resources and it has positive impacts for individuals and their organizations, namely enhancing employees’ engagement, performance and motivation and promoting health (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Schaufeli, 2017).

In sum, according to the literature the first process drains employee’s energy but the second trigger it. Furthermore, both high job demands and low job resources are positively related with exhaustion and are considered burnout antecedents. Only high job resources are related with positive outcomes: employee engagement and burnout prevention (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Schaufeli, 2017).

Figure 1 The Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).



2.5. Recovery experiences

As already mentioned, the job demands – namely, the contact with clients – are related with emotional exhaustion and its impacts, as well as the need for recover (Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010). Thus, it is said in the literature that the employees who face high job demands, namely emotional dissonance, also experience a higher need to recover from work (Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010).

How is it possible to recover from the mentioned work demands? How can employees blur the impacts of the job acting approach? The literature suggests that employees can recover from job demands trough recovery experiences.

According to previous research, “Recovery from work refers to stepping away from work, unwinding, and experiencing the absence of work-related demands – in short, recovery is a means by which employees can hit the “off” switch.” (Fritz and Ellis, 2015: 4).

The literature believes that by integrating “strategies that allow employees to regularly recharge their batteries during time away from work”, it is possible to have healthier and more productive workers (Fritz and Ellis, 2015: 4). Fritz and Ellis said that when workers recover from work demands they benefit from increased performance and well-being (Fritz and Ellis, 2015). Moreover, some researchers have shown that recovery experiences are related with increased work engagement (Sonnentag, 2003).

Therefore, the recovery from work aims to ensure workers’ improved performance. It means that recovery experiences has positive impacts not only for the individual but for the organization as well (Ellis, 2015). When considering the enhanced performance, it relates to the employees’ “(...) readiness to perform, attentional capacity, and/ or feelings of being focused, energized, and motivated to work.” (Fritz and Ellis, 2015: 4).

In which concern to employee well-being, it is associated with “(...) higher life satisfaction, lower burnout, and fewer health complaints” (Fritz *et al.*, 2013: 279). In general, relaxation is related with improved energy, vitality, concentration and positive mood (Fritz *et al.*, 2013). Hence, when engaging in relaxing experiences workers can re-establish their energy and mood spent during work time (Fritz *et al.*, 2013).

Sonnentag and Fritz proposed four main differentiated recovery experiences: psychological detachment from work, relaxation, mastery and control (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007).

Psychological detachment refers to the mental detachment from work during nonwork periods, namely by abstaining from both work relate-activities, thoughts and emotions (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). Etzion and his colleagues stated that the detachment from work during non-working hours is the sense of being out of a work situation (Etzion *et al.*, 1998). The employees who experience psychological detachment from work experience improved well-being (Etzion *et al.*, 1998). Researchers also stated that “(...) getting a chance to not think about work at all (...) fosters a sense of happiness and serenity in employees.” (Fritz *et al.*, 2013: 276). Lastly, research by Sonnentag and Fritz’s (2007) indicated that psychological detachment is the most important form of recovery experience.

Relaxation is related to the experience of low physical and mental job demands and reduced effort and self-regulation (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). Relaxation refers both to mind and body relaxation and it is commonly associated with the leisure activities, such as taking a walk, taking a bath, meditation, reading a magazine or listening to music (Fritz *et al.*, 2013). “Relaxation is associated with positive mood, a sense of vigor and attentiveness, as well as with less fatigue and negative emotions.” (Fritz *et al.*, 2013: 277).

Mastery experiences refer to the experiences in which employees have the opportunity to learn and/ or to broad their horizon in other domains (non-work) (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007) for instance, to travel or to learn a hobby. Although it requires some regulation, it allow workers to build up new internal strategies (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). According to the literature, mastery experiences have positive outcomes such as employees’ sense of vitality, positive mood and less fatigue (Fritz *et al.*, 2013).

The control is related with the person’s ability to choose and to decide what to do during the time out of work – leisure time – and when and how to do the desired activities (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). “Control during nonwork time refers to a sense of autonomy over which activities to pursue during nonwork time as well as when and how to pursue them.” (Fritz and Crain, 2016: 57). The experience of control, as it is related with the opportunity of choosing the activities preferred, it is associated across the literature with positive outcomes, such as happiness and higher psychological well-being (Larson, 1989;

Lazarus, 1966) by enhancing the feeling of self-efficacy and competence (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). The control is described as an external source of recovery experiences (Sonntag and Fritz, 2007).

Regarding the type of recovery experiences, this study has focused on mastery experiences because they fit with the breaks' formats chosen (more detail below) and due to their impact on workers' performance.

Regarding the duration and the form of the recovery experiences, it is said that it does not matter the length of the break when experiencing the absence of work-related demands and engaging in relaxing experiences there is an improvement on employees' performance and well-being. Thus, the work breaks can take several formats – varying in structure and duration (from one hour or a period of days) – namely, vacations, holidays, weekends, evening after work, lunch breaks and other micro breaks at work (Fritz *et al.*, 2013). In this study the main focus will be on breaks during working time: lunch breaks and microbreaks at work. The choice has been made having in mind the studied population – frontline retail employees – who have rotating shift and rotating days off schedule (without weekends).

The most common at-work break is the lunch break, which is typically in the middle of the workday (covering or not the lunch time). It usually takes between 20 and 60 minutes and the employees usually take this time to eat, use the bathroom and rest. The literature on this topic mention that lunch breaks may not impact employees' well-being (Fritz *et al.*, 2013). However, Fritz and her colleagues (2013) also stated that when employees engage in relaxation and mastering during lunch breaks they can experience higher performance after the break – less fatigue and higher concentration. Furthermore, when employees take this time napping or socializing activities they feel more positive emotions after the break (Fritz *et al.*, 2013).

“Thus, in and of themselves, lunch breaks may not improve well-being, but rather actively seeking out activities that may enhance the likelihood of experiencing critical recovery experiences may be crucial for recovery during these breaks. In contrast, employees who engaged in work activities, such as preparing work materials for the next meeting, during breaks experienced more negative emotions later.” (Fritz *et al.*, 2013: 277).

