



## Navigating emotional labour: the role of deep acting in enhancing job performance and customer relations in the South African racecourse industry



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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to examine the effects of deep acting on employees employed at the racecourse. The objective of this study is to examine the effects of deep acting, a type of emotional labour, on the well-being and job performance of service employees in the hotel industry in South Africa. Additionally, the study intends to provide effective coping strategies to minimise any negative consequences of emotional labour. This study employs a qualitative methodology, utilising purposive sampling to choose eight participants from the racecourse industry. The data was gathered using semi-structured in-depth interviews, enabling a thorough investigation of the participants' experiences and perceptions. Thematic analysis was employed to examine the data and discover significant themes and patterns pertaining to the practice of deep acting and its effects. According to the study, sales assistants reported that deep acting was less stressful than surface acting. The practice of deep acting had a positive impact on the job performance and communication abilities of the sales associates, hence contributing to their professional development. Notwithstanding these advantages, certain individuals experienced a sense of being underappreciated by their employers due to the emotional work they performed. The results indicate that engaging in deep acting promotes a heightened sense of empathy towards clients and improves the performance of sales associates as a result of their cumulative work experience. This research emphasises the necessity for organisations, especially those in the hospitality sector, to acknowledge and endorse the emotional labour carried out by their employees. By acknowledging the beneficial aspects of deep acting and providing appropriate coping mechanisms, employers can help alleviate potential negative impacts on employee well-being. Acquiring this comprehension can result in improved management techniques that foster employee contentment and productivity. This study adds to the scarce body of scholarship on emotional work in the South African setting, particularly within the racecourse business. This study presents innovative perspectives on the impact of deep acting on service employees and provides practical approaches for efficiently managing emotional labour. The research highlights the significance of maintaining a balance between employees' self-management and their regulation of client interactions, which ultimately improves the overall quality of customer service and staff satisfaction.*

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## Introduction

Internationally, academics have started to recognise emotions as a crucial aspect of both human and organisational existence. Emotions have an impact not only on individuals internally when they experience emotional difficulties, but also on their connections with others, whether it be during encounters between employees and customers or exchanges with co-workers. Therefore, the extent to which emotion might enhance performance advantages for individuals and organisations remains an insufficiently explored topic (Bolden et al., 2023). The objective is to analyse the ramifications of emotional labour in the customer-service sector of the

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Racecourse industry, specifically focussing on its impact on sales employees at X Racecourse. The goal is to develop and propose effective coping strategies for emotional labour that can be implemented in the Horse Racing and Gambling industry.

Prior research has yielded inconclusive findings about the impact of emotional labour on both individuals and organisations. For instance, the majority of organisations in the service sector have shifted their focus towards prioritising the needs and satisfaction of their customers. This necessitates direct, in-person or verbal communication between the consumer and the employee. In order for the service business to achieve success, it is imperative that personnel always exhibit a pleasant attitude towards consumers, a concept referred to as emotional labour by Hochschild (2022). The subject at hand is how emotional labour, namely the distinction between deep acting and surface acting, affects the job performance and job happiness of Racecourse customer-service personnel. What are the precise emotional labour requirements and coping mechanisms utilised by customer-service professionals at Racecourse, and how do these mechanisms impact their overall well-being and interpersonal dynamics in the workplace? What is the impact of the emotional display guidelines and training programs at the X Racecourse on employees' emotional expressions, and how does this affect employee creativity, customer happiness, and overall organisational performance?

Exuding friendliness may hinder an employee's creativity, but it is necessary for a Racecourse customer-service employee who must employ a wide range of emotional labour in their job responsibilities. Therefore, the service industry offers a rich environment for examining emotional labour. Over the past two decades, numerous studies have been undertaken to evaluate emotional labour in various service professions, such as healthcare professionals, bank employees, food sector workers, and insurance agents. Although there have been many studies conducted, there has been less focus on researching the emotional labour of the customer-service staff at the Racecourse. The aim of this study is to investigate the effects of emotional labour in the customer-service profession at the Racecourse. This study aims to elucidate the impact of emotional labour on sales staff and proposes coping mechanisms that might be recommended to the Horse Racing and Gambling industry.

