

## Repositório ISCTE-IUL

---

Deposited in *Repositório ISCTE-IUL*:

2023-01-18

Deposited version:

Accepted Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Ma, S., Silva, M. G., Trigo, V. & Callan, V. (2020). Emotional labor and emotional intelligence on job performance: comparison of public and private organizations in China. In Ali Farazmand (Ed.), *Global encyclopedia of public administration, public policy, and governance.*: Springer.

Further information on publisher's website:

10.1007/978-3-319-31816-5\_3898-1

Publisher's copyright statement:

This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Ma, S., Silva, M. G., Trigo, V. & Callan, V. (2020). Emotional labor and emotional intelligence on job performance: comparison of public and private organizations in China. In Ali Farazmand (Ed.), *Global encyclopedia of public administration, public policy, and governance.*: Springer., which has been published in final form at [https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-31816-5\\_3898-1](https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-31816-5_3898-1). This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance with the Publisher's Terms and Conditions for self-archiving.

---

### Use policy

Creative Commons CC BY 4.0

The full-text may be used and/or reproduced, and given to third parties in any format or medium, without prior permission or charge, for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes provided that:

- a full bibliographic reference is made to the original source
- a link is made to the metadata record in the Repository
- the full-text is not changed in any way

The full-text must not be sold in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

---

# **Emotional Labor and Emotional Intelligence on Job Performance: A Comparison of Public and Private Organizations in China**

Shaozhuang Ma<sup>a</sup>, ma.shaozhuang@iscte-iul.pt; Maria Gabriela Silva<sup>a</sup>, gabriela.silva@iscte-iul.pt; Virginia Trigo<sup>a</sup>, virginia.trigo@iscte-iul.pt; Victor J. Callan<sup>b</sup>,  
v.callan@business.uq.edu.au

<sup>a</sup> Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE–IUL), Business Research Unit (UNIDE-IUL),  
Lisbon, Portugal;

<sup>b</sup> School of Business, University of Queensland, St Lucia, Brisbane, Australia;

**Synonyms** – Emotional Labor, Emotional Intelligence, Job Performance, Public and Private Organizations in China

**Definitions:** Emotional labor is the process of regulating emotional expressions for organizational goals. Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive, understand, appraise and express emotion, coupled with the ability to generate and regulate feelings.

## **Introduction**

Emotional labor involves the management of feelings to create publicly observable expressions that are in accordance with the display rules established by organizations (Hochschild, 1983). The display rules that shape the expression of such emotional labor are associated with occupational norms and organizational contexts (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Thus, due to the difference in management approaches, culture and norms, emotional labor may differ in public and private organizations. Accordingly, emotional labor may impact upon job performance in public and private organizations, but this relationship is subject to personal resources available (Newton, Teo, Pick, Ho & Thomas, 2016). Specifically, this paper discusses differences on emotional labor among managers and professionals working in Chinese public organizations

(CPOs), foreign-invested enterprises (FIEs) and Chinese privately-owned enterprises (POEs), as well as differences in the relationships among emotional labor, emotional intelligence (as a personal resource) and job performance.

### **Different Emotional Labor across Organizations of Different Ownership Type in China**

Different work environments impact upon the level of emotional demands prescribed by work situations. Two theoretical approaches offer a useful lens for understanding how environmental factors influence organizational requirements for emotional expression (Lawler & Thye, 1999; Lively & Powell, 2006): the cultural-normative approach and the structural-relational approach. The cultural-normative approach highlights the role of emotional norms and display rules in a social context, while a structural-relational approach emphasizes the impact of social positions (e.g., power and status) on the emotions that people are likely to feel. The cultural-normative perspective implies that, while emotional norms shape emotional expressions or displays, they vary across social or organizational contexts. Morris and Feldman (1996) propose that, at the organizational level, the explicitness of display rules, routineness of task, form of interaction and job autonomy are associated with emotional labor behavior. Additionally, the requirements for emotional labor are associated with features of organizational cultures (e.g., Gardner et al, 2009). The structural-relational approach proposes that positional differences lead to divergent felt emotions, which in turn have important effects on exchange relations and networks (Lawler & Thye, 1999). Specifically, low status employees are more likely to experience negative emotions and are more apt to conceal them from group members, thus engaging in emotional labor.

