Leading with emotional labour: the interplay of six emotions

Aromaa, Eeva

Inderscience Publishers

https://erepo.uef.fi/handle/123456789/8244

Downloaded from University of Eastern Finland's eRepository
When referring to this journal article, please use the following reference:


**Leading with emotional labour: the interplay of six emotions**

Eeva Aromaa* and Outi-Maaria Palo-oja

Business School, University of Eastern Finland, P.O. Box 1627, FI-70211 Kuopio, Finland

*Corresponding author

Eeva Aromaa is a PhD Candidate of Innovation Management at the Business School of the University of Eastern Finland. She is interested in research areas such as innovation, emotional labour, humour in organizations and qualitative research methods. Email: eeva.aromaa@uef.fi

Outi-Maaria Palo-oja is a PhD Candidate of Innovation Management at the Business School of the University of Eastern Finland. Her research interests include commercialization, product development, and sensemaking. Email: outi-maaria@palo-oja.fi

This paper is a revised and expanded version of a paper entitled ‘Emotional experiences in business development’ presented at ICMC2014, BIMTECH Campus, 3–4 December 2015.
Abstract

This study explores how emotional labour is performed by leaders to enhance employee task completion. More specifically, the study examines how one particular leader enacted emotional labour by expressing various emotions in real-life interactions that were recorded during an 11-minute conversation with employees. The data for the study were collected from a videotaped office meeting that took place in a small service company. A detailed micro-analysis of a series of vignettes from the meeting provides new evidence of the dynamic nature of emotional labour in an everyday leadership situation, enhancing the research literature on emotional labour performed by Humphrey (2008), Humphrey et al. (2008) and Iszatt-White (2013b).

Keywords: leadership, leading, emotional labour, emotion work, emotional displays, emotion management, managing emotion, controlling emotion, displaying emotion, gestures, video data, vignette, micro-analysis, small companies
1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to explore how emotional labour (Humphrey, 2008; Humphrey et al., 2008; Iszatt-White, 2013b) is ‘done’ (or performed) by a leader in a specific interaction situation between the leader of a small service company and her employees. The study examines how the leader expresses and controls emotional displays when trying to motivate employees during an 11-minute conversation about a specific topic. During the conversation, the leader makes persistent attempts to motivate her employees to carry out the task of updating a flyer, a task which they have failed to carry out despite previously agreeing to it. Through a micro-analysis of video data and an analysis of vignettes from the conversation (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014), the study shows how this leader produces complex and varied types of emotional labour by switching from one type of emotional display to another during a brief conversation.

As it is impossible to lead an organisation or team of people without considering their emotions (Iszatt-White, 2013b, p. 15), the emotional nexus between a leader and the members of his or her team is always at the heart of leadership success or failure (Gallos, 2013, p. 40). With the dream of happy productive workers (Staw, 1986) remaining the Holy Grail of organisational research, a key challenge for leaders, when attempting to delegate responsibility and encourage employee participation, is the ability to persuade via emotional appeal, rather than by using logic or commands based on authority (Iszatt-White, 2013b, p. 15).

In the introduction to her book, Leadership as Emotional Labour, Iszatt-White (2013a, p. 6) suggests that leadership theory is at a crossroads. Although recent theories of spiritual leadership (Fry, 2005), authentic leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005) and servant leadership (Spears and Lawrence, 2004) all emphasise the emotional component within the leader-follower relationship, Iszatt-White (2013a, p. 6) argues that theoretical approaches to leadership are ‘a long way from fully understanding this most complex and varied activity’.

In their widely cited article, Barley and Kunda (2001) criticise recent social scientific studies into work, particularly within organisation theory. They suggest a number of methodological requirements for research to bring the work back in through a return to fieldwork and ethnographic research. Luff and Heath (2012) suggest that naturalistic studies using video recordings of everyday activities and social interaction between the participants – occurrences which remain hidden from official documents and audio files (Fele, 2012) – may be one way to address these concerns in organisational studies. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015) confirm that visual materials have increasingly become part of research in business studies.