There are other shorter breaks – microbreaks – which are not structured and may occur during the workday (Fritz *et al.*, 2013). These breaks usually aim to reenergize employees (Fritz *et al.*, 2013). The impact of microbreaks on employees’ performance is controversial for management. On the one hand, it might maintain the employee well-being throughout the day (Fritz *et al.*, 2013). On the other hand, it can have a negative impact on employees’ performance by spending time away from work tasks (Fritz *et al.*, 2013).

According to literature, these breaks does not have impact on employees’ performance (Fritz *et al.*, 2013). However, more recent research showed that some work-related activities as “to learning something new, creating meaning, and building positive relationships at work” are related with higher experienced energy and less fatigue (Fritz *et al.*, 2013). In contrast, non-work-related activities in micro breaks have been associated to less energy and without a positive impact in well-being (Fritz *et al.*, 2013). Thus, detaching totally from work are more suitable for longer breaks away from work (Fritz *et al.*, 2013). Summing up, lunch breaks can reenergize employees to perform during the afternoon and micro-breaks when used for learning, developing relationships or creating meaning can improve their work experiences (Fritz *et al.*, 2013).

Thus, as already mentioned, the organizations can benefit from supporting employees to recover from work. It is said that it is one strategy which promotes workers’ well-being and performance. Fritz and Ellis (2015: 8) believe that “organizations that understand their role in facilitating employee recovery, and that encourage their employees to leverage work breaks for the purpose of recharging and unwinding, will benefit from a workforce that is psychologically fit, energized, and ready to work.” .

How recovery experiences can be encouraged by the organizations/ employers?

First, the companies should try to reduce the work stressors and demands (Fritz and Ellis, 2015). Since not all of them can be removed, it is important to support other practices, such as:

1. To encourage employees to take vacation and not to trade the vacations days for monetary rewards and, consequently, not allowing employees to recover from job demands (Fritz and Ellis, 2015).
2. The leaders should also behave and promote work life balance through their teams (Fritz and Ellis, 2015). Thus, they must highlight the importance of

taking healthy meals and enough sleep and encourage workers to take breaks and to exercise (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2016).

3. To develop flexible scheduling policies, namely by allowing employees to adapt their schedule through time or spatial flexibility. It gives the opportunity to recover adequately (Fritz and Ellis, 2015).
4. To promote a balanced work-related technology use in order to recover properly during the time out of work, for instance, by setting limits to phone calls and emails (Fritz and Ellis, 2015).

In conclusion, through the literature review several concepts were described, starting from the emotional requirements of the frontline service jobs to their impacts on employees' performance and well-being and the resulting need of recover. In the next chapter, some of these concepts will be highlighted and correlated in a model which comprises four research hypotheses.

3. Proposed Model

There are common expectations about what are the correct reactions and interactions that the employees of human service jobs must perform (Hochschild, 1983). As already mentioned, frontline service agents are expected to be friendly and express positive emotions to customers (Iñigo *et al.*, 2007). However, employees does not always feel positive. In other words, sometimes frontline workers' feelings are different from the ones expected from them to perform at work (Grandey, 2003).

In order to face this job requirement, workers engage in acting to display the required rules and to accomplish their job role (Grandey, 2003; Iñigo *et al.*, 2007). “The prevalence of acting in service roles is not surprising, given the ubiquity of display rules and the fact that even service agents who identify strongly with their role will not always fell precisely what is expected from them” (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000: 189).

Available empirical evidence suggests that the emotional regulation promotes, through the emotional expression or suppression, “more effective human interactions” and it impacts positively the worker's performance and organization's results (Okabe, 2017). In contrast, the service providers to accomplish their job requirements behave inauthentically. According to literature, acting is also positively related with stress and emotional exhaustion among human service agents in several industries (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000). Thus, previous research suggested that emotional regulation strategies have an impact not only on employees' performance – improved results in human interactions – but, on the other hand, it has a detrimental impact on employees' health and well-being – emotional dissonance and emotional exhaustion. Additionally, the emotional dissonance and exhaustion are also stated by having impact both in workers' performance and well-being (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Maslach and Liter, 2016; Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010).

It is important to differentiate the two main different formats/ strategies of emotional regulation – surface acting and deep acting – and their impacts on employees and organizations. Surface acting can be defined as the experience of faking emotions to meet the job role or certain job rules, regulating emotional expressions without changing the individual's inner feelings (Grandey, 2000; Okabe, 2017). Deep acting occurs when

one tries to feel a specific desired emotion and modifies their inner feelings (Grandey, 2000; Grandey, 2003).

In previous research, the surface acting is positively correlated with emotional exhaustion due to the need of display different emotions from the ones experienced: emotional dissonance (Ashforth and Tomiuk, 2000; Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010). In which concern to deep acting there are controversial results and there is no evidence of a positive correlation of this variable with emotional exhaustion because it is focused on the antecedent emotions and it promotes emotions aligned with the required ones (Grandey, 2000; Iñigo *et al.*, 2007). Accordingly, this study is going to focus on the surface acting approach as this strategy have more detrimental impacts in workers' well-being and health: emotional exhaustion (Abraham, 1998; Iñigo *et al.*, 2007).

Okabe (2017: 151) in a study regarding the impact of the cabin crews in customer's satisfaction and loyalty refers that "despite not changing inner feeling, surface acting is desirable to an organization because passengers see the expected expressions, even when the cabin crew feels differently from the display.". In other words, it is possible to assume that surface acting has a positive relationship not only with emotional exhaustion but also with employees' service performance. Furthermore, this research provided evidence that emotional exhaustion can be a mediator of the relationship between organizational demands and job performance and hospitality offering.

Accordingly, I hypothesize that:

H1. Surface Acting is positively correlated with Service Performance.

H2. Emotional Exhaustion mediates the relationship between Surface Acting and Service Performance.

Considering that surface acting leads to emotional exhaustion and it drains employees' energy, there is a need to recover from this strategy of emotional regulation in order to improve workers' health and boost their performance. With the aim of identifying strategies to blur the negative impacts of the surface acting on employees' health and well-being and enhancing employees' service performance, the concept of recovery experiences is going to be introduced.

The concept of recovery experiences arises due to the need of employees recover from high job demands/stressors (Sonnentag *et al.*, 2010). Thus, in the service work,

frontline employees have the need to recover from their job demands, namely from the acting approach.

