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Reconciling Body, Cognition and Emotions: Towards a Renewed Conceptual Model of Emotional Labour and its Nomological Network

Authors

Dr. Benjamin Apelojg (*)

University of Potsdam, Berlin
Germany
apelojg@uni-potsdam.de

Dr. Rebecca Dickason (*)

IGR-IAE Graduate School of Management
Center for Research in Economics and Management (CREM CNRS, UMR 6211)
University of Rennes
[Previously: Institute for Management Research (IRG) – Gustave Eiffel University, France]
rebecca.dickason@univ-rennes.fr

(*) Both authors have contributed equally to this work

Summary (327 words)

Research on emotional labour has blossomed in recent years. However, despite a myriad of studies and conceptual reflections, the physiological dimension of emotional labour and the interactions with cognition have remained largely absent from literature. This paper aims to bring the body out of the shadows by connecting the literature on emotional labour with that on the corporeal lived experience (which links the body with consciousness and cognition). In order not to ‘succumb’ to dualism or, as Dennett says, the ‘Cartesian theatre’, we propose a novel conceptual model of emotional labour and its nomological network, which could open innovative avenues for future research. In a time of multifarious crises, such as the Covid-19 crisis, rising inflation and war, everyone is ‘under attack’, physically, psychologically, mentally, and emotionally. This means that multiple human crises overlay the economic crises faced by organizations and that crises and disruptions are now part and parcel of everyday organizational life. Building disruptive sustainability is therefore a multifaceted challenge, which impacts all the functions and processes of the organization. Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a crucial and strategic role in this matter and should both *be* sustainable and *foster* sustainability, which means ensuring the preservation of occupational health. Indeed, from a holistic perspective, healthy workers mean healthy teams and organizations, sustainable organizations in other words. Emotional labour has been proved to be challenging to perform in settings characterized by high emotional demands and its deleterious effects on health has been documented. Finding innovative ways to improve the practice of emotional labour in a sustainable, ecological way for individuals and teams but also to mitigate its deleterious effects is paramount to developing disruptive sustainability. By bringing the body into the equation, our conceptual model suggests new disruptive ideas that we consider both pertinent and original. Its heuristic nature offers food for thought by proposing complementary research paths to those currently dominating organizational psychology and thus opening new avenues for a ‘body-integrative’ perspective on emotional labour.

Track: Organizational Psychology

Keywords: emotional labour, nomological network, body, cognition, conceptual model

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INTRODUCTION

Despite early “teething problems,” research on emotion in organizations has expanded into a multifaceted body of literature over the years (Fineman, 2000; Ashkanasy, Zerbe, & Härtel, 2002; Ashkanasy, Humphrey, & Huy, 2017). Two concepts have spearheaded the field (Grandey, Diefendorff, & Rupp, 2013; Ashkanasy, Humphrey, & Huy, 2017): emotional intelligence (for a review, see Côté, 2014) and emotional labour (for a review, see Gabriel, Diefendorff, & Grandey, 2023).

Initially defined as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7), emotional labour is now broadly considered as “the regulation of feelings and expressions to fulfil interpersonal role expectations at work” (Gabriel, Diefendorff, & Grandey, 2023, p. 5). Although Hochschild’s book *The Managed Heart* (1983) mentioned the bodily experience of emotional labour, this dimension has been forgotten in subsequent developments of the concept. Literature on the body, in organizational contexts, remains scarce, although early works included it as part and parcel of the workers’ efficacy and performance, along with their emotional experience (Hersey, 1932; Mayo 1930, 1933). This is surprising because the concept of embodied cognition has become anchored in many scientific fields (Spackman & Yanchar, 2014) and the importance of the body for thought and action has been extensively documented in neurobiological research (Roth, 1997; Bennett, Dennett, Hacker, & Searle, 2007). If the body is ever considered, it is either in terms of gender and race or as an object to be optimized and shaped, but rarely as an “organizing principle” (Stec, 2015, p. 350). Overall, it can be said that the interrelations between emotions, corporeal experiences and cognition have remained underexplored in organization research.

In this paper, we intend to bridge the gap between the literature on emotional labour, and the literature on the body and cognition in organizational studies. This leads us to propose a novel conceptual model encompassing the nomological network of emotional labour. This model builds on existing research and expands it.

INSIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE ON ORGANIZATIONS, EMOTIONS AND EMOTIONAL LABOUR

Disembodied Organizations?