It is typical to encounter 'job vacancies' adverts in the service sector. The crux of the service sector lies not only in personnel fulfilling their job responsibilities, but also in their ability to approach their work with the appropriate demeanour, genuine honesty, and a genuine concern for clients. In order for a service sector company to achieve success, it need staff who can effectively engage with consumers by exhibiting emotions such as warmth, friendliness, excitement, cheerfulness, and confidence. Both in South Africa and elsewhere, there are occupations that require distinct emotional expressions. As an illustration, health professionals undergo training to exhibit compassion and benevolence, waitstaff are instructed to demonstrate affability and joviality, and law enforcement personnel are expected to maintain composure. The study took place at the X Racecourse, widely recognised as the venue for Africa's premier horseracing event. The Racecourse is positioned at the base of Durban's Berea, with various hotels of Durban's Golden Mile forming a backdrop. It encompasses the expansive green area of the Royal Durban Golf Club's championship course. The Racecourse contains a pear-shaped track that spans 2,800 meters and includes various gradient elements. Horse racing at the X Racecourse has a history that spans 150 years. The inaugural race meeting took place in July 1844 in close proximity to the current racecourse location. The X Racecourse commemorated its centenary in 1996, whereas the inaugural Durban July took place in 1897, featuring a mere seven horses in competition (Gold Circle KwaZulu-Natal Newsletter, 2022-2023).

The X Racecourse employs a variety of staff members, such as betting assistants, cashiers, and supervisors. All of these racecourse jobs share the same characteristic of being service occupations. Racecourse positions include direct interpersonal encounters with the public or customers, which comprises a significant portion of employees' responsibilities. Given that the interactions between racecourse employees and customers are central to the service experience and have a significant impact on customers' perception of service quality, it is crucial for supervisors to effectively manage employees' behaviour and emotional expressions in order to maintain high service quality at the X Racecourse (Gold Circle KwaZulu-Natal Newsletter, 2022-2023).

Many companies, particularly in the service business, commonly believe that there is a significant correlation between employees' cheerful expressions and the growth of income. Exhibiting passion and friendliness are believed to enhance client satisfaction, boost sales, and lead to higher rates of repeat business and financial prosperity. (Agarwal, 2021). Consequently, staff are required by the organisation to effectively handle challenging consumers and transform the scenario into a favourable experience. Prohibition is imposed on negative emotional displays while good emotional displays are mandated. As a result, the employee's feelings are no longer considered private, but rather as a public display that is regulated by the business. The organisation establishes guidelines for emotional expressions and offers training sessions for employees. Employees receive training on genuine smiling, concealing unpleasant feelings, and demonstrating empathy and kindness. Hochschild refers to the concept of emotional labour as the deliberate regulation of emotions to present a visible display of facial and physical expressions in public settings. By engaging in these types of techniques, employees acquire the ability to repress their own emotions and exhibit the emotions that the organisation deems appropriate.

## **Literature Review**

The nature of business is to “operate racecourses and training centres within the Province of KwaZulu-Natal for the benefit of the thoroughbred racing industry and to operate wagering outlets to facilitate betting on horseracing and other sporting activities” (Chiweshe,2023). X prides itself on being community-minded, with their main concern being on a variety of charity and socially related projects. The most commercial and well-known racing event is the Vodacom Durban July that occurs yearly on the first

Saturday in July. The event is organised by X and takes place at the X Racecourse in Durban. In 2013 the event was attended by more than 55 000 people.

X places priority on its employees because of a belief that the organisation would not exist without them. The organisation recruits more than 2 500 employees from across the country, with 305 of them working as casual sales assistants at the X Racecourse. These sales assistants are grouped into three categories, namely betting assistants, cashiers and supervisors. All these sales assistants report to line managers or sales assistant managers who in turn report to senior managers. It is important to also note that whenever the sales assistants encounter problems that may need the assistance of human resources practitioners, the Human Resources department of X is open to intervene.

### **Emotional labour**

Emotional labour refers to the deliberate separation of spoken emotions from genuine emotions in order to fulfil the objectives of an organisation or to meet the demands of a job. Hochschild introduced this notion in 1979 and subsequently released the first book titled "The Managed Heart" in 1983. Hochschild (1983), as referenced by Wingfield (2021), defined emotional labour as the deliberate control of one's emotions in order to project a desired image and physical demeanor. Employees are encouraged to regulate their emotions in order to impact the customer's experience. For instance, a customer is more inclined to make a repeat call in a business when she was treated in a manner that made her feel unique by the employee, as opposed to a situation where there was no particular interest or attention shown. The Theory of Emotional Labour discusses the discrepancy between an employee's genuine emotions and the emotions they feign in order to fulfil job expectations, irrespective of the authenticity of their feelings (Blackwell-Pal, 2022). Emotional labour, as defined by Lam *et al* (2022), refers to the necessary exertion, strategizing, and regulation of emotions within a business when engaging with clients. According to Davila (2024), emotional work refers to the use of affection, regulation, and emotional expression by employees to accomplish organisational goals. Hochschild (1983) categorises emotional effort into three distinct types: surface acting, deep acting, and true acting.