According to Grandey (2003: 274),

“(...) when work demands are removed — for example, during evenings after work — employees have the opportunity to replenish their psychological resources (e.g., energy, positive mood) that may have been lost during work, due to effort expended in the process of performing work tasks and coping with work-related demands. In turn, the ability to recover is presumed to directly relate to employees’ well-being and health, as well as employees’ performance capacity (...).”

Recovery experiences are stated to have positive impacts both for the organizations and their employees. On the one hand it enhances employees’ well-being, and on the other hand, it boosts employees’ performance (Fritz and Ellis, 2015). Regarding the impact on performance, recovery experiences have been positively related with workers’ readiness, focus, motivation and energy (Fritz *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, I deduce that employees may blur the impacts of the job acting approach and enhance service performance through recovery experiences.

Previous research had also mentioned the concept of recovery experiences related with four primary sources: relaxation, psychological detachment, control and mastery experiences (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007; Fritz and Ellis, 2015; Ellis, 2015) – explained with more detail in literature review. This research is going to focus on the mastery experiences and their impact on service performance.

The mastery experiences are one type of recovery experience related with challenging and learning activities (Ellis, 2015). Fritz and Sonnentag (2006: 938) defined mastery experiences as “activities that act as an individual challenge or that offer the possibility to learn new skills, such as taking language classes, learning a new sport, or undertaking a mountain expedition.”. This type of recovery experience is referred to be correlated with enhanced positive mood and energy and lower fatigue when returning to work after the break (Fritz *et al.*, 2013).

Although the recovery experiences can take different duration and structure (Fritz *et al.*, 2013), for the reason mentioned on the literature review chapter, the focus will be in two formats, both during working hours: lunch breaks and microbreaks. Fritz and

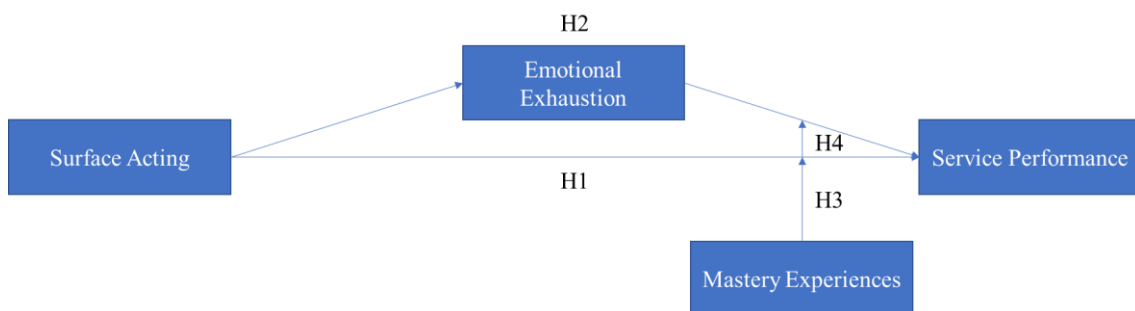
colleagues (2013) argued that employees who engage in mastery experiences during lunch breaks and other microbreaks appear to have higher performance, less fatigue and more vigour after the break.

Thus, I propose two additional hypotheses, as follows:

H3. Mastery Experiences during work breaks moderates the relationship between Surface Acting and Service Performance in the indirect effect of the mediator Emotional Exhaustion, such that the relationship is stronger when employees have high Mastery Experiences.

H4. Mastery Experiences during work breaks moderates the relationship between Emotional Exhaustion and Service Performance in the indirect effect of the mediator Emotional Exhaustion, such that the negative relationship between Emotional Exhaustion and Service Performance is stronger when employees have lower Mastery Experiences.

Figure 2 Proposed Model.



4. Methodology

4.1. Participants and Procedures

The research was administered on the retail sector, as in the service companies it is considered important that the frontline employees engage in emotional labour when interacting with the customers because it is determinant for the customer's perception of service quality and it impacts the company's results and competitive advantage (Lee, 2018; Pugh, 2001). The sample was drawn from frontline service employees from a Portuguese food retail company which has thirty-nine stores across the country. Permission to conduct the questionnaires was approved by company's human resources director and operations director. It was a paper and pencil study which was personally delivered in the stores. The questionnaires were held in Portuguese, as it is a Portuguese company. The participation was voluntary, and the confidentiality was ensured. The employees who the store management team considered that would have difficulty to complete the survey were not invited to answer.

The main criteria to choose the participants was that they had direct interactions with customers in a day-to-day basis at work. Although the participants were all frontline service employees, they held different positions in the store, such as store operator, specialized operator and supervisor. Thus, the study was applied to two different targets – employees' (operators or specialized operators) and supervisors – using two different surveys accordingly. Both questionnaires had an introduction explaining the purpose and the objective of the study and the instructions to answer. The employees answered questions regarding emotional labour and emotional exhaustion. Besides, employees' direct supervisors assessed their team members' service performance. In order to match employees' answers with the respective supervisors, each survey had a code. The supervisors were required to use the first letter of the name of each worker to identify the evaluated subordinate. The results were analysed with IBM SPSS Statistics.

Regarding the sample, I took advantage from the geographical dispersion of the company's park of stores and I selected stores from four regions (North, Centre, Lisbon Metropolitan Area and Algarve) out of the five regions of continental Portugal (*NUT II*). A total of 140 frontline workers from ten stores were invited to participate in the study. In the end, I was able to collect responses from 91 employees from eight different stores (response rate of 65%) from four different store sections. The participants were aged from

22 to 59 and they were on average 38.14. In accordance with the sector, around 60% were female. Regarding education, more than half of the sample (54%) only completed nine years or less of formal education and the mean was 10.26 years. Moreover, the sample on average had more than a decade of both experience and seniority; to be precise, the mean work experience was around 17 years (SD = 10.69) and the participants had on average 10.55 years of seniority in the company (SD = 8.06). Around one third of the participants were supervisors.

Table 1 Sample characteristics.

Variables	N	Mean	%	Std. Dev.
Age (years)	87	38.14		9.36
Education (years)	88	10.26		2.94
Experience (years)	85	17.18		10.69
Seniority (years)	87	10.55		8.06
Female (%)	91		59.3	
Supervisory role (%)	91		35.2	

4.2. Measures

The questionnaires included some socio-demographic questions: age, gender, years of education, job title, years of work experience and seniority in the organization.