This study, which draws from previous theoretical discussions about leaders’ emotional labour (Humphrey, 2008; Humphrey et al., 2008; Iszatt-White, 2013b), approaches the theoretical (Iszatt-White, 2013a, p. 6) and methodological (Barley and Kunda, 2001) challenges with regard to existing leadership research by using video recordings of a specific social interaction (Luff and Heath, 2012) between a leader and her employees. Leading with emotional labour (Humphrey, 2005; 2006), refers to the use, by managers or other leaders, of emotional labour and emotional displays to influence the moods, emotions, motivation and performance of their followers (Ashkanasy and Humphrey, 2011; Humphrey et al., 2008). Previous studies have suggested that leaders express three types of emotions:
(1) friendly and positive; (2) sympathy and compassion; and (3) irritation and anger. These are seen as being equivalent to the emotions expressed by individuals working in various service occupations. Leaders need to switch rapidly from one type of emotional display to another. They also need to use considerably more judgement than service agents when dealing with emotional labour (Humphrey, 2008; Humphrey et al., 2008). In leaders’ relationships with employees, they are required to produce complex and varied types of emotional labour. This reflects the idea that leaders face a greater variety of interactions than do service agents (Iszatt-White, 2013b).

This study is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the concept of leading with emotional labour, which forms the theoretical framework for this study. The methodology used in the study is explained in Section 3. Section 4 gives a detailed analysis of emotional labour as performed by the leader of a small service company. The findings of the analysis are discussed in Section 5, with the conclusions presented in Section 6.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Theorising emotional labour

Research into the sociology of emotions, in which emotion is conceptualised as being socially constructed, has shown a long-term interest in how emotion is expressed in organisational and work settings. From the sociological perspective, emotions are defined as the social display of feelings (Sturdy, 2003), which has led to calls to explore ‘collaborative social performances’ (Waldron, 2000) where emotions are expressed (Hearn, 1993, p. 146). Arlie Hochschild’s (1979; 1983; 1993) trailblazing work on flight attendants’ emotional labour has inspired similar empirical research into a variety of occupations (Humphrey, 2013). These studies consider emotional labour as real work, which may require a convincing portrayal of feigned emotion, a pretence that can be dropped during work breaks and at the end of the day (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild (1983, p. 7) defined emotional labour as the management of feeling to create an appropriate managerially prescribed emotional appearance, with publicly observable facial and bodily displays, used especially in face-to-face service work to achieve certain organisational goals.

Hochschild’s view of emotional labour was that the employer-employee relationship is entirely exploitative and one-sided, with the only gain or benefit to the employee being financial. However, later researchers have seen this form of social interaction as being more complex (Iszatt-White 2013a, p. 3). For example, O’Brien (1994) saw emotional labour as an instrument of social control: in his empirical study, he found that nurses performed emotional labour as their primary resource to gain individual change. Price (2001) highlighted the rewarding dimension of accomplishing emotional labour within teachers’ work, where relating to others was seen as an important source of recognition, empathy and respect.

In a key extension of the original theory, Bolton and Boyd (2003, p. 290) argued that Hochschild’s formulation of emotional labour, where controlled emotional performances lead to alienation and altering one’s true self, is too absolutist in its implementation and consequences. They emphasise a
more extended view of the origins of emotional labour in which it arises from the internalised views of the professional norms of conduct and the normal course of social interaction. Hence, Bolton and Boyd (2003, p. 289) see ‘emotional labourers’, such as airline cabin crew, not as the victims of an emotional agenda set by their employers, but as ‘skilled emotional managers’, who are able to juggle and synthesise different types of emotion work depending on different situational demands. Bolton’s (2005) typology of four distinct varieties of emotional self-management in organisations has enriched our understanding of emotions in organisations, especially the complex responses that ‘skilled emotion managers’ are capable of causing in varying situations.

2.2. Leaders’ emotional labour

Brotheridge and Grandey (2002; see also Clarke et al., 2007 and Gardner et al., 2009) found that managers carry out emotional labour as frequently as sales and customer service workers. Ronald H. Humphrey developed one of the first theoretical models of how leaders perform emotional labour. His phrase, ‘leading with emotional labour’ (Humphrey, 2005; 2006), refers to managers or other leaders performing emotional labour and emotional displays as follows: (1) to regulate their own emotions; (2) to influence the moods, emotions, motivation and performance of their followers; and (3) to create organisation-wide rules for emotional display that help create the unique culture and identity of a particular organisation (Ashkanasy and Humphrey, 2011; Humphrey et al., 2008).

Humphrey (2008) and Humphrey et al. (2008) have suggested that the key differences between the emotional requirements of leadership and those needed in service encounters include the fact that leaders need to display a wider range of emotions and must consider more carefully which emotions to display and when to display them. Leaders need to express the following three types of emotion, which are also characteristic of the three types of service occupation: (1) friendly and positive emotions in their daily interactions to build trust and good leader-member relations; (2) sympathy and compassion towards employees’ personal problems; and (3) irritation, anger and power when employees perform poorly and fail to meet organisational goals (see also Iszatt-White, 2009).