With regards to expressions of emotional labor, it is particularly interesting to look at countries like China that are transitioning from predominantly state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to a multiple ownership system. This structural system includes public organizations

represented by SOEs and other public organizations funded by government, and a growing private sector represented by foreign-invested enterprises (FIEs) and domestic privately-owned enterprises (POEs) (Ma, Silva, Callan & Trigo, 2016). The Chinese public organizations (CPOs) are constrained by their historical heritage, hierarchical structures and systems, and some governmental control, while private enterprises have greater flexibility and autonomy to run their business.

Although organization's HR practices influence emotional labor (Gabriel, Cheshin, Moran & van Kleef, 2016), studies in China also reveal differences in HRM practices according to different ownership forms (Ma et al., 2016). Foreign-owned enterprises use more formalized and transparent bonus systems through the transfer of high-performance human resource systems of their home country. Employees are motivated through transparent, open and fair remuneration practices and approaches that promote employee development, as well as a warm and friendly climate (Jaussaud & Liu, 2011). Compared to the HRM practices of FIEs, the systems of Chinese owned firms are much less transparent, with supervisors having stronger levels of personal influence. For example, the HRM systems of Chinese privately-owned enterprises are generally pragmatic, nonsystematic and informal.

The different clusters of firms that characterize the three ownership types also lead to different organizational cultures. Tsui et al. (2006) note that both foreign and domestic private firms have highly integrative cultures that emphasize internal integration and external adaptation, while public organizations have a hierarchical culture. Thus, differences in HRM approaches and organizational cultures in these three types of organizations may influence emotional labor in different ways.

The current study of Chinese managers aimed to fill the gap in the limited knowledge about the effect of the contextual factors of organizational ownership type on emotional labor. Specifically, this study reported a significant difference in emotional labor demands between

Chinese public organizations and private sectors. Professionals working in POEs and FIEs showed significantly higher levels of emotional labor than those working in CPOs. Two explanations are offered. First, most private organizations are market-driven and pursue the philosophy that "the customer is king". Employees working in private sectors experience more emotional labor when interacting with external customers (see Bolton, 2002). Moreover, private sectors stress the achievement of performance and economic goals more than the public sector, which could be an important impetus for emotional labor. On the other hand, public organizations are less performance-driven and employees may have less pressure to engage in emotional labor for in-role performance. The data from this study do reveal that job performance in the public sector was significantly lower than in the private sector.

In addition, employees working in the public sector in China are more likely to enjoy greater power and status, and thus face less pressure to meet the needs of their external customers. People working in the public sector in China enjoy a high status and less emotional labor when working with their external customers due to the high-power distance culture in China. High status people are thought to enjoy more freedom in their emotional expression and hence may put less effort into their emotional management (Lively, 2000). As others state (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002), occupational types contribute to the reported levels of emotional labor. In addition, the study's findings suggest that ownership type is a potentially new antecedent of emotional labor.

### **Association between Emotional Labor and Job Performance**

The literature tends to support the idea that emotional labor is positively related to work performance (Goodwin et al., 2011). The current study also reveals that overall those individuals who are skilled at managing and displaying emotions are likely to have better job performance. However, when examining the managerial samples of private and public sectors

separately, emotional labor was a valid predictor of job performance only in CPOs and not in FIEs or POEs. These different results of the association of emotional labor with job performance further illustrate that organizational environments in the public and private sectors in China shape employee emotional labor behaviors in different ways. First, though employees in both FIEs and POEs report higher levels of emotional labor than their counterparts in CPOs, their job performance is not affected by their emotional labor. This is interesting because it suggests that organizational HRM practices, culture and norms that are associated with ownership types might be the more critical factors that impact upon the role of emotional labor upon job performance.

Emotional labor is subject to bureaucratic forms of control such as the nature of supervision from superiors, as illustrated by the CPOs in this study, which are characterized by a more hierarchical structure, bureaucratic culture and significant status differences (i.e., power distance). Therefore, on the one hand in public organizations, “getting-the-job-done” on a daily basis depends very much on “guanxi” (relationships) with colleagues and particularly with supervisors, as job autonomy is much more constrained in the public sector. On the other hand, performance appraisal in Chinese public organizations is subject to the supervisor’s personal judgement and favoritism as objective performance criteria are absent or vague. Therefore, developing and maintaining good “guanxi” with the supervisor and colleagues are critical in achieving positive performance evaluation for job performance, and such high-quality relationships involve emotional exchange.

Given the hierarchical differences in social status and the vague display rules in such Chinese organizations, employees in CPOs need to engage in emotional labor to develop personal relationships with colleagues and particularly with their supervisors. Moreover, the traditional influence of collectivistic cultural values around harmony and cooperation within a group is more prominent in CPOs than in FIEs and POEs. On the contrary, as considered earlier,

in private enterprises, job performance is more merit-based with more explicit and objective criteria and less influenced by the personal influence of supervisors. Therefore, despite employees in private organizations performing more emotional labor with external customers, the overall influence of emotional labor on job performance is constrained.

Moreover, the study's finding that emotional labor has no relationship on job performance in the private sector is similar to previous studies conducted in the West (e.g., Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). This finding may imply that employees working in FIEs and POEs may experience demands around emotional labor in their organizations that are identical to their counterparts in Western countries, suggesting that HRM practices in the POEs are converging toward those practices of FIEs in their country of origin (see Ma et al., 2016).

### **Moderating Effect of Emotional Intelligence on the Relationship between Emotional Labor and Job Performance**

Emotional intelligence involves the ability to perceive, understand, appraise and express emotion, coupled with the ability to generate and regulate feelings (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Emotional intelligence is especially important as a factor in the relationship between emotional labor and job performance. A moderator role of emotional intelligence is theoretically supported by the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which postulates that personal resources (e.g., emotional intelligence) may mitigate efforts to display appropriate emotions. Researchers contend that high emotionally intelligent employees perform better than low emotionally intelligent employees at jobs that demand emotional labor (e.g., Joseph and Newman, 2010).

Among these public and private organizations investigated in China, the moderating effect of emotional intelligence on the relationship between emotional labor and job performance only exists in public organizations and does not exist in private organizations. In Chinese public

organizations, emotional labor is more strongly related to job performance in the case of high emotionally intelligent employees rather than in low emotionally intelligent employees. In explaining these different results in public and private organizations, one interpretation lies in the differences in emotional norms, display rules and social positions in the two types of organizations. The explicitness of rules (e.g., objective performance indicators) and the highly integrative cultures in private organizations encourage their employees to rely less on leveraging on emotional intelligence to perform emotional labor to achieve job performance. However, the greater ambiguity of display rules, more hierarchical cultures, higher levels of position power and significant personal influence on job performance from supervisors in public organizations encourage employees to leverage on their emotional intelligence to engage in displays of emotional labor with insiders that best allow them to gain desirable job performance. In other words, in the bureaucratic public sector, subordinates are evaluated more by the superior's personal judgement and their personal and political fortunes are determined by how their superiors judge their performance. Therefore, it is natural to expect those working in Chinese public organizations to leverage on emotional intelligence to "please" supervisors for favorable job performance evaluations.