Emotional Labour – Surface Acting

In order to study surface acting, the Emotional Labour Scale from Brotheridge and Lee (2003) was applied. The authors developed a validated scale which is one of the most used across the literature to study emotional labour topics. It measures topics related with the intensity, variety and frequency of the emotional displays in the workplace (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003). The usage of surface acting was measured using three items, where employees were asked to indicate the frequency with which they experience some situations on a normal working day. An example of the inquired situations is “Resist expressing my true feelings”. The items were all rated on a five-point Likert-scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). The Cronbach’s alpha of this scale was 0.59. The principal component analysis shown one factor representing 37,92% of the explained variance and another one 25,36%.

Emotional Exhaustion

To assess the employees' emotional exhaustion, I used seven items developed on the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Kristensen *et al.*, 2005). The CBI is divided in three parts that evaluate different dimensions of burnout and I used the seven validated items regarding work-related burnout. The participants were invited to answer according to the frequency they experience the items. For this subscale, the Cronbach's alpha was 0.83. As the previous scale, it is also a five-point Likert-scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Three examples of the assessed items are:

- (1) "Is your work emotionally exhausting?";
- (2) "Are you exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work?";
and
- (3) "Do you feel burnt out because of your work?".

Recovery Experiences – Mastery Experiences

Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) with the aim of understanding "how individuals unwind and recuperate from work" (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007: 204) developed four validated measures: psychological detachment from work, relaxation, mastery, and control. In this study, I applied four items from the mastery experiences' measure ($\alpha = .91$), such as:

- (1) "I learn new things."; and
- (2) "I do things that challenge me.".

Considering their breaks at work, the participants indicated their agreement with each item on a five-point Likert-scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Customer Service Performance

To measure the employees' customer service performance, it was developed a scale composed by three items. It was adapted from a measure developed by Wang and colleagues (2017). Two examples of the items used are:

- (1) "The employee shows spontaneity when smiling to a customer."; and
- (2) "I have to ask the employee to show a smile and a favourable attitude towards a customer.".

The latter item was reversed. Supervisors indicated the frequency that some situations occur on a seven-point Likert-scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). This variable was measured using the means of the teams for the three items. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.75.

5. Results

In table 2, the means, standard deviations and zero-order correlations of the studied variables are shown. Regarding the means, the variables which used 5-point scales – surface acting, emotional exhaustion and mastery experiences – have had the following scores: 2.52, 3.00 and 3.22, respectively. These variables shown means around the middle point of the scale, being the mastery experiences the variable with the highest mean score. The variable service performance (7-point scale) mean was 4.47.

As we can see, the studied variables shown correlation between them. The stronger positive association is between surface acting and emotional exhaustion ($r = .41$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, mastery experiences and service performance mean were both negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion ($r = -.30$, $p < .05$ and $r = -.36$, $p < .01$, respectively).

Table 2 Means, standard deviations, correlations between the variables and Cronbach's alphas.

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4
1. Surface Acting	2.52	.70	(.59)			
2. Emotional Exhaustion	3.00	.69	.41**	(.83)		
3. Mastery Experiences	3.22	.93	.15	-.30*	(.91)	
4. Service Performance Mean	4.47	.84	-.16	-.36**	.17	(.75)

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Cronbach's alphas are shown in bold along the diagonal. (n = 91).

Test of Hypotheses

To test the model and the four hypotheses, regression analysis was conducted using SPSS Statistics. I used the PROCESS macro developed by Hays (2018) for SPSS to investigate both the mediational and the moderated mediation hypotheses. The PROCESS tool estimates not only the coefficients from the ordinary least squares of the model but also the estimations of both direct and indirect effects in mediation models and test questions regarding moderated mediations (Hayes, 2018). Hypothesis 1 and

hypothesis 2 were tested using a mediation analysis (Model 4 in PROCESS) and hypothesis 3 and 4 were tested using a moderated mediation analysis (Model 5 and 14, respectively). Results are based on 5,000 bootstrap samples and a 95% level of confidence.

Mediation Analysis

In Table 3 is shown the investigation about the relationship between surface acting and service performance mediated by emotional exhaustion. The results indicated that there is a positive significant relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .44$, $SE = .13$, $p < .001$, 95% CI .18 to .69), meaning that surface acting (predictor) is a significant predictor of emotional exhaustion (mediator). Furthermore, the emotional exhaustion (mediator) is a significant predictor of service performance (outcome) in a negative way ($\beta = -.44$, $SE = .17$, $p < .012$, CI -.78 to -.10). The full mediation model was significant [$F(2, 53) = 4.06$, $p < 0.022$, $R^2 = .13$]. Around 13% of the variance in service performance is explained by the model ($R^2 = .13$). These results support the mediational hypothesis (H2). On the other hand, surface acting is not a significant predictor of service performance ($\beta = -.00$, $SE = .17$, $p < .995$, 95% CI -.35 to .35), rejecting the first hypothesis (H1). Additionally, the indirect effect of surface acting on service performance is -.19 (Boot SE = .10) and the bootstrap confidence limits are entirely below zero ([-.41, -.01], do not include zero), meaning that the indirect effect test is significant, and it provides support for the mediation via indirect effect. It suggests that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between surface acting and service performance, supporting hypothesis 2.

Table 3 Model coefficients for emotional exhaustion as mediator.

M: Emotional Exhaustion						
	β	SE	t	p	CI (lower)	CI (upper)
X: Surface Acting	.44	.13	3.48	.001	.18	.69
R²	R ² = .18					
F	F (1, 54) = 12.08					

Y: Service Performance						
	β	SE	t	p	CI (lower)	CI (upper)
X: Surface Acting	-.00	.17	-.01	.995	-.35	.35
M: Em. Exhaustion	-.44	.17	-2.57	.012	-.78	-.10
R²	R ² = .13					
F	F (2, 53) = 4.06					

Direct effect of X on Y				Indirect effect of X on Y		
Effect	SE	t	p	Boot Effect	Boot SE	CI
-.00	.17	-.01	.995	-.19	.10	[-.41, -.01]

Notes: n = 54. β = Regression coefficients; SE = Standard error, CI = Confidence Intervals; X = Antecedent variable; M = Mediator; Y = Dependent variable.