After a long period of ignoring the body, sociological research has now included it in a wide range of topics: there are studies on age, gender, sexuality, disability, etc. (Gugutzer, 2015, p. 50 ff). One who often inspired these developments was Merleau-Ponty. In his important work *Phenomenology of Perception*, he describes the body as the mediating instance between mind and body (Merleau-Ponty, 1966).

Acker (1990) criticized management research as ‘bodiless’. The “bodily aspects of organizational life,” such as the experience of fatigue or hunger at work (Lawrence *et al.*, 2023, p. 44) have indeed received moderate attention. Recently, the concept of “organizational body work” has been coined to underline the “organizational embedded efforts to shape human bodies” (Lawrence *et al.*, 2023, p. 37), thus suggesting the interactions between the body and the organization, and that the latter might seek to actively shape the corporeal experience.

The Body, Forgotten in the Emotional Labour Experience

In a seminal article preceding her pioneering book, Hochschild (1979, p. 551) stressed that emotion could be construed as a “bodily cooperation with an image, a thought a memory – a cooperation of which the individual is aware.” Fineman, for his part (2000, p. 8) discussed the “embodiment of emotion” underlining how specific situations or interactions can “be felt *in* and *of* the body.” This echoes the bodily aspects of organizational life previously cited (Lawrence *et al.*, 2023). The “corporeal being” is an integral part of the emotional experience: it “is ‘working’ and ‘producing’ during activities we describe as emotional” (Fineman, 2000, p. 8),

which includes emotional labour. Body language is paramount in the practice of emotional labour, and so is the managing of emotional corporeal symptoms through slow breathing, for instance (Hochschild, 1979).

Emotional labour has been conceptualized diversely. One of the best-known integrative perspectives uses a trifocal approach, envisaging emotional labour through the prisms of emotion requirements, regulation and performance (Grandey, Diefendorff, & Rupp, 2013; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015).

Indeed, an integrated three-component model of emotional labour antecedents, outcomes and moderators has been proposed by Grandey and Gabriel (2015). In this perspective, emotional labour is conceptualized as a *process* between emotion requirements, regulation and performance. The focal antecedents outlined include person characteristics (e.g. personality traits) and event characteristics. The focal outcomes are employee well-being (job satisfaction, burnout/health) and organizational well-being. The moderators are relational factors (e.g. relational power) and contextual factors (e.g. social support).

INSIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE ON BODY, COGNITION AND NEUROBIOLOGY

The Body-Mind Discussion and Embodied Cognition

The question of how body and mind are related to each other is an ancient philosophical question. The issue of the relationship between body and mind or the so-called “body-soul-problem” has not been resolved to this day. René Descartes (1596-1650) is one of the best-known dualist philosophers. Today, most researchers reject the idea of dualism and advocate a form of monism (Blackmore, 2014, pos. 80). Monistic approaches hold that there is only one substance, which, for most, is physical matter. They include, for example, functionalism or the ideas of non-reductive materialism and emergence.

The theoretical approach of embodied cognition emphasizes the physical body as a relevant factor for perception and human action (Spackman & Yanchar, 2014, p. 47), which is not too far removed from reflections on organizational body work (Lawrence *et al.*, 2023).

According to Varela, Thompson and Rosch (2016, p. 173), the choice of the term “*embodied*” aims to “highlight two points: first, that cognition depends upon the kinds of experience that come from having a body with sensorimotor capacities, and second, that these individual sensorimotor capacities are themselves embedded in a more encompassing biological, psychological, and cultural context” (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 2016, p. 173). The body is therefore viewed as a *shaping, producing* system and not a suffering one.

Body Neurobiological Research

Most neurobiological researchers follow a monistic conception of body and mind. However, envisaging brain and mind separately from one another is not compatible with the modern natural scientific view (Roth, 1996, p. 281). One of the well-known approaches is identity theory, which sees mental and material states as identical but cannot explain why the same neurological processes are experienced differently.

A more recent approach is that of Daniel Dennett, who sees consciousness as a “system of virtual machines” (Dennett, 2018, p. 369), in the sense that there is no ego but only a multitude of parallel processes that generate a useful illusion (Blackmore, 2014, pos. 1148). The idea of disembodied representations, be it communication without a body or disembodied structuralism, comes to nothing if there is no body to use. In other words, body and mind, as well as bodily and social experience, are two sides of the same coin. This is evident in the context of emotional labour which is a *situated* performance, imbued with the intricacies of social and organizational realities, and is indissociable from the *inner*, intimate, physical experiences which lead to the expression and regulation of emotions.