Emotions possess an inherent quality of being always changing and evolving (Kalim, 2022). Consequently, while evaluating emotional labour in service encounters, it is common to analyse the fluctuations that occur inside an individual throughout different days. However, current research on emotional labour towards colleagues has not taken into consideration these daily fluctuations. To effectively capture emotional labour in coworker relationships, it is necessary to include the everyday dynamics (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2020). This need is additionally substantiated by empirical data indicating that coworker relations exhibit daily fluctuations, with some days being described as positive and others as negative. Thus, we employ a diary methodology to investigate the intrapersonal dynamics associated with everyday emotional labour directed towards colleagues.

Emotional labour involves two main strategies for handling emotions, referred to as deep acting and surface acting. Deep acting refers to the deliberate effort made by employees to adjust their internal feelings in order to match the emotions that are anticipated or required in a certain setting. This can be achieved through several approaches, such as reevaluating the circumstances (Humphrey *et al.*, 2015). Surface acting requires employees to abstain from trying to modify their own feelings. Alternatively, individuals opt to suppress or hide their authentic emotions and mimic emotional expressions (Güler *et al.*, 2024). Surface acting is correlated with adverse well-being outcomes for service employees, whereas deep acting does not exert a substantial influence on the overall well-being of service employees. Thus, surface acting can be regarded as the emotional labour technique that holds greater psychological significance.

As a result of these findings, previous research on emotional labour towards coworkers has mostly focused on superficial behaviour, often completely ignoring genuine emotional expression. Ngcobo *et al.* (2022) investigated the determinants of feigning emotions towards colleagues at work, including team politics. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as surface acting. The findings revealed that individuals who employed surface acting towards their colleagues had heightened levels of emotional exhaustion and diminished job performance. In a similar vein, Kumar (2022) found that engaging in surface acting towards coworkers had negative repercussions, including strained relationships with colleagues and health problems. Further research has built upon these findings by investigating group meetings, uncovering a negative association between the utilisation of surface behaving towards colleagues during meetings and the effectiveness of those sessions. Previous research on emotional labour towards coworkers has generally focused on surface acting as a negative phenomenon in the workplace (*cf.* Gabriel *et al.*, 2020).

### **Deep Acting**

Deep acting refers to the process of modifying both the outwardly expressed emotions and the inside experienced emotions (Chang, 2023). Deep acting occurs when an individual consciously attempts to empathise with another person's perspective in order to comprehend their emotions and experiences. Deep actors are believed to be driven by internal incentives. When someone engages in deep acting, they must make a deliberate decision to involve their emotions. Rinfret & Wise (2024) shown that deep acting is more prevalent in coworker interactions compared to surface acting. Prior research on emotional labour towards colleagues has primarily concentrated on surface acting, as exemplified by studies conducted by Ojo (2023). Therefore, the understanding of how to engage in deep acting with colleagues is very restricted. Our objective is to facilitate the acquisition of such knowledge. Therefore, our study specifically examines the factors that can predict and the results that can arise from engaging in deep behaving towards colleagues. However, surface acting is also taken into account in order to provide a thorough understanding of emotional labour among

colleagues. An examination of emotional labour in coworker interactions, specifically focusing on deep acting as a generally beneficial emotional labour strategy (Becker et al., 2018), enhances our comprehension of both the maintenance of positive coworker relationships and the overall concept of emotional labour (Diefendorff et al., 2020). Therefore, doing an analysis of emotional labour towards colleagues, with a specific emphasis on deep acting, is a significant endeavor from both a theoretical and practical perspective.

### **Benefits of Deep Acting**

According to Kumar et al. (2022), deep acting seems to have more positive consequences that can either be personal or organisational or both. This is because when a person feels their sense of accomplishment through the activities they engage in or the people they associate with, they are bound to be satisfied with their jobs. Researchers have conducted many studies to find the link between job satisfaction and job performance and the findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between the two. Studies show that deep actors are more likely to be higher performers and to contribute positive results towards the organisation.

Annor et al. (2023) state that it is important for the employee to be aware of the customer's emotions in order to be able to reciprocate in an appropriate manner than simple smiling. This helps the employee to be aware of the circumstances where they are required to show sympathy or empathy towards the customer.