Moderated Mediations

In table 4 it is possible to analyse if the mastery experiences moderate the relationship between surface acting and service performance (H3). The overall model (Model 5) was significant (F (4, 51) = 5.57, R² = .30, $p < .001$). The interaction between surface acting and service performance was also significant ($\beta = .48$, SE = .14, $p < .001$, 95% CI .21 to .76) which means that mastery experiences is a significant moderator of the relationship between surface acting and service performance. Although only for low ($\beta = -.42$, SE = .20, $p < .043$, 95% CI -.82 to -.01) and high levels ($\beta = .45$, SE = .22, $p < .042$, 95% CI .02 to .89) of mastery experiences the main effect of the moderator is significant, the indirect effect test is significant (Boot effect = -.18, Boot SE = .10, 95% CI .21 to .76). Thus, mastery experiences moderate the relationship between surface acting and service performance in the indirect effect of the mediator emotional exhaustion, such that there is a stronger relationship when employees have high mastery experiences, corroborating hypothesis 3.

Table 4 Model coefficients for the moderated mediation, with mastery experiences as a moderator between surface acting and service performance.

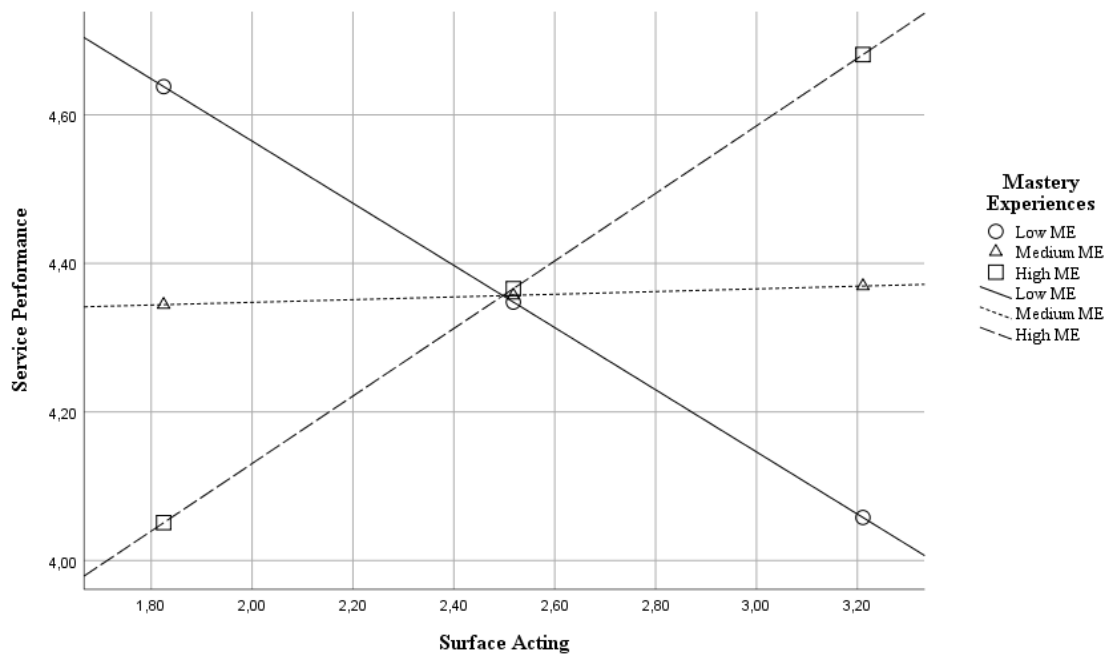
Y: Service Performance						
	β	SE	t	p	CI (lower)	CI (upper)
X: Surface Acting	-1.53	.46	-3.33	.002	-2.45	-.61
M: Em. Exhaustion	-.42	.17	-2.46	.017	-.77	-.09
W: Mastery Exper.	-1.20	.38	-3.16	.003	-1.96	-.44
X * W	.48	.14	3.51	.001	.21	.76
R²	R ² = .30					
F	F (4, 51) = 5.57					
Conditional effect						
Low Mastery Exp.	-.42	.20	-2.08	.043	-.82	-.01
Conditional effect						
Medium Mastery Exp.	.02	.17	.11	.915	-.32	.36
Conditional effect						
High Mastery Exp.	.45	.22	2.09	.042	.02	.89

Indirect effect of X on Y

Boot Effect	Boot SE	CI
-.18	.10	[-.40, -.01]

Notes: n =56. β = Regression coefficients; SE = Standard error, CI = Confidence Intervals; X = Antecedent variable; M = Mediator; Y = Dependent variable; W = Moderator.

Figure 3 Moderation effect of mastery experiences on the relationship between surface acting and service performance, in the indirect effect of emotional exhaustion.



In table 5 the hypothesis 4 of the studied model was tested (PROCESS, model 14). The full moderated mediation was significant ($F(4, 51) = 4.54, R^2 = .26, p < .001$) as well as the interaction of the mediator (emotional exhaustion) with the moderator (mastery experiences) was also significant ($\beta = .45, SE = .15, p < .005, 95\% CI .15 \text{ to } .76$). Thus, the interaction between emotional exhaustion and mastery experiences has a significant relationship with the dependent variable, service performance.

However, when analysing the conditional indirect effect, it is possible to conclude that the indirect effect of emotional exhaustion on service performance is significant only when the mastery experiences are low (Boot effect = $-.36$, Boot SE = $.17$, 95% CI $-.71 \text{ to } -.06$). The same analysis is not true for moderate and high levels of mastery experiences due to their bootstrap confidence intervals ($[-.40, .00]$ and $[-.20, .25]$). The index of moderated mediation was also not significant (Boot effect = $.20$, Boot SE = $.11$, 95% CI $-.00 \text{ to } .41$). Thus, I can conclude that the indirect effects of emotional exhaustion on emotional exhaustion has a significant impact on service performance only if the mastery experiences are low, such that the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and service performance is higher when employees have lower recovery experiences. The H4 is not fully corroborated.

Table 5 Model coefficients for the moderated mediation, with mastery experiences as a moderator between emotional exhaustion and service performance.