Humphrey (2008) and Humphrey et al. (2008) also suggest that leaders need to show considerably greater judgement when dealing with emotional labour than service agents require. The need to switch rapidly from one type of emotional display to another may also make emotional labour more difficult. Iszatt-White (2013b, p. 33) states that the interplay of different forms of emotional labour is not about moving in and out of different personal or occupational roles, as discussed by Bolton and Boyd (2003). Rather, it is more concerned with the complex variety of in-role emotional labour.

Ipszatt-White (2013b, p. 14) shows that the relationship between the service employee and the client in the on-off service encounter contrasts greatly with the ongoing professional relationship between the leader and the employee. In leaders’ relationships with those they lead, they are required to produce complex and varied types of emotional labour. This reflects the greater variety of issues faced by leaders in comparison with service workers. Humphrey (2013, p. 90) also emphasises that emotional labour demands depend on the nature of the relationship between the leader and the employees. For example, teenagers holding part-time summer jobs or employees working in
temporary jobs that are not career oriented may not see a mutual relationship with their leader as important to their career success and job satisfaction.

Humphrey (2013, p. 90) reminds us that the power balance between parties influences the emotional labour process. In most leader-follower relationships, the leader or formal manager usually has a relative power advantage, which gives a considerably different flavour to the emotional labour that the leader performs. When supervising highly skilled professional employees, managers may depend on their employees’ expertise and enthusiastic cooperation in order to get the job done. This dependence on their subordinates reduces their managerial power (Humphrey, 2013, p. 90).

3. Research methodology and data analysis

3.1. The service company context

The case company is a franchise-based rental and real estate agency established by its current leader in 1999. The company started by renting apartments to students and, since then, it has grown to serve businesses and associations as well as elderly private clients. Thinking about new business opportunities is the major reason for this leader to be an entrepreneur. During a study conducted by the first author between 2012 and 2013, the leader, together with her four full-time employees, developed several new service products, and the company started to expand into the real estate business. The company also began to let business premises in addition to apartments and houses. Today, in 2016, the company has moved to a much larger office and provides employment for a new managing director as well as six service employees.

During the 2012–2013 period, the leader and her employees had office meetings once a month, which the first author was allowed to video record. In the empirical part of this study, we present a series of vignettes from an 11-minute discussion about updating a flyer. This particular conversation was chosen because the leader had to put a lot of effort into the discussion because her employees had not proceeded as had been agreed upon beforehand. The topic was the second of twenty discussed at the office meeting, which was held on 25 March, 2013. The number of topics is based on the agenda given beforehand to Yammer (i.e. a social networking tool for private communication). As always, the meeting was held in a small and comfortable kitchen at the back of the main customer service office. The leader was under time pressure, being expected to discuss all twenty topics within two hours. To keep their energy levels high, the leader and the employees had access to coffee and refreshments during the meeting.

3.2 Analysing video data through vignettes

Luff and Heath (2012) have emphasised that video offers unprecedented access to domains and activities and provides resources that can be repeatedly viewed and are open to review and analysis by others. However, collecting video material raises a wide range of issues: (1) how to transcribe the
data, ‘translating the visual into words’ (see also Pink, 2007, p. 119); (2) how to develop an analysis that resonates with the collected materials; and (3) how to present the analysis to audiences or in conventional research publications. This latter is a challenge because of the rich nature of the material collected. McNaughton (2009) argued that using a video recording as data is by no means easy. However, it can provide rich, intimate data about the complex nature of human interaction. In this study, the presentation and analysis of the empirical data are conducted through vignettes in order to provide rich illustrations of the complex way that leaders use emotional labour.

According to Jarzabkowski et al. (2014), vignettes are vivid portrayals (Erickson, 1986) of specific incidents, such as conversations (Liu and Maitlis, 2014; Rouleau, 2005, Samra-Fredericks, 2003), which illuminate a theoretical concept that the author wishes to convey. Vignettes reveal particular concepts, bringing them to life by describing the actual event or incident in an evocative way (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014). For example, Rouleau (2005) has provided rich storytelling detail in vignettes by characterising the key individuals as central actors and providing details about their experiences, their facial expressions and the nuances of their vocabulary. The evidentiary power of such vignettes lies in their plausible, vivid and authentic insights into the life-world of the participants, which enables readers to experience the field, at least partially (Erickson, 1986; Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Humphreys, 2005; Humphreys and Watson, 2009).