### **Consequences of Deep Acting**

Deep acting is the genuine displayed emotions and genuine emotional engagement of people in their profession. Research has shown a positive correlation between this factor and higher levels of employee happiness, work satisfaction, and job commitment. Previous research has demonstrated that participating in immersive play can successfully alleviate emotional fatigue among employees. However, the specific mechanisms via which intense play affects emotional fatigue, particularly the elements that mediate this relationship, have not been extensively studied. This study aims to investigate the impact of deep play on the relationship between service-oriented leadership and employee emotional fatigue. The proposition suggests that service-oriented leadership, by fostering a conducive environment for immersive play, could potentially mitigate emotional exhaustion among employees. Burić et al. (2021) contends that individuals who engage in deep acting encounter less repercussions of emotional labour. However, similar to surface actors, they still confront adverse outcomes. These repercussions may involve self-alienation or a sense of detachment from one's authentic self or genuine feelings. Over time, this situation has the potential to progress to a state of emotional weariness or burnout.

### **Critical Analysis**

#### **Business Operations and Community Focus**

The organization "X" operates within the thoroughbred racing industry in KwaZulu-Natal and organizes notable events like the Vodacom Durban July. Its community-minded approach, focusing on charity and social projects, is commendable. However, the review lacks a detailed exploration of how these community projects directly impact the organization's overall business model and profitability. Future studies could provide a deeper dive into the measurable outcomes of these initiatives.

#### **Employee Dynamics**

"X" employs a large workforce, including casual sales assistants divided into betting assistants, cashiers, and supervisors. The hierarchical structure with clear reporting lines is well-delineated. However, the review could benefit from an analysis of the effectiveness of this structure. For instance, how does this hierarchy impact employee satisfaction and performance? Are there any bottlenecks or inefficiencies that arise from this organizational structure?

#### **Emotional Labor**

Emotional labor is a central theme, with references to key theories and empirical studies. Hochschild's foundational work on emotional labor sets the stage, followed by contemporary research on surface and deep acting. Here are some critical points to consider:

- i. **Surface Acting vs. Deep Acting:** The review differentiates between surface acting (suppressing genuine emotions) and deep acting (modifying internal feelings to match required emotions). It rightly points out the negative outcomes associated with surface acting, such as emotional exhaustion and strained relationships. However, it could delve deeper into the organizational strategies that could mitigate these negative effects. For example, what specific training or support mechanisms can help employees engage more in deep acting rather than surface acting?
- ii. **Daily Fluctuations in Emotional Labor:** The review highlights the importance of considering daily fluctuations in emotional labor. This is a significant point, as it acknowledges the dynamic nature of emotions. Future research could explore how daily emotional labor impacts long-term employee well-being and job performance. Additionally, the role of organizational culture in supporting employees through these fluctuations could be examined.
- iii. **Benefits and Consequences of Deep Acting:** The review presents deep acting as generally beneficial, leading to higher job satisfaction and performance. It also notes potential adverse outcomes, such as self-alienation. This dual perspective is valuable, but the review could further investigate the conditions under which deep acting is most effective. For

instance, are there specific types of jobs or organizational environments where deep acting is more sustainable? What role do individual differences play in the effectiveness of deep acting?

#### Unique Contributions

The study's unique contributions lie in its focus on emotional labor towards colleagues, which is often overlooked in favor of customer interactions. By examining both surface and deep acting in coworker relationships, the study aims to provide a more holistic understanding of emotional labor in the workplace. This focus on intrapersonal dynamics and the use of a diary methodology to capture daily fluctuations is innovative. It bridges a gap in existing literature by considering the daily emotional experiences of employees and their impact on coworker relationships and overall job performance.

### Research and Methodology

This part provides a comprehensive description of the methodologies and strategies utilised in the collection, manipulation, and examination of the obtained data. The research employed a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research is essential because it offers in-depth and detailed understanding of the intricate and human-focused aspects of emotional labour. To properly perform their positions in the racetrack business, personnel must have a profound grasp of how their emotions impact their engagement. Qualitative research techniques, such as conducting in-depth interviews and making participant observations, enable researchers to capture the subjective experiences and perspectives of workers. This helps to reveal the effects of deep acting, which refers to employees consciously modifying their internal emotions to display desired emotions, on their job performance and interactions with customers. This methodology facilitates the identification of emotional difficulties and adaptive techniques within a particular setting, elucidating the influence of elements such as cultural diversity and economic pressures on the management of emotional labour. Qualitative research is essential in the South African racecourse industry to understand the intricate dynamics of employee-customer relationships and the impact of emotional labour on organisational outcomes and personal well-being. This is particularly important due to the significant influence of historical and social factors in this industry.

#### Target population

The target population for this study consists of a specific group of individuals, as delineated by from which the researcher will draw their sample. In this particular study, the target population encompasses 305 sales assistants employed at the X Racecourse, encompassing betting assistants, cashiers, and supervisors. From this defined target population, a purposive selection process was employed to include eight sales assistants, two supervisors, three cashiers/term operators, and three betting assistants. These selections were made based on the criterion of having served the organization for a minimum of one year and currently remaining in their positions Lohr (2021). The reason for focusing on sales assistants who have been employed for more than one year is based on the assumption that they have a greater comprehension and knowledge of the issue being investigated, due to their long-term involvement with X racetrack. As a result, they are considered more proficient at delivering extensive and pertinent information that aligns with the objectives of the study.