Y: Service Performance

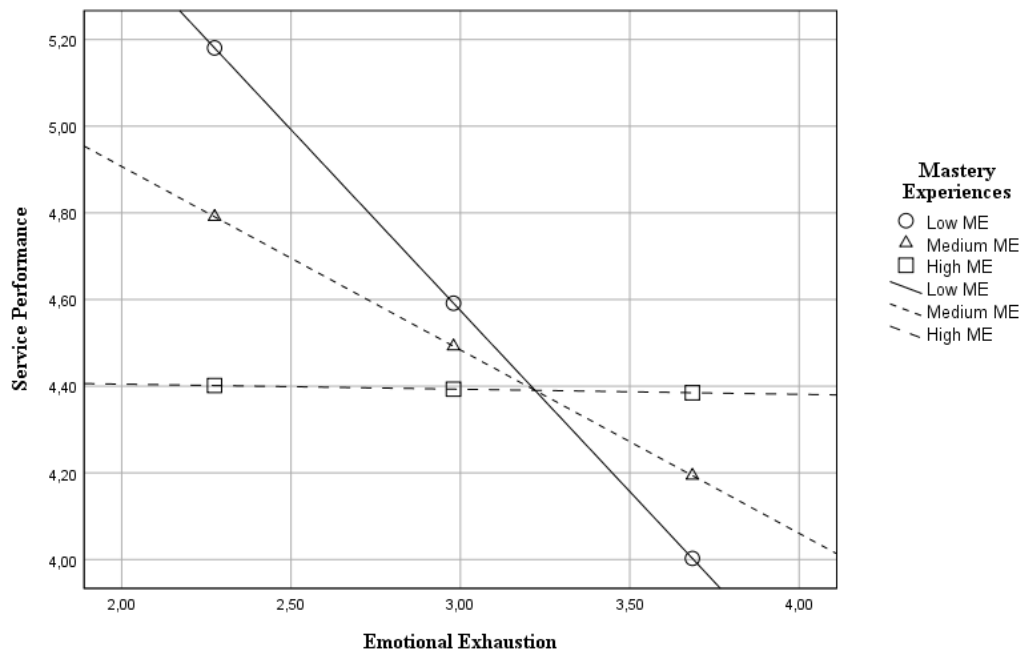
	β	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	CI (lower)	CI (upper)
X: Surface Acting	.03	.017	.20	.843	-.32	.39
M: Em. Exhaustion	-.42	.18	-2.40	.022	-.78	-.07
W: Mastery Exper.	-0.11	.14	-.79	.434	-.39	.17
M * W	.45	.15	2.95	.005	.15	.76
R²	R ² = .26					
F	F (4, 51) = 4.54					

Conditional indirect effects of X on Y

	Boot Effect	Boot SE	CI
Low Mastery Exp.	-.36	.17	[-.71, -.06]
Medium Mastery Exp.	-.18	.10	[-.40, .00]
High Mastery Exp.	-.01	.11	[-.20, .25]
Index of moderated mediation	.20	.11	[-.00, .41]

Notes: n = 56. β = Regression coefficients; SE = Standard error, CI = Confidence Intervals; X = Antecedent variable; M = Mediator; Y = Dependent variable; W = Moderator.

Figure 4 Moderation effect of mastery experiences on the relationship emotional exhaustion and service performance, in the indirect effect of emotional exhaustion.



6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1. General Discussion

Considering that the service organizations are increasingly concerned with providing a good service to the customers and, knowing that it increases the need of employees engaging in acting to achieve the organizational rules, this study was focused on the service sector and on employees who have frequent direct interactions with customers. This research aimed to study the relationship between the surface acting performed by frontline employees and their service performance through the mediation of emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, the study also analysed the impact of engaging in mastery experiences during work breaks on the former relationship.

In line with the literature (Abraham, 1998; Brotheridge and Lee, 2003; Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983; Iñigo *et al.*, 2007), it was possible to identify a positive relationship between surface acting and emotional exhaustion. As expected, it was also found that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between surface acting and employees' service performance. Thus, the surface acting, mediated by emotional exhaustion, has a negative relationship with service performance. In other words, although engaging in surface acting aims to achieve the organizational requirements and results, it may drain the frontline employees' energy (Grandey, 2000) and lead to emotional exhaustion, which consequently may result in service performance losses. Then, this study also supports the idea that surface acting promotes reduced performance, through emotional exhaustion (Iñigo *et al.*, 2007).

Nevertheless, when analysing the impact of mastery experiences on the relationship between surface acting and service performance in the indirect effect of emotional exhaustion, different results were shown. Mastery experiences were significant moderators between surface acting and service performance (in the indirect effect of the mediator). Thus, this study suggested that when employees recover from surface acting by having high mastery experiences, they will benefit from an increased performance. These results are also aligned with the previous research on recovery experiences (Fritz and Ellis, 2015) which stated that employees who recover from work demands will have improved performance. On the other hand, the employees who engage in surface acting

and have low mastery experiences are expected to have poorer service performance. The conditional effect for medium levels of mastery experiences was not significant.

Besides, this research also provides evidence regarding the moderation effect of the mastery experiences on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and service performance. It was suggested that when employees have low mastery experiences, there is a stronger negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and service performance.

6.2. Theoretical implications

Across the literature (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003; Grandey, 2003; Gross, 1998; Iñigo *et al.*, 2007), the emotional exhaustion has been more associated with the surface acting technique, as it is an emotionally demanding strategy when compared with, for instance deep acting. The results of this study are consistent with the previous research, corroborating a positive relationship between the variables (surface acting and emotional exhaustion). On the other hand, surface acting was expected to be positive related with service performance, as this strategy aims to align employees' behaviours and expressions with the organizational requirements (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998; Okabe, 2017). However, this study did not find a relationship between the variables.

Besides, the mediation results shown that employees who engage in surface acting are expected to have symptoms of emotional exhaustion, and consequently show deficits in service performance. Thus, this research provides evidence that emotional exhaustion is an intermediate step between surface acting and service performance. Thus, in line with the JD-R model, the surface acting may be categorised as a job demand (emotional type) which predict strain - emotional exhaustion - and negative organizational outcomes – performance losses (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001).