BUILDING A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

In this section, we outline the main dimensions of our proposed model (see *Fig. 1*). While organizational emotionality can be found at various levels of analysis (Ashkanasy & Parker, 2021) our model of emotional labour and its nomological network focuses on the most prevalent factors studied in the literature – individual and organization-related ones – which we envisage ‘with a twist’ by putting the body at the centre of our reflections.

By identifying a diversity of parameters, factors, variables which have a heuristic potential we are not seeking a universalist approach but intend to envisage a set of elements which are, in essence, embedded in specific contexts and realities, thus remaining consistent with our situated vision of emotions, corporeality, and the body-emotion nexus.

In contrast to the conventional approaches in management and organizational psychology concerning individual dimensions (e.g. with a focus on personality traits; Gabriel & Grandey, 2015), here we envisage them through the interplay between mind states, body states and emotions. Body states are influenced by the central nervous system, metabolism, blood pressure and heart rate. Following James’ view (1890/1950) that emotions are side effects of physiological states, we surmise the strong influence of perception, what we label as ‘mind states’ in the model. At the individual level, both physiological states and their mental representations inform and are informed by emotions.

The body is constantly adapting to its environment, both internal and external. The personal “lived-in experience” previously described is thus *embedded* in the organizational context. This leads us to the ‘other side of the coin’ concerning the practice of emotional labour: the organizational context which encompasses institutional factors, unit-level environmental factors and team factors.

Institutional factors, such as professional development policies (Dickason, 2022a), architecture (Markus, 2002), organization of work and general working conditions (Doppia *et al.*, 2011, Estryn-Béhar, 2011) impact general well-being and the practice of emotional labour (Dickason, 2018, 2022b).

Research on emotional labour shows the multilevel nature of emotional rules (Dickason, 2022a) and the variability of emotional demands according to specific areas within organizations, i.e. emotionalized zones (Fineman, 1996; Dickason, 2022b), which is why we have included them at the unit-level.

At the level of the team (collective/managerial factors), leadership and social support are key facets for the emotional labour performance (Dickason, 2018). The general emotional climate (De Rivera, 1992) emanating from the team may be conducive to social sharing of emotions (Rimé, Herbet, & Corsini, 2004), which offsets the potentially deleterious effects of emotional labour.

The inclusion of the body in the model necessitates envisaging adaptive parameters which can be situated *within* the body, *within* the organization and/or *outside* of the organization. The body is always in a certain relationship *to* as well as *in* the organization, both *spatially* and *temporally*. In other words, various instantiations of *distance* need to be considered. For example, while commuting to work, emotions, mind and body states change, which echoes the idea of anticipatory emotion regulation and appraisal strategies (Beal & Trougakos, 2013, p. 39). Spatial and temporal distance should also be envisaged *within* the organization. For instance, recovery activities such as breaks modulate emotional labour and mitigate its consequences (Trougakos *et al.* 2008; Dickason, 2018). Similarly, as interpersonal interactions impact emotion regulation (Troth *et al.*, 2018), proximity with colleagues probably influences bodily states and thus emotions. In this sense, regulatory factors within the body as well as outside the body should also be included.

In the model, we include elements related to the personal lived-in experience, the lived-in experience within the organization, as well as adaptative parameters. The interactions between each dimension of the model are indicated by arrows. We surmise that certain factors may play a direct role and others an indirect role in the various adaptative and regulatory processes at work, particularly from the perspective of the corporeal experience. For instance, leadership style or the social sharing of emotions may have an indirect effect, whereas environmental factors such as temperature or light exert a direct influence.

Clearly, this model is still nascent and receiving feedback on it will be paramount to further developing it. Indeed, we strive to ‘bring it to another dimension’ by materializing the complexities and multiple levels of interactions in dynamic way that mirrors both the fluctuating and continuous adaptative nature of the corporeal experience and the constant interplay of the organizational strata in relation with the practice of emotional labour.