#### Accessible population

The accessible population refers to a specific subgroup within the target population that contains the specific traits that a researcher intends to explore. Consequently, individuals must possess the essential attributes in order to be selected for participation in the study. The study focused on sales assistants at the X Racecourse who had been employed by the institution for at least one year.

#### Sampling method

Sampling is defined as the process of selecting units or people from the target population so that the sample can represent the actual population. There are two sampling strategies namely probability and non-probability sampling (Fulop & Avvisati, 2022).). Both probability and non-probability sampling strategies have further sub-strategies that can be used by a researcher. In this study, the non-probability sampling strategy was used since it is most appropriate for a study which employs a qualitative research approach.

#### Purposive sampling

In this study a purposive sampling method was used to select a study sample or participants for the study from the accessible population. Purposive sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique that involves gathering information from certain target groups or individuals based on a reasonable location. The researchers opted for purposive sampling as it enables them to deliberately select employees who possess the necessary information to address the primary study inquiries. Consequently, the study specifically chose sales assistants who had been employed at X racetrack for over a year to participate.

#### Sample size

Sampling refers to the process in which a researcher chooses a subset of individuals from the target group to serve as a representative sample of the entire population (Andrade, 2021). The designated segment is referred to as a sample. Sample size refers to the total number of units, elements, or individuals involved in the study. As previously stated, X possesses two racecourses and several outlets. Both racecourses employ the same personnel, which is why the race meetings never occur on the same day. The overall number of

sales assistants at X Racecourse is 305, which includes betting helpers, supervisors, and cashiers. Only a total of two supervisors, three cashiers/term operators, and betting helpers were chosen to participate in this study. Therefore, a sample size of eight (8) sales assistants, as shown in Table 1, was chosen to enable the researcher to gather a variety of perspectives from various types of sales assistants. This will help assess how each employee category utilises deep acting and the impact it has on employees.

**Table 1: Sample size**

<b>SAMPLE SIZE</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Sample size</b>
Supervisors	76	<b>2</b>
Cashiers	181	<b>3</b>
Betting Assistants	48	<b>3</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>8</b>

### **Research design**

Lohr (2021) provides a concise definition of research design as a systematic plan that outlines the methods for gathering, measuring, and analysing data, all of which are aligned with the research questions of the study. Various research designs, such as exploratory, descriptive, and causal, are employed to perform research projects. The study was done utilising an exploratory research approach.

### **Exploratory design**

An exploratory study is a type of research that aims to investigate a phenomenon or subject that is not widely known or understood. The exploratory research design facilitates the development of initial insights into a phenomena or issue, and enables researchers to go towards more precise study inquiries (Mättig, 2022). This study aims to examine the impact of emotional work on service staff at the X Racecourse. An exploratory research methodology is appropriate for this study since it allows researchers to uncover novel perceptions and gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of emotional labour on service staff at the X Racecourse.

### **Data collection instruments**

There are different types of data collection instruments that can be used when conducting a qualitative study, namely in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and observations (Akyıldız, & Ahmed,2021). For the purposes of this study semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to obtain the necessary data from participants.

### **Semi-structured in-depth interviews**

There are three types of in-depth interviews used by researchers, namely unstructured, semi-structured and structured in-depth interviews (Akyıldız, & Ahmed,2021). The researchers used semi-structured in-depth interviews in this study. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are partially structured one to one interview allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interviews as a result of what the interviewee says. Semi-structured in-depth interviews allow for the participants to respond freely and to elaborate and clarify certain points, and for the researchers to obtain focused and in-depth data (Creswell & Creswell 2022). Semi-structured in-depth interviews also allow the researchers and participants to engage in a formal interview. Semi-structured in-depth interviews allow the researchers to develop and use an interview guide or a list of questions and topics that need to be covered during the conversation, usually in a particular order. The researchers follow the interview guide, but is able to follow topical trajectories in the conversation that may stray from the guide when a researcher feels this is appropriate, which allows for the collection of in-depth information needed in the study.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were perceived to be suitable for this study as they enabled the researchers to gain access to the participants' in-depth perceptions and opinions and to gain insight into the research problem under study from the participants' viewpoints. Eight semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted and recorded using a voice recorder. The semi-structured in-depth interviews lasted between twenty to forty-five minutes.