### **Implications for Practice**

Organizations need to be aware of the association between emotional labor and the organizational context created and supported by their existing HRM and other practices. For example, more explicit display rules and autonomy-supportive policies may make employees engage in emotion regulation in a more positive way. In this regard, public organizations are encouraged to benchmark the management approach adopted by private organizations, including the implementation of more transparent HRM practices and the creation of a more positive work climate for their workforce. These objectives are in line with the New Public



Management (NPM) rhetoric and benefits in the transference of management practices from the private to the public sector.

In addition, while many studies on emotional labor highlight the importance of person-job fit, this study identifies the importance of person-organization fit. For example, given the significant roles of emotional labor and emotional intelligence in public organizations, these organizations may need to consider assessing the emotional intelligence of candidates in the recruitment of employees. Moreover, given the significant levels of emotional labor reported by the samples of managers and professionals, organizations should consider and weigh up the costs of emotional labor on their employees. In addition to the provision of emotional management training, the employment of more humanistic practices to replace emotional display rules might be one beneficial strategy.

## **Conclusion**

The public and private sectors in China exhibit significant differences in their emotional labor demands, revealing ownership type as a new antecedent of emotional labor. Second, emotional labor has a significant effect on in-role performance, and emotional intelligence moderates the link between emotional labor and job performance in public organizations, but not in private organizations.

## REFERENCES

- Bolton, S. C. (2002). "Consumer as king in the NHS", *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 15(2), 129–139.
- Brotheridge, C.M. & Grandey, A.A. (2002). "Emotional labor and burnout: Comparing two perspectives of "people work", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 60(1), 17–39.
- Gabriel, A.S., Cheshin, A., Moran, C.M., & van Kleef, G.A. (2016). "Enhancing emotional performance and customer service through human resources practices: A systems perspective", *Human Resource Management Review*, 26(1), 14-24.
- Grandey, A.A., & Melloy, R.C. (2017). "The state of the heart: Emotional work as emotion regulation reviewed and revised", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22 (3), 407.
- Goodwin, R. E., Groth, M., & Frenkel, S. J. (2011). "Relationships between emotional labor, job performance, and turnover", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 79(2), 538-548.
- Hobfoll, S.E. (1989). "Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress", *American Psychologist*, 44(3), 513-524.
- Hochschild, A.R. (1983). *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Jaussaud, J. & Liu, X. (2011). "When in China ...the HRM practices of Chinese and foreign-owned enterprises during a global crisis", *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 17(4), 473-491.
- Joseph, D. L. & Newman, D. A. (2010). "Emotional intelligence: An integrative meta-analysis and cascading model", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(1), 54-78.
- Lawler, E. J. & Thye, S. R. (1999). "Bringing emotions into social exchange theory", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 25, 217-244.
- Lively, K. J. (2000). "Reciprocal emotion management – working together to maintain stratification in private law firms", *Work and Occupations*, 27(1), 32-63.

Lively, K. J. & Powell, B. (2006). "Emotional expression at work and at home: Domain, status, or individual characteristics?" *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 69(1), 17-38.

Ma, S., Silva, G., Callan, V. J., & Trigo, V. (2016). "Control and commitment HR practices, job satisfaction and turnover intentions: A comparison between local and multinational firms in China", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 27(9), 974-990.

Mayer, J. D. & Salovey, P. (1997). "What is emotional intelligence?" In P. Salovey and D. J. Sluyter (Eds.), *Emotional Development and Emotional Intelligence*, 3-31, New York: Basic Books.

Mesmer-Magnus, J. R., DeChurch, L. A. & Wax, A. (2012). "Moving emotional labor beyond surface and deep acting: A discordance-congruence perspective", *Organizational Psychology Review*, 2(1), 6-53.

Morris, J. & Feldman, D.C. (1996). "The dimensions, antecedents and consequences of emotional labor", *Academy of Management Review*, 21(4), 986-1010.

Tsui, A. S., Wang, H. & Xin, K. R. (2006). "Organizational culture in China: An analysis of culture dimensions and culture types". *Management and Organization Review*, 2(3), 345-376.