Jarzabkowski et al. (2014) illustrate three characteristics of vignettes and how they enable the author to slip in and out of different ways of presenting data. First, they enable the presentation of particularly rich examples of how things work in real life in the form of short evocative stories alongside the more interpretative explanatory text and/or presentation of the wider corpus of data. Such explanations are a validating mechanism that enhances the quality of the vignettes. Interspersing explanatory text with vignettes allows the author to present concepts that drill down into how those concepts work in practice.

Secondly, Jarzabkowski et al. (2014) suggest that vignettes are a particularly useful way to illustrate the messy and entangled interrelationships between concepts as they actually occur within the field. Vivid vignettes can illustrate a nexus of concepts and relationships, often within a richly conveyed context, which the surrounding text can then tease out (Carlile, 2002; Jarzabkowski et al., 2014; Liu and Maitlis, 2014). Thirdly, Jarzabkowski et al. (2014) highlight the special characteristics of vignettes: these vibrant and illustrative excerpts are an evocative way to provide readers with a sense of what it was like to be in the field when compared with more detached or sanitised ways of presenting data.

### 4. The vignettes – updating a flyer

1

The employees sit in the back room of the office. Two of them, Emma and Irene, sit side by side on one side of a small table while Anna and Rosa occupy the corner of a computer desk, facing Emma and Irene. The leader, Paula, helps herself to a cup of coffee from the coffee maker by the sink.

Paula: *Then we had something about that marketing thing. Let’s just blaze through it.*
Emma laughs and picks up the flyer from the table.

Emma: I’d like it if you and Irene would take a moment, that you’d go over this lessor side of it. If you want we can go over the sales thing.

Emma’s eyes move between Paula and Irene. Paula sits down at the small table in the middle of the two pairs of employees, directly opposite Emma, and places her coffee cup and pastry in front of her.

Emma: Yeah, the text should probably be condensed.

Paula: Yeah, yeah. Yes.

Paula and Emma look each other in the eye.

Emma: This bit here.

Emma points at the flyer and looks at Irene and Paula in turn.

Paula: Have you done anything else to it yet?

Emma: Well, no we haven’t.

Emma eyes the flyer. Paula takes a bite or two out of her pastry. Irene and Anna make suggestions on how to change the text, and Emma comments on their suggestions. Paula listens to the employees, always turning to look at the person talking. After a small pause, Emma continues speaking.

Emma: But this would probably call for all of us to look at this together. It probably won’t work itself out this minute . . .

Emma laughs. Paula rests her cheek on her palm and lightly presses her teeth together.

Interpretation

At the beginning of the conversation, the leader puts pressure on the employees to proceed quickly. Emma asks for help from the leader and from Irene, saying that they should take some time right now to both produce new text and revise old text based on the services they offer for lessors. For the first time, the leader asks in a constructive manner whether Emma and Anna have revised the flyer. Emma answers that they have not. Irene and Anna start to give suggestions on how they could revise the flyer. The leader, who usually participates very actively in revising documents, hides her irritation that Emma and Anna haven’t done the required work by staying quiet while the employees discuss the subject in a lively manner.

Humphrey’s concept of leading with emotional labour (2005; 2006) refers to a leader’s ability to regulate his or her own emotions (Ashkanasy and Humphrey, 2011; Humphrey et al., 2008). In this first part of the conversation, the leader demonstrates this ability by staying quiet and thus hiding her irritation. However, the next vignette will show that staying quiet is not a viable strategy for the leader, who wants the task of updating the flyer to move forward.

The employees’ discussion dies down.

Paula: But have you like . . . umm . . . I mean . . . I’ll rephrase . . .

Paula points at Emma with her fingers, making them look like a bird’s beak.
Emma: *Yeah.*

Emma looks at Paula intently.

Paula: *Have you in any way tried to add that . . .*

The beak formed by Paula’s fingers has become sharper.

Paula: *When we were talking about . . . the idea was that . . . I understood that . . .*

Emma: *Yes.*

Emma keeps her eyes fixed on Paula.

Paula: *I understood that we had agreed to . . .*

Emma: *Yeah.*

Paula: *That we do half a page, not a complete spread.*

Paula points to a form lying on the table, indicating what they had all agreed upon.

Emma: *For young people, yeah, that’s right.*

Paula: *Have you done anything about it yet?*

Emma: *No.*

Emma’s voice is bright.

Paula: *Yeah, okay. What’s the schedule on that?*

Emma: *Well, there probably isn’t any kind of schedule yet.*

Emma looks down at the flyer on the table.

Paula: *Alright, what if we set the month on that?*

Paula looks at Emma and then turns to look at Anna, who is sitting behind her, and speaks quickly.