### **Limitations**

The study's sample size of eight participants, though sufficient for qualitative research, may limit the generalizability of the findings to the entire population of sales assistants at the X Racecourse. However, the small sample size was justified by the need for in-depth exploration of each participant's experiences. Future studies could expand the sample size to include a broader range of participants to enhance generalizability. The purposive sampling method, while beneficial for selecting knowledgeable participants, could introduce bias as the selection is based on the researchers' judgment. The criteria for participant selection (at least one year of employment) were clearly defined to ensure that selected individuals had adequate experience and knowledge. Additionally, efforts were made to include a diverse range of sales assistants to capture varied perspectives. The semi-structured in-depth interviews were limited to twenty to forty-five minutes, which may not have been sufficient for some participants to fully articulate their experiences and perspectives. Recognizing the time constraints, participants were given the opportunity to schedule follow-up interviews if they had more to share. This ensured that participants could fully express their thoughts and experiences.

### **Data analysis**

Data analysis is defined as the process of analysing the collected data. It describes the process of how the data generated is organised and interpreted (Greta, 2023).

### **Thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the interviews since the study is qualitative in approach. Thematic analysis groups data together into themes, theoretical concepts and topics that the researcher believes are important in order to understand the subject under investigation (Greta, 2023). Thematic analysis was thought to be suitable to analyse data to be collected because the technique briefly organises data collected and then describes the data sets in detailed. The technique was used because it enables data to be treated in a way that makes it possible to interpret the research problem. Qualitative data was encoded and codes were generated. Through the coding process the researchers were able to generate basic categories of the raw data collected to be assessed in a way that made it possible to understand the research problem under study. The process of coding enabled the researchers to link the data collected to the ideas about the data. This process allowed the researchers to think about the data collected and make categories that acted as points of analysis in the data analysis process.

In short, the process of coding the information enabled the study to form a list of patterns or themes organised in a simple style. A sum up of data analysis process employed in this study is presented below:

- i. Familiarisation with the data: This process allowed the researchers to read and re-read the data, to become immersed and closely familiar with the content of the data.
- ii. Coding: This phase allowed the researchers to generate short labels or codes identifying important characteristics of the data important to answering research questions used in the study. This process involved coding the whole dataset. Then the researchers collated all the codes and all-important data extracts, together for later stages of analysis.
- iii. Searching for themes: This phase included assessing the codes and collated data to pinpoint relevant broader patterns of meaning. The phase involved collating data relevant to each candidate theme. This enabled the researchers to work with the data and review the possibility of each candidate theme.
- iv. Reviewing themes: In this phase the researchers checked the candidate themes against the dataset. This was done in order to determine candidate themes telling a convincing story that answered the research questions of this study. It was in this phase that themes were typically refined, split, combined, or thrown out.
- v. Defining and naming themes: In this phase the researchers developed a detailed analysis of each theme, carefully worked out the scope and focus of each theme, determining the 'story' of each theme. The researchers used this stage to decide on an informative name for each theme.
- vi. Writing up: This was the final phase for the data analysis process in which the researchers weaved together the analytic narrative and data extracts, and contextualising the analysis in relation to existing current literature.

### **Data quality control**

Data quality control is defined as the quality criteria that are used to judge whether the study can be viewed as trustworthy. These criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021).

### **Credibility**

The credibility criterion is used to establish whether the qualitative research results are trustworthy or believable from the research subject's perspective. The legitimate judging key of credibility of results is that the true perceptions of the participants are gathered during the data collection process. To achieve credibility, the researchers worked collaboratively with the target population from the beginning of the study right until the end in order to gain their trust which led to them communicating openly (Greta, 2023).

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of a study can be transferred or applied to other settings or contexts that are similar to the research context (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). This primarily refers to the responsibility of the person generalising (Creswell & Creswell, 2022.) It is thus important for the primary researcher to thoroughly describe the research context and the central assumptions that were used in the study to show how the results could or could not apply to other settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The researchers, in this study, thoroughly clarified the concepts used in order to make it easier for the next researchers to judge and determine how sensible the transfer of the findings to other settings would be.

### **Dependability**

Dependability refers to the emphasis on the need for the researcher to be accountable for the ever-changing context within which research occurs and for this to be clearly examined in the research (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). The researchers in this study outlined

the changes that occurred in the research setting, suggested what the effects of these changes might be and explained how the changes were approached in the study.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is defined as the extent to which the results could be corroborated by other researchers or readers (Tuval-Mashiach, 2021). In order to ensure that the results in this study are confirmed the researchers did the following:

- i. Procedures for checking and rechecking data were documented - the researchers had a list of instruments and activities that were to be completed and this list was continually referred to in order to verify that these had been accomplished.
- ii. Enlisted another researcher to peer review the study - for this study there was a supervisor in place to guide, monitor and conduct the peer review of the researcher's study.
- iii. Conducted a data audit - this allowed the researchers to examine data collection and data analysis procedures, as well as to make judgements of potential for bias or distortion, and these procedures were followed by the researchers in conducting this study.