Regarding the moderation results, the investigation has shown that the surface acting technique (in the indirect effect of emotional exhaustion) and the mastery experiences interact in the prediction of service performance. Precisely, when employees have high mastery experiences during work breaks, it is expected that the relationship between surface acting and service performance becomes positive. In other words, the surface acting is related with higher levels of service performance in the presence of high mastery experiences. In contrast, if workers have low levels of mastery experiences the

negative relationship between surface acting and service performance in the mediation of emotional exhaustion becomes stronger. It might be explained due to the recovery effect of mastery experiences, allowing employees both to recover from the work demands – emotional dissonance – and to enhance their performance capacity by having new challenges and by building new internal resources (Ellis, 2015; Fritz and Ellis, 2015; Fritz *et al.*, 2013). Moreover, it was also possible to conclude that when the workers have low mastery experiences during their breaks, the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and service performance is higher. Further, when applying the JD-R model, it might be possible to classify the mastery experiences as job resources, when encouraged by the organization (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001). In this sense, when employees engage in mastery experiences, the organization might benefit from improved results (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Demerouti *et al.*, 2001).

An innovation of this research was the moderated mediation model applied, allowing to measure the impact of mastery experiences in the mediation relationship between surface acting, emotional exhaustion and service performance. Another innovation of this investigation was the study of the impact of the mastery experiences, as a recovery strategy, during work breaks on the service workers who engage in surface acting.

6.3. Practical implications

This research has some important contributions for organizations, namely for the development of human resources practices and management decisions. Firstly, the organizations should be concerned in understanding what are the techniques used by the frontline employees to face the required service rules. Thus, it may be important for organizations to develop instruments to identify and measure the emotional regulation and acting techniques engaged by their workers.

Furthermore, this study was in line with some previous research (e.g. Grandey, 2003) and provided evidence that the surface acting strategy leads to emotional dissonance and to a state of depletion and few resources (emotional exhaustion) which may negatively impact workers' service performance. In this sense, managers should encourage employees to engage in other emotional regulation techniques, namely deep acting, which is considered a less demanding strategy across the literature (Grandey,

2003; Iñigo *et al.*, 2007). Accordingly, both the HR and the management teams should develop and provide to frontline workers some training on the alternative techniques.

This investigation also suggested that having high mastery experiences during work breaks might have positive impacts in employees' recover and performance capacity. Thus, as already suggested in the literature (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2016) managers and supervisors should encourage workers to take breaks and stimulate them to take their lunch breaks and other small breaks to have mastery experiences. Furthermore, the organizations may provide some resources in the common areas to boost these experiences. These practices might enhance both company results and employees' well-being.

6.4. Limitations and future research

This research had some limitations that should be mentioned. One limitation is the population size and its representativeness. The studied sample was small, and it was exclusively composed of employees from the same organization from the food retail sector. Therefore, statistical significance of the estimations is low, and the results may not be generalized to other companies and other sectors. It might be relevant to test this model with a bigger sample size as well as in other organizations, industries and countries in order to obtain more reliable and generalized results.

Moreover, the research had a cross sectional design which not allows us to determine the cause and effect relationship nor to understand the dynamic of the variables, as it is based on one point in time. Additionally, both surface acting, emotional exhaustion and mastery experiences were self-reported measures which may bias the results, given that participants tend to value their positive actions. As a suggestion for further investigation, it might be significant to conduct a longitudinal design study or experimental study and to use measures that do not rely on respondents' insights (e.g. to observe behaviours).

In order to get deeper knowledge on the studied topics, and considering this study evidence, future research might include other impacts of the surface acting approach, namely employees' well-being. It might be important to include this variable, as it is suggested in the literature that surface acting and emotional exhaustion impacts it negatively (Grandey, 2003; Iñigo *et al.*, 2007) and, on the other hand, recovery

experiences are mentioned to impact positively employees' well-being (Ellis, 2015; Fritz and Ellis, 2015). Additionally, further investigation might measure the impact of some other types of recovery experiences as relaxation or psychological detachment (Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007) on frontline employees' well-being. Other formats and durations of breaks might be also analysed, namely vacations and evenings after work (Fritz *et al.*, 2013).

Lastly, future studies might consider some control variables, such as age, gender and job satisfaction. It is important to highlight that job dissatisfaction has been mentioned in the literature as a predictor of acting strategies (Grandey, 2003).

6.5. Conclusion

This study had two main goals: to understand the relationship between surface acting and service performance through the mediation effect of employees' emotional exhaustion; and to understand if mastery experiences (as one type of recovery experiences) during work breaks moderate the relationship between surface acting and service performance and between emotional exhaustion and service performance, both in the indirect effect of the mediator emotional exhaustion.

The findings suggested, indeed, that surface acting has a positive relationship with emotional exhaustion, and a negative relationship with service performance in the indirect effect of emotional exhaustion.

Furthermore, this study proposes that if employees who engage in surface acting experience high mastery experiences, they are expected to have improved performance. The opposite for the ones who have low mastery experiences. This research also found that the negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and service performance is higher when employees have lower recovery experiences.

In sum, this study provides evidence that surface acting has detrimental impacts for service providers' health (emotional exhaustion) and, consequently performance. On the other hand, it was found that when frontline employees engage in high mastery experiences during lunch breaks and other microbreaks, they benefit from improved performance. Thus, today's organizations and their management teams might be concerned in understanding what are the strategies engaged by their frontline employees

to perform positive affective displays. Moreover, according to this research, organizations might encourage employees to recover and to have mastery experiences during the work breaks.

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8. Annexes

Annex A: Employee's Survey

Questionário

O meu nome é Laura Bárbara e encontro-me a finalizar o mestrado em Gestão de Recursos Humanos e Consultadoria Organizacional da ISCTE Business School. No âmbito da minha dissertação, este questionário pretende recolher informação sobre a forma como os colaboradores com contacto direto com o cliente encaram e desempenham esta função.

Não existem respostas certas ou erradas. **TODOS OS DADOS PERMANECERÃO CONFIDENCIAIS** e serão utilizados exclusivamente para fins académicos (acima mencionado). Como tal, solicito que responda de forma espontânea e sincera a todas as questões. Obrigada pela sua participação!

Caracterização do inquirido

Género: Masculino Feminino **Idade:** ___ anos **Habilitações literárias:** _____ **Exp. profissional:** ___ anos **Atividade profissional:** _____ **Antiguidade:** ___ anos

Questionário A

Considerando a escala abaixo apresentada, assinale (X) de 1 a 5 a frequência com que experienciam, num dia normal de trabalho, as seguintes situações.