Paula: *I don’t mean it has to be right now.*

Interpretation

In this part of the conversation, the leader puts a lot of effort into staying constructive when asking whether Emma and Anna have completed the assigned task or set a timetable for the work. The leader is patient, phrasing her question in eight different ways. However, her gesture – shaping her fingers into a beak which gets sharper as she asks questions – illustrates her irritation at the employees’ inefficiency. The employees, who, with the exception of Anna, have been working at this small company for several years, have learned that this leader shows a range of feelings during office meetings. With the exception of Emma, all the employees stay totally quiet during this episode, where the leader leads with patience and endurance while simultaneously showing her irritation in a controlled way.

Here, leading with emotional labour (Humphrey, 2005; 2006) requires the leader to regulate one emotion (e.g., irritation) while simultaneously expressing other emotions (e.g., patience and endurance). In this second part of the conversation, the leader struggles to stay constructive; at the same time, she shows her irritation through gestures. Humphrey (2013, p. 90) emphasises that emotional labour depends on the nature of the relationship between the leader and the employees. In
this situation, the leader grills Emma, allowing Anna who has less experience at this company to follow the discussion.

3

Emma talks about how she and Anna have not had time to work on the flyer together.

Emma: *We sort of want your opinions on it as well.*

Emma motions towards Paula with her right hand. Paula closes her teeth together lightly and tightens the corners of her mouth.

Paula: *Yes, yes.*

Paula stretches out her words and nods. Emma says that the basic idea behind the flyer is good. Anna reminds the others that they still have to decide when the flyers should be handed out.

Paula: *That’s also one thing that . . .*

Paula nods, and her eyes shift from Emma to Anna and back again. Emma talks about how they have put some suggestions in parenthesis regarding how the flyer could be changed. Paula’s posture has sagged. The corners of her mouth twitch, and she licks her lips. When she begins to talk, she straightens her upper body.

Paula: *I think it would be efficient to go about this so that someone . . . It often goes, like, if we're all here, it’s gonna take a massive amount of time.*

Paula keeps her hands open in front of her and shakes her head sharply as she says the word *massive.* Emma hastens to speak, swiping her hand in front of her.

Emma: *Yeah, we don't need to do that.*

Paula talks over Emma.

Paula: *No, see, I mean . . .*

Paula suggests that they mark on the calendar who is going to edit which text. As she speaks, her right hand resembles a sharp bird’s beak, plucking worms quickly from different directions.

**Interpretation**

Here, Emma explains that she and Anna didn’t have time to revise the flyer. Then she tells the leader – for the third time – that she and Anna need some help from the leader and from Irene in order to update the flyer. The leader’s body language, which includes clenching and grinding her teeth, shows her irritation. However, the leader changes her emotional appearance and replies in a polite and constructive manner when Emma says that the idea for the new flyer is good. When Anna reminds the leader about the schedule for delivering the flyer, the leader looks at both of her employees, nods her agreement and thanks Anna for reminding her. However, when Emma says that she and Anna have added some notes for changes to the flyer, the leader’s body language and gestures – her bent upper body and her tightening the corners of her mouth – show that she is not satisfied with the work that the employees have done. Once again, the leader manages to change her emotional appearance very quickly: she starts with a positive tone and straightens her upper body as she suggests how they
should proceed with updating the flyer and, at the end of the sentence, she shows her irritation by saying that they will all have to spend a large amount of time doing this.

This third part of the conversation shows how the leader rapidly switches from one type of emotional display (irritation) to another (patience). Humphrey (2008) and Humphrey et al. (2008) suggest that displays must often be switched multiple times within minutes. This part of the conversation shows how the leader performs several turns between showing irritation and patience in a conversation lasting one-and-a-half minutes. These two feelings are also intertwined in the second-last sentence in this part of the conversation.

4

Paula: Do you want me to do the preliminary work and decide what’s taken out and what’s put in?

Paula extends her hands wide in front of her, palms down.

Emma: It’s mostly about this . . .

Paula: So that we could, like, move this along?

Paula’s right hand makes a circling motion as she speaks.

Emma: Lessor section here.

Emma’s words drown under Paula’s. She tries again.

Emma: Anna and I could look at the lessee side.

Emma looks past Paula at Anna. Paula quickly gets up from her chair. Emma looks at the flyer on the table and explains how she and Anna could go over the lessee side if Paula and Irene take care of the text concerning lessors and apartment investing.

Paula: Do we have these flyers here? I want one of those.