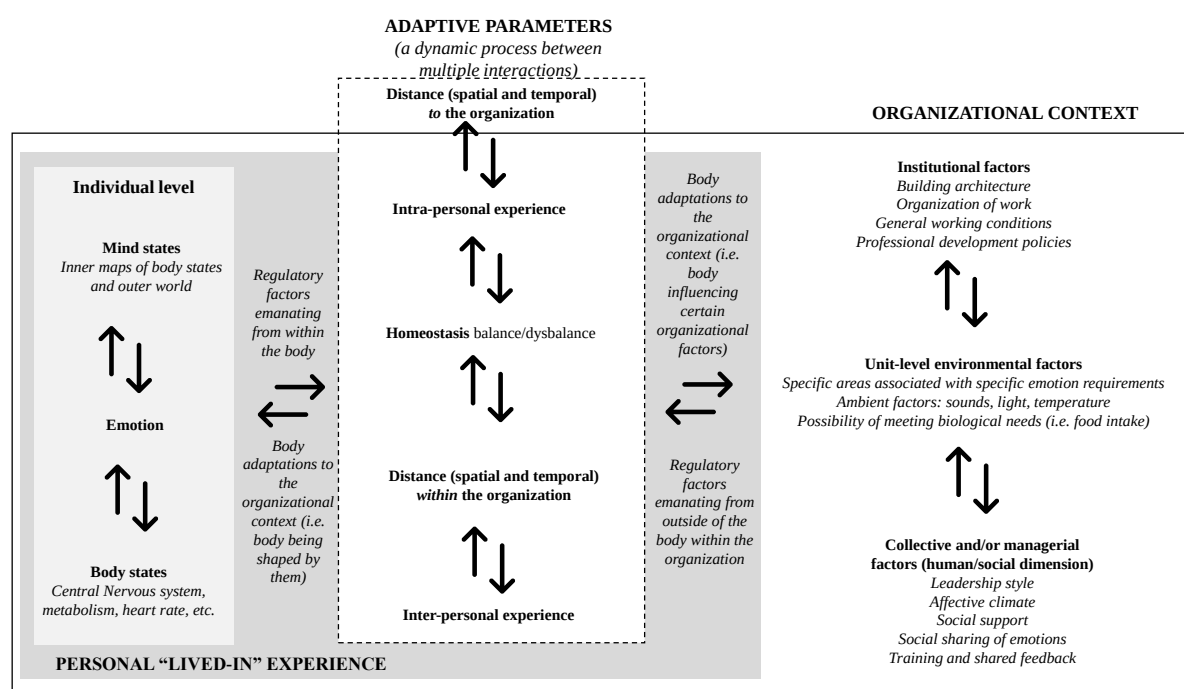


Figure 1: A novel model of emotional labour experience and processes integrating the body through a multilevel perspective

(For a better visualization of the model, we are also including a full-page version after the list of references)

CONCLUSION

This study extends Lawrence *et al.*'s (2023) recent contribution in the *Academy of Management Annals* concerned with the active shaping of organizations on the corporeal experience to the body of literature on emotional labour. Whereas Lawrence and his colleagues ask what organizations *do* to our bodies and *intend to do* to our bodies, we position our reflections at the nexus between body and emotions. Emotions are understood through the lens of situatedness, and are both embodied and a shaping, producing system, deeply rooted in the corporeal experience.

In recent years, approaches aiming to balance mind, emotions and body have made advances into organizations, although the perspectives suggested have been diversely perceived by the academic community and remain difficult to implement in a wide variety of organizational settings. These include attempts to implement practices focusing on improving emotion regulation and corporeal consciousness, such as mindfulness (Hülshager, 2015; Hülshager *et al.*, 2013) and yoga practices (Creary & Locke, 2022). The inter-relation between active physical exercise and affect has also been investigated (Reed & Ones, 2006).

The next steps in developing this paper include further exploring the literature to check for other factors that we may have overlooked. In particular, we strive to delve deeper into the literature on embodiment in organizations and see if other concepts pertaining to the field of organizational emotionality could provide other insights (e.g. discrete emotions, emotional intelligence, emotional contagion). We also aim to improve the articulation of the various bodies of literature we have invoked and to determine if the direction of relations between items of the model can be better understood. Our goal is to continue to move from a “stream by stream” approach and to refine our conceptualization by proposing an integrated view of the various bodies of literature around the concepts that are at the core of our model. Another theoretical aspect that we will have to consider is how our research fits into possibly diverse ontological and epistemological perspectives (pragmatism, for instance). The schematization of the model is also a point of focus as we strive to find a representation which puts the body at the centre of the various processes outlined, thereby offering an even more radical shift from current models and conceptualizations. We also envisage assessing the relevance of this model through a study conducted in a healthcare setting, in accordance with relevant ethical and GDPR norms and concerns.

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