### **Discussion**

This section presents an analysis of the findings related to deep acting factors that affect customer-service employees at the X Racecourse.

Effects of trying to actually experience emotion that must be shown at work

The findings of the study suggest that in most instances the X sales assistants have a positive attitude towards life such that trying to experience actual emotions that are required by X has no effect on them. This is due to the fact that they do inherently feel the positive emotions required of them in their job. However, the study found that sometimes sales assistants feel undermined by the process of trying to actually experience emotions that they are expected to show at work.

The findings above are in agreement with Smith's (2014) study, which suggests that deep actors sometimes do not experience negative consequences since they alter their felt emotions to match their expressed emotions. Even though this may be the case, employees may experience emotional exhaustion such as feeling undermined, in the long run, as expressed by the X sales assistants.

Effects of making the effort to actually feel emotions required to be expressed towards the customer

The findings suggest that it is easy for sales assistants to feel the emotions that they express if they are interacting with customers who have a positive attitude towards them and the work they are doing at the X Racecourse. This can be attributed to the fact that customers with a positive attitude towards sales assistants make it easy for sales assistants to reciprocate this positive attitude and this in turn has a positive effect on sales assistants' emotions such as wanting to do more work than expected. Findings also show that when sales assistants make an effort to actually feel emotions they are required to express towards their customers, they are able to refer to their own past experiences on how best to serve particular regular customers.

This finding is in agreement with the findings of a study conducted by Annor et al. (2023) that found that deep acting seems to have more positive consequences that can either be personal or organisational or both. Employees tend to have a positive attitude towards their work and obtain a sense of ease during the workday. This is because when a person feels their sense of accomplishment through the activities they do or the people they associate with they are bound to be satisfied with their job.

Kumar et al. (2022) take the argument further by stating that employees should make an effort to observe customers' emotions and feelings because deep acting requires employees to have a good understanding of their own emotions and to determine the most appropriate and genuine emotions to employ in their interactions with customers. In other words, findings in this study as well as the findings from the studies discussed in the literature review indicate the need for employees to learn to read customers' emotions and react to them appropriately by making use of or learning from past events or experiences.

Effects of working hard to feel the emotions that are required to be shown to customers

The findings reveal that sales assistants do not feel that they work hard to transform their feelings. This is because sales assistants believe that feeling the emotions that they need to display to customers is part of being human. The study found that the effects of working hard to feel the emotions that sales assistants are required to express to customers has no effect on them because they have learnt to read customers' minds, in a sense, which helps them to interact and communicate better with customers. The study further revealed that interacting with customers affects sales assistants' moods and helps them to learn to express sympathy to customers.

The findings presented above are in agreement with Burić et al. (2021) study which established that individuals make a decision to engage emotions when deep acting. This helps the employees to communicate better, to be aware of the customer's emotions and to reciprocate in an appropriate manner (Burić et al., 2021). This helps the employee to be aware of the circumstances in which they are required to show sympathy or empathy towards the customer. This is in line with the findings of the current study at the X Racecourse, as the same was noted in terms of how sales assistants learn to read situations and to display the appropriate emotions.



## **Recommendations**

- i. There is a need for the X Racecourse to make sales assistants aware of the effects that emotional labour may have on them.
- ii. The X needs to make the managers aware of the positive impacts they would have on sales assistants if they supported them socially and emotionally.
- iii. The X Racecourse management team should make use of the meetings they have with sales assistants in order to gather emotional labour issues they encounter during work and engage sales assistants in coming up with mechanisms on how best to address emotional labour issues.
- iv. There is a need for the X Racecourse to provide emotional intelligence training or any other emotional labour coping strategies training to the sales assistants.

## **Practical Impact on Business**

Understanding and managing emotions within an organization, particularly in the service sector, has significant implications for business performance and employee well-being. Emotions influence not only interpersonal relationships among employees but also the quality of interactions between employees and customers. For instance, at the X Racecourse, employees engage in emotional labour, often presenting a positive attitude towards customers despite their true feelings. This practice is crucial for ensuring customer satisfaction and fostering loyalty, which in turn can lead to increased revenue and repeat business. The emphasis on emotional labour in customer service roles, such as those at the X Racecourse, underscores the need for businesses to invest in training programs that help employees manage their emotions effectively. This approach not only enhances customer experiences but also contributes to the overall financial success of the organization by maintaining a high standard of service quality.

Moreover, the emotional demands placed on employees, especially in roles that require constant customer interaction, necessitate effective coping strategies to mitigate potential negative effects such as emotional exhaustion and burnout. The practice of deep acting, where employees genuinely align their internal emotions with the desired emotional expression, can lead to higher job satisfaction and better job performance. This contrasts with surface acting, where employees simply fake the required emotions, often leading to adverse outcomes like stress and job dissatisfaction. By fostering an environment that supports genuine emotional engagement, businesses like the X Racecourse can improve employee morale and productivity, thereby enhancing overall organizational performance. Understanding the nuances of emotional labour can therefore provide businesses with valuable insights into employee management and customer relations, ultimately contributing to a more resilient and thriving business environment.

## **Operations and Processes**

Develop training programs for employees, especially those working in customer-facing roles at the racecourse, focusing on emotional labour management techniques such as deep acting. These programs should educate employees on how to engage in deep acting effectively to enhance customer interactions while mitigating negative impacts on their well-being. Establish support systems within the organization, such as counselling services or peer support groups, to assist employees in coping with the emotional demands of their jobs, particularly in instances where they feel undervalued or experience emotional exhaustion due to deep acting. Revise performance evaluation criteria to recognize and reward employees who demonstrate proficiency in deep acting and its positive effects on job performance and customer satisfaction. Develop or update organizational policies that acknowledge and promote the importance of emotional labour, particularly deep acting, in the hospitality industry. These policies should outline expectations for employee behaviour and emotional expression while providing guidelines for managing emotional labour effectively. Implement feedback mechanisms, such as regular surveys or focus group discussions, to gather insights from employees about their experiences with emotional labour, including deep acting, and to identify areas for improvement in organizational support and management practices.

Provide managerial training programs to equip supervisors and managers with the skills and knowledge necessary to support and manage employees engaged in emotional labour, including facilitating deep acting and addressing any challenges or concerns that arise. Allocate resources for ongoing research and development initiatives aimed at further understanding the implications of emotional labour, particularly deep acting, on employee well-being and organizational performance within the context of the racecourse industry. Develop communication strategies to foster a culture of open dialogue and transparency regarding emotional labour expectations, challenges, and support mechanisms within the organization. Implement performance improvement plans for employees who may be struggling with managing emotional labour, providing targeted support and resources to help them develop effective coping strategies, including deep acting techniques.

## **Long-term Impact**

By understanding the nuances of emotional labour, particularly the distinction between deep acting and surface acting, organizations can implement policies and practices that prioritize employee well-being. Long-term, this could lead to reduced burnout, improved job satisfaction, and increased employee retention rates. Deep acting has been found to foster a greater sense of empathy towards customers, leading to more authentic interactions. Over time, this can contribute to enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty, which are vital for the long-term success of businesses in the hospitality industry. The study sheds light on the need for organizations to

recognize and support the emotional labour performed by their employees. In the long run, this understanding can lead to the development of more effective management practices that prioritize both employee and customer well-being, ultimately fostering a positive organizational culture. Organizations can use the insights from this study to develop training programs that equip employees with the necessary skills to manage their emotional labour effectively. Long-term, this can lead to a more resilient workforce capable of navigating the demands of customer-facing roles in the hospitality industry. As the study contributes to the limited literature on emotional labour in the South African context, its findings have the potential to influence industry-wide practices. By promoting awareness and understanding of emotional labour, the study can drive positive changes in how organizations across various sectors manage employee well-being and customer interactions.

## Conclusions

Based on the study, sales assistants reported having reduced levels of stress when they engaged in deep acting instead of surface acting. Furthermore, the results suggest that practicing deep acting has a positive effect on sales assistants. The practice of deep acting had a negative effect on sales personnel, as it occasionally caused them to feel unappreciated by the business. Deep acting has a positive effect on the sales assistants' knowledge and execution skills, which are influenced by their work experience. The study also indicates that practicing deep acting improves the sales assistants' capacity to engage with consumers successfully and display empathy towards them.

The study did not include the X outlets due to scheduling constraints. The investigation was exclusively done at the X Racecourse. Considering this, a recommendation for future research would be to carry out a study at the retail establishments as well. This would offer a comprehensive perspective on the subject topic, given the outlets are primarily responsible for the majority of the work and employ full-time staff, unlike the X Racecourse. Furthermore, it is necessary to perform a study that would engage customers in order to ascertain their perspectives on the impact of sales assistants' surface acting, deep acting, and genuine acting on the quality of service received by customers and the service provided by sales assistants.

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