Paula takes a few steps in various directions. Rosa says that there are flyers in the customer section of the office. Paula leaves to get a flyer. Emma takes a sip of her coffee. Paula returns with a flyer of her own.

Emma: Yeah, what you should put there is . . .

Emma leans over the table to show Paula what she’s talking about.

Emma: We’ve now crossed out the Students’ Rental Agency bit.

Paula: Well, yeah, that’s a given.

Paula crosses out the relevant part in her own flyer.

Interpretation

In this part of the conversation, the leader leads by showing her irritation that the employees haven’t updated the flyer. First, the leader asks whether the employees want her to do the preliminary work. Emma doesn’t get the chance to answer because the leader interrupts, expressing very clearly – both verbally and non-verbally – that the work needs to progress quickly. When the leader stands up and says that she needs a copy of the flyer, the employees do not gesture or say anything until she comes back. When the leader returns, Emma remains as constructive as she has been throughout the
Emma explains to Paula which sentences could be joined together and how the text could be arranged in a new way. Paula makes the changes to her own copy of the flyer.

Paula: Yeah, right, let’s do that. Is there something else you’ve cut?

Discussion turns to the piece of copy concerning the sale of apartments and new business activities. Paula begins to speak while looking intently at the flyer.

Paula: Off the top of my head, I’d see it like . . . Is it like this?

Paula measures the flyer with her hands, laughs and looks at Emma with a smile.

Emma: Yeah.

Emma nods and looks Paula in the eye. Paula points to different parts of the flyer with her fingers, which are spread apart in the shape of a funnel.

Paula: Rental service, sales service . . . All the services could, like, have their own heading.

Paula measures the flyer again with her fingers, smiles at Emma and laughs.

Paula: They could have their own heading to clearly set them apart, like this.

Paula measures the flyer once again. Emma speaks quickly.

Emma: Yes, that might do, yeah.

Paula states that there is a problem with the composition of the flyer. In the current version, there is clearly more text aimed at lessors than at lessees.

Paula: What should we put on the lessee side, if we mean to keep it balanced?

Paula looks at Emma and opens her mouth wide. She asks her next question in a funny voice.

Paula: Should we come up with a nice picture there?

Paula draws the outline of a flower or a cloud on the flyer and laughs. Emma smiles.

Emma: Let’s see, we can think about that.

Interpretation

Emma explains to the leader her preliminary ideas about updating the flyer. When the leader starts to explain her own ideas, she weighs up the flyer with her hands and eyes while talking about how they could organise text to achieve a balanced outcome between two spreads. The leader gives the others her suggestions concerning the content of the updated flyer. Sturdy (2003) suggests that being rational is also being emotional. The leader then shows friendliness to Emma by smiling. The leader’s gestures
are now more relaxed (e.g., when she holds her fingers apart like a funnel) than they were in earlier episodes; previously, she held her hand as a sharp beak, pressing her fingers together. Humphrey (2008) and Humphrey et al. (2008) suggest that leaders have to express friendly and positive emotions in their daily interactions to build trust and good leader-member relations. They must also express sympathy and compassion towards employees’ problems (see also Iszatt-White, 2009).

When the leader realises that they have a problem – the flyer has too little text about lessees – she pulls her mouth open like a clown. She suggests in a humorous tone that maybe they could draw something. Emma reacts by smiling briefly. Here, the leader uses humour to help motivate the employees to tackle the task at hand. Anderson (2005) and Vecchio et al. (2009) emphasise that humour enhances leadership style and effectiveness. Consalvo (1989) and Holmes (2007) state that humour has a positive impact on group problem solving.

The fifth part of the conversation illustrates how the leader performs three types of emotional labour – rationality, friendliness and humour – during a segment of conversation lasting one-and-a-half minutes. Iszatt-White (2013b) points out that leaders are required to produce varied types of emotional labour. This reflects the greater variety of issues faced by leaders than by service agents.

Paula begins to edit the text with quick, wide-ranging movements of the pen, all the while talking about how they can balance the flyer.

Paula: And here, we’d have the general information about our company.

Emma: Yeah.

Emma looks at Paula with wide eyes and then turns intently to the flyer in her hand.

Paula: So that we could get it balanced, sort of . . .

Paula’s hands resemble the hands of a pianist, gently dancing on the flyer.

Emma: Yes.

Irene: Then we might be able to change these around.

Irene shares her suggestion for the layout of the text.

Rosa: Mmm.

Anna: Or what prevents us . . . from putting it . . .

Paula: Right, right . . . I was thinking the general info could come first.

Paula looks at Emma and then at Irene.