1	2	3	4	5
Nunca	Raramente	Às vezes	Frequentemente	Sempre

1. Resisto a expressar os meus verdadeiros sentimentos.	1	2	3	4	5
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2. Finjo ter emoções que realmente não tenho.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Escondo os meus verdadeiros sentimentos sobre uma situação.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Faço um esforço para realmente sentir as emoções que preciso de mostrar aos outros.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Tento efetivamente experienciar as emoções que devo mostrar.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Tento verdadeiramente sentir as emoções que tenho de mostrar como parte do meu trabalho.	1	2	3	4	5

Questionário B

Considerando a escala abaixo apresentada, assinale (X) de 1 a 4 a sua opinião face às seguintes afirmações.

1	2	3	4
Totalmente falso	Falso	Verdadeiro	Totalmente verdadeiro

1. Não tenho tempo para terminar as minhas tarefas.	1	2	3	4
2. Ando sempre a “correr” para conseguir terminar as minhas tarefas.	1	2	3	4
3. Tenho muito tempo disponível.	1	2	3	4

Questionário C

Considerando a escala abaixo apresentada, assinale (X) de 1 a 5 a frequência com que experiencia as seguintes situações.

1	2	3	4	5
Nunca	Raramente	Às vezes	Frequentemente	Sempre

1. Sente-se esgotado(a) no final do dia de trabalho?	1	2	3	4	5
2. De manhã sente-se cansado(a) quando pensa que tem de enfrentar mais um dia de trabalho?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Sente que cada hora de trabalho é muito cansativa para si?	1	2	3	4	5

4. Tem energia suficiente para a sua família e amigos durante o seu tempo de descanso?	1	2	3	4	5
5. O seu trabalho é emocionalmente esgotante?	1	2	3	4	5
6. Sente-se frustrado(a) devido ao seu trabalho?	1	2	3	4	5
7. Sente-se exausto(a) devido ao seu trabalho?	1	2	3	4	5

Questionário D

Considerando a escala abaixo apresentada, assinale (X) de 1 a 5 a sua opinião face ao seu comportamento no seu tempo livre durante o horário de trabalho (ex. pausas, hora de refeição).

1	2	3	4	5
Discordo totalmente	Discordo	Não concordo nem discordo	Concordo	Concordo totalmente

1. Esqueço-me do trabalho.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Não penso no trabalho de todo.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Distancio-me do meu trabalho.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Faço uma pausa das exigências do trabalho.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Relaxo.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Faço coisas relaxantes.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Uso o tempo para relaxar.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Uso tempo para lazer.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Aprendo coisas novas.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Procuo desafios intelectuais.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Faço coisas que me desafiam.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Faço algo para ampliar meus horizontes.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Sinto que posso decidir por mim mesmo o que fazer.	1	2	3	4	5

14. Decido a minha própria agenda.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Determino por mim mesmo como vou passar o meu tempo.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Faço as coisas da maneira que eu quero que elas sejam feitas.	1	2	3	4	5

Questionário E

Considerando a escala abaixo apresentada, indique (X) de 1 a 5 com que frequência considera que a sua CHEFIA DIRETA pratica os seguintes comportamentos.

1	2	3	4	5
Raramente ou nunca	Poucas vezes	Às vezes	Frequentemente	Muito frequentemente

1. A minha chefia direta comunica uma visão clara e positiva do futuro.	1	2	3	4	5
2. A minha chefia direta trata os colaboradores como indivíduos, suporta e encoraja o desenvolvimento.	1	2	3	4	5
3. A minha chefia direta encoraja e reconhece os colaboradores.	1	2	3	4	5
4. A minha chefia direta promove a confiança, envolvimento e cooperação da equipa.	1	2	3	4	5
5. A minha chefia direta encoraja a pensar os problemas de novas formas.	1	2	3	4	5
6. A minha chefia direta é clara sobre os seus valores e age de acordo.	1	2	3	4	5
7. A minha chefia direta incute orgulho e respeito nos outros e inspira-me para ser altamente competente.	1	2	3	4	5

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Annex B: Supervisor's Survey

Questionário

O meu nome é Laura Bárbara e encontro-me a finalizar o mestrado em Gestão de Recursos Humanos e Consultadoria Organizacional da ISCTE Business School. No âmbito da minha dissertação, este questionário pretende recolher informação sobre a forma como os colaboradores com contacto direto com o cliente encaram e desempenham esta função.

Não existem respostas certas ou erradas. **TODOS OS DADOS PERMANECERÃO CONFIDENCIAIS** e serão utilizados exclusivamente para fins académicos (acima mencionado). Como tal, solicito que responda de forma espontânea e sincera a todas as questões. Obrigada pela sua participação!

Caracterização do inquirido

Género: Masculino Feminino **Idade:** ___ anos **Habilitações literárias:** _____ **Exp. profissional:** ___ anos **Atividade profissional:** _____ **Antiguidade:** ___ anos

Questionário A

Considerando a escala abaixo apresentada, classifique (escrevendo o número) de 1 a 7 a frequência com que ocorrem as seguintes situações.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Nunca	Quase nunca	Raramente	Às vezes	Frequentemente	Muito Frequentemente	Sempre

Colaborador	1	2	3	4
1. O colaborador apresenta espontaneidade a mostrar um sorriso para o cliente.				
2. O colaborador apresenta um sorriso ao cliente de forma genuína.				
3. Tenho que avisar o colaborador para mostrar um sorriso e uma atitude favorável face a um cliente.				

Questionário B

Considerando a escala abaixo apresentada, classifique (escrevendo o número) de 1 a 5 a sua opinião relativamente ao desempenho do colaborador nos seguintes tópicos.

1	2	3	4	5
Necessita melhorar muito	Necessita algumas melhorias	Satisfatório	Bom	Excelente

Colaborador	1	2	3	4
1. Quantidade de trabalho.				
2. Qualidade do trabalho.				
3. Rigor/ precisão do trabalho.				
4. Atendimento ao cliente.				
5. Tem novas ideias.				
6. Trabalha para implementar novas ideias.				
7. Procura novas formas de fazer as coisas.				
8. Desenvolve melhorias nos processos e rotinas.				

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