Irene: Yeah, well, I guess so.

Irene extends her arm towards Paula. Emma speaks at almost the same time as Irene.

Emma: Right, yeah.

Irene and Paula begin to discuss different ways of arranging the text portion of the flyer. Comments flow back and forth. Irene smiles and motions with her hands as she speaks.

Paula: Yeah, well, that’s the . . .
Paula moves her hands in parallel, first up, then down, then up again in quick succession, as if she were playing rapid chords on a piano.

Interpretation

The leader uses wide circles when making suggestions for the flyer. She moves her fingers like a pianist. Irene also gives suggestions, which she emphasises with lively hand gestures. Anna and Rosa also take part in the conversation, however briefly. In this company, such lively discussions between all the members are typical. However, during this part of the conversation, enthusiastic exchanges remain timely and very short.

This sixth part of the conversation shows how the leader once again alters her emotional performance, which can now be characterised as leading with enthusiasm. Previous studies have suggested that leaders need to be able to arouse emotions such as excitement in others (Ashkanasy and Tse, 2000; Bryman, 1992) and that a leader’s ability to inspire others pivots on ‘striking the right emotional chord’ as rational analyses do not move people (Murray, 2011). This part of the conversation shows how the leader is capable of switching her emotional displays, within in a few minutes, from irritation to enthusiasm. Humphrey (2008) and Humphrey et al. (2008) have suggested that leaders should be capable of doing this.

7

Paula: Okay.
Paula speaks energetically and looks at the flyer on the table in front of her.

Paula: What is . . .
She cuts off mid-sentence, exhales, closes the flyer and draws her finger along the fold. Emma is now standing.

Paula: The schedule?
Paula stares straight ahead for a moment and then turns her eyes to Emma, who is walking past her to the coffee maker.

Paula: When do you want to have my part of the text?
The corners of Paula’s mouth twitch.

Emma: As soon as possible.
Emma sighs. Paula fixes her eyes on Emma.

Paula: Is after Easter okay, if I look it over during Easter?
Emma answers with a laugh.

Emma: Well, sure.
Anna asks Emma to check the calendar on the wall for the date when the flyers are to be handed out. Paula takes a bite out of her pastry.

Emma: Towards the end of May.
Paula nods and speaks snappily.
Paula: *Yeah, yeah. So, if we get it done in April, ready for printing, then it'd be ready in May. Ready to be handed out.*

Emma: *Yes.*

Paula: *Yeah. Bueno. That's settled then.*

Paula nods and turns to the next item on the agenda.

Interpretation

At the beginning of this last episode, the leader still has enthusiasm in her voice about the progress concerning the task at hand. However, while asking Emma about the timetable, she changes her enthusiasm to rational questioning. Later, she makes it clear that the task at hand must be completed. She emphasises this by keeping her eyes tightly on Emma while she is walking, by slightly twitching the corners of her mouth and by nodding her head while speaking.

This last part of the conversation illustrates again how the leader rapidly switches from one type of emotional display to another, from enthusiasm to rationality, as Humphrey (2008) and Humphrey et al. (2008) have argued that leaders should be able to do.

5. Discussion

The detailed analysis of the video data, an 11-minute conversation about a specific topic during an office meeting at a small service company, focuses on one leader’s emotional labour. In this situation, the leader makes persistent attempts to emphasise the importance of the task at hand – updating a flyer – which the employees have failed to carry out despite earlier agreement. A micro-analysis of the 11-minute real-time interaction reveals the following aspects about the emotional labour performed by the leader: (1) it consists of six types of emotional labour; (2) it is characterised by dynamic and situational displays of different emotions simultaneously; and (3) there are rapid transitions between different types of emotional display. This analysis makes the following contributions to the research literature on emotional labour in leaders.

The analysis shows how the leader performs the following six types of emotional labour in her attempt to motivate employees to complete the task at hand: (1) patience (parts two and three of the conversation); (2) irritation (parts two to four of the conversation); (3) rationality (parts 5 and 7 of the conversation); (4) friendliness (part 5 of the conversation); (5) humour (part 5 of the conversation); and (6) enthusiasm (parts 6 and 7 of the conversation). The analysis demonstrates that the repertoire of emotional labour displays, especially in this specific situation (in which a leader tries persistently to motivate the employees to perform the task at hand), is wider than previous studies have suggested (for example, Humphrey, 2008; Humphrey et al., 2008).

Next, detailed analysis through the use of vignettes illustrates the dynamic and situational nature of emotional labour. In this particular situation, where the leader tries to promote the task of updating a flyer, emotional labour is characterised by dynamic and situational displays of different emotions at
the same time. The second and, especially, the third part of the conversation show how the leader demonstrates her irritation and patience, how these emotions are switched and intertwined with each other, and how she expresses patience verbally with a constructive tone while displaying irritation at the same time, mainly through body language (e.g., by bending the upper body while clenching and grinding her teeth).

The dynamic nature of the emotional labour performed by the leader is also illustrated in the changing dynamics during the fourth and fifth parts of the conversation. Interestingly, in the fourth part of the conversation, the leader makes her irritation clear, whereas in the fifth part of the conversation, she starts to perform a more positively valenced type of emotional labour, moving from an emotionally neutral rationality to friendliness and humour. The dynamic nature of emotional labour is nicely illustrated in the sixth part of the conversation, in which the leader turns her emotional performance into a positive display of enthusiasm and manages to motivate the other employees to take part in the discussion. Guy et al. (2014) found that leaders need a range of emotional skills for managing the human side of work. In her study, Samra-Fredericks (2013, p. 15) found that one element for influencing strategic processes was leaders’ ability to be emotionally expressive and to do so appropriately and at the right moment. According to Sigford (2005, p. 76), learning to develop ‘emotional Teflon’, is useful for leaders in dealing with employees’ negativity and criticism. In this study, the employees did not criticise their leader, at least directly. However, emotional Teflon may have helped the leader to handle challenging situations of many kinds and to quickly change her own emotional displays.

Iszatt-White (2013b, p. 18) emphasises the dynamic nature of emotional labour, arguing that the interplay of different forms of emotional labour is not about moving in and out of different personal or occupational roles, as discussed by Bolton and Boyd (2003). Rather, it concerns the complex variety of in-role emotional labour. Goleman’s (2006) idea of social chameleons, who convincingly express emotions that they may not feel and who turn emotions on or off, also characterises the emotional labour performed by the leader in this study.

This study illustrates how the leader was capable of switching between different types of emotional displays very rapidly. The most convincing illustration comes in the seventh part of the conversation, where, in mid-sentence, the leader clearly switches from enthusiasm to rationality. Humphrey (2008) and Humphrey et al. (2008) suggest that leaders need to use considerably more judgement than service agents when dealing with emotional labour.

Finally, Humphrey (2013, p. 87) suggests that it may be especially difficult for leaders to effectively perform all types of emotion. As an example, he suggests that a leader good at showing care and compassion may not be good at displaying the right amount of anger and irritation to ensure compliance when dealing with motivationally challenged employees. In this study, the question as to whether or not the task of updating the flyer was eventually completed remains unresolved. However, our analysis of the 11-minute conversation between the leader and her employees shows how various emotions were dynamically and skilfully put to work in the leader’s attempt to motivate her employees. Through her skilful coordination of emotions, the leader in this study showed herself capable of constructing an appropriate state of mind in her employees (Hochschild, 1983).
6. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to contribute to knowledge about emotional labour in leaders with regard to the dynamic nature of leading employees through emotional labour. For this purpose, the study focused on the interaction between a leader and her employees during a videotaped office meeting in which the leader made persistent attempts to motivate her employees to take care of a particular task. The study used a detailed analysis of an 11-minute conversation through vignettes accompanied by interpretations.

The contribution of this study to existing literature is twofold. First, the study has provided new evidence of the dynamic nature of emotional labour in difficult leadership situations. In the recorded conversation, the emotional labour performed by the leader was characterised by several types of both verbal and non-verbal displays. These verbal and non-verbal displays were often used simultaneously, and they could be replaced by other displays to enhance employee motivation. Secondly, this study has made a methodological contribution by using video recordings of everyday activities (Luff and Heath, 2012) and by analysing the emotional labour performed by a leader through the use of vignettes (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014).

The findings of this study indicate that more research is needed to understand leaders’ emotionality in the context of elaborating and adopting innovations. One interesting topic for future research is the role played by emotional display rules in helping to create the unique culture and identity of a particular organisation (Ashkanasy and Humphrey, 2011; Humphrey et al., 2008). Grandey et al. (2005) have suggested that owners and entrepreneurs, in particular, have considerable autonomy in creating emotional display rules in their companies. An entrepreneur can use emotional display rules to create a unique organisational culture in an effort to generate a competitive advantage or establish a market niche.

References


Humphreys, M. and Watson, T.J. (2009) ‘Ethnographic practices: from “Writing-up Ethnographic Research” to “Writing Ethnography”’, in Ybema, S. et al. (Eds.), Organizational Ethnography:


