EXPLORING A REFINEMENT MEASURE OF DEEP ACTING ON BURNOUT

Marie ANDELA, Didier TRUCHOT, Yolande PONZ

Sciences du langage, de l'homme et de la société, Université de Franche-Comté
30-32 Rue Mégévand, 25030 Besançon Cedex, France
E-mail: marie.andela@univ-fcomte.fr

Abstract: While surface acting is negatively related to employees' well-being, deep-acting seems to bear mostly weak and non-generalizable relations with well-being outcomes. We suggest that inconclusive results may be explained by overly-global measures of deep acting that mixed several processes. We thus propose to measure cognitive change (ERQ, Christophe, Antoine, Leroy, Delelis, 2009), and attentional deployment, both emotion regulation strategies included in the definition of deep acting, and their respective impacts on burnout (Maslach Burnout Inventory). Our results indicate that cognitive change and attentional deployment, currently measured as composing a one-dimensional factor, have in fact different impacts on employees' burnout: cognitive change is associated with low levels of burnout while attentional deployment is positively related to burnout.

Key words: emotion regulation, emotion labor, deep acting, measure, burnout

EXPLORING A REFINEMENT MEASURE OF DEEP ACTING ON BURNOUT

Suggesting that emotional labor was associated with poor health outcomes, Hochschild's (1983) work has stimulated many empirical studies. For this study we refer to Grandey (2000, p. 97), who incorporates Gross' theory to define emotional labor. She defines it as "the process of regulating both feelings and expressions for organizational goals" through surface acting and deep acting.

EMOTIONAL LABOR DEFINITION

Deep Acting

Considered as an antecedent-focused emotion regulation, the deep acting strategy occurs before the emotion arouses physiological and behavioral reactions. This form

of emotion regulation concerns the perception of emotional signals and consists in the treatment of these signals. Individuals engaged in an antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategy tend to adjust their internal feelings to the required feelings. To achieve this goal, people can use two methods: *attentional deployment* and *cognitive change* (Grandey, 2000). With cognitive change, employees can re-evaluate the situation and modify their perception of the situation in order to trigger the required emotion. With attentional deployment they can think about events, thoughts or pleasurable things, which call up the emotions that are required in the particular situation.

Surface Acting

Surface acting is considered as a response-focused form of emotion regulation that occurs when the emotion has already been elic-

ited. Rather than adjusting internal feelings, response-focused forms of emotion regulation consist in managing the emotional expressions. Employees engaging in surface acting suppress their true feelings and display more emotions than they feel by amplifying their emotions (Grandey, 2000). In this exploratory study we propose to focus on the suppression of emotions aspect of surface acting.

Deep Acting and Burnout

The link between deep acting and burnout remains unclear: some studies indicate a positive link between deep acting and emotional exhaustion. Other studies reveal a negative link between deep acting and emotional exhaustion. Finally some studies do not reveal any links between deep acting and negative health outcomes (see Hülshager, Schewe [2011] for a review of this topic). Some scholars suggest that these inconclusive results may be partly explained by the limitations inherent in the current measure of the emotional labor construct (Mikolajczak et al., 2009).

Indeed, the items aimed at measuring deep acting on actual scales of Grandey (2003), Brotheridge and Lee (2003), Diefendorff, Croyle, and Gosserand (2005), reflect the notion of making an effort to experience the required feeling but do not clearly specify what kind of emotion regulation is being used. For example, items such as “I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others” and “I try to actually experience the emotions that I must show” (Brotheridge, Lee, 2003), do not indicate whether an employee is using reappraisal, attentional deployment or other emotion regulation strategies. Current measures

of deep acting can thus capture very different processes of emotion regulation, which may have very different effects on employees’ health outcomes. Some of these may have positive health outcomes while others may be detrimental for the employees (Mikolajczak et al., 2009). Indeed, re-evaluation, which involves actively reinterpreting emotive stimuli in terms that modify the emotional impact (Gross, 1998), appears to have many benefits. It has proven particularly effective for down-regulating intense negative emotions (Ochsner et al., 2004). It decreases emotional experience without any observable physiological costs (Butler et al., 2003; Ochsner et al., 2004) and it results in decreased behavioral and subjective indications of emotion, particularly negative emotions such as anger, without elevated physiological responding (Mauss et al., 2007).

However, attentional deployment can be considered as a cognitive distraction (Gross, 1998), which appears as a dysfunctional strategy: indeed, the more the individual tries to distract him/herself from a negative event, the more the affect link to the situation will continue to emerge later in his consciousness (Wenzlaff, Wegner, 2000). This attentional distraction, for example, thinking about one’s vacation when one has to deal with an aggressive customer, helps an employee to get through the difficult interaction but does not help in facing the specificity of this problematic situation. And this negative event may continue to affect the individual.

To sum up, re-evaluation may be very helpful in acting a professional role by allowing cognitive flexibility, when facing difficulties. On the contrary, attentional deployment may not trigger past problematic situations and will require an additional effort to focus on memories or pleasant things in order to meet

job demands. We thus suggest that reappraisal may be a more effective and less exhausting emotion strategy than attentional deployment:

H1: Re-evaluation will be negatively related to burnout

H2: Attentional deployment will be positively related to burnout

Emotion Suppression Dimension of Surface Acting and Burnout

Results concerning surface acting are more consensual, as they are generally related to poor health outcomes (Hülshager, Schewe, 2011). Three mechanisms could explain the negative relationship between the suppression dimension of surface acting and well-being: emotion suppression depletes mental resources, compromises employee's sense of authenticity and leads to a prolonged experience of negative emotions (Hülshager, Schewe, 2011). On the basis of these previous results, we predict the following:

H3: The emotion suppression dimension of surface acting will be positively related to burnout

METHOD

Measures

The MBI-GS (Maslach, Jackson, 1986) was used to measure emotional exhaustion, cynicism and personal self-efficacy. Two items reflecting Grandey's definition of attentional deployment were developed: "I make the effort to think about something different in order to feel more positive emotions", "I force myself to think about something different in order to feel less negative emotions". We referred to the French validation of the Emo-

tion Regulation Questionnaire (Christophe et al., 2009) in order to assess reevaluation (2 items) and suppression of emotions (4 items). Instructions were changed in order to be adapted to the job context. Employees were asked to think about the way they deal with stressful situations in their jobs and to specify to what extent they agree with the items.

Participants

Questionnaires were distributed to commercial executives of an industrial plant. Participants were free to respond and completed anonymously the questionnaire. Sixty percent or 118 questionnaires were returned. On average, the participants were 39 years old ($SD = 9.00$) with 7 years of experience in their current position ($SD = 5.39$). Eighty per cent of the sample was male.

RESULTS

The factor structure of the questionnaire (see Table 1) was explored by conducting an exploratory factor analysis performed with maximum likelihood and varimax rotations. The factor loadings listed are the correlations between the items and the factors on the basis of the factor structure matrices of the measurement. Three factors were extracted, together explaining 83% of the variance with communalities ranging between .72 and .92.

Relationships between regulation of emotion and burnout were studied with correlations (see Table 2).

Results indicate a negative correlation between re-evaluation and emotional exhaustion. Moreover, re-evaluation increases self-accomplishment. Hypothesis 1 is supported. Attentional deployment is linked to emo-

tional exhaustion and cynicism but does not impact self-efficacy. Hypothesis 2 is supported. Results suggest that suppression is associated with emotional exhaustion and

cynicism. Hypothesis 3 is supported. Overall, the results reveal that re-evaluation and attentional deployment have different associations with burnout.

Table 1. Factor structure of the questionnaire, $n = 118$

<i>Scales and constituent items</i>	Suppression	Attentional deployment	Re-evaluation
<i>Suppression, variance explained = 35%</i>			
- I control my feelings by hiding them	.89	.13	.10
- I keep my emotions to myself	.87	.24	.08
- When I feel negative feelings, I avoid expressing them	.73	-.24	.11
- I mask my negative emotions to stay professional	.84	.29	.07
<i>Attentional deployment, variance explained = 24%</i>			
- I force myself to think about something different in order to feel more positive emotions	.09	.90	.32
- I make the effort to think about something different in order to feel less negative emotions	.16	.88	.31
<i>Re-evaluation, variance explained = 23%</i>			
- In order to feel less negative emotions (irritation, distress...), I change the way I perceive the situation	.09	.26	.92
- In order to feel more positive emotions (enthusiasm, empathy, serenity), I change the way I perceive the situation	.14	.30	.90

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, correlations for study variables

		means	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Re-evaluation	5.50	2.16	(.90)					
2.	Attentional deployment	4.90	2.36	.32**	(.93)				
3.	Expressive suppression	11.73	4.17	.25*	.35**	(.87)			
4.	Emotional exhaustion	11.42	6.67	-.06*	.21*	.32**	(.85)		
5.	Cynicism	9.37	6.70	-.04	.23*	.34**	.53**	(.80)	
6.	Self-efficacy	19.80	5.47	.24*	.16	-.18*	-.60	-.27*	(.79)

Note: * $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$

DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent specifying the different emotional strategies included in the term of deep acting improves our understanding of the effects of emotional labor on burnout. This exploratory study highlights the importance of precisely measuring each emotion regulation strategy included in the concept of deep acting. This methodological precision enables the assessment of these different processes with dissimilar effects on burnout. If re-evaluation is negatively related to burnout and acts as a protective emotion regulation strategy, attentional deployment is positively related to burnout and appears to be detrimental for employees. Moreover, this study provides further evidences of the positive association between suppression of emotions and burnout. However, our investigation was restricted to commercial executives, so one must be cautious in generalizing the present findings to other professions.

Received August 1, 2013

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OVEROVANIE CITLIVEJ MIERY POHLTENIA PRÁCOU NAVYHORENIE

M. Andela, D. Truchot, Y. Ponz

Súhrn: Zatiaľ čo povrchná činnosť negatívne súvisí s pocitom pohody zamestnancov, zaujatá činnosť len slabo, a nie veľmi všeobecne súvisí s pocitom pohody. Predpokladáme, že sporné výsledky možno vysvetliť príliš všeobecnou mierou zaujatej činnosti, ktorá spája niekoľko procesov. Navrhujeme preto merať kognitívnu zmenu (ERQ, Christophe, Antoine, Leroy, Delelis, 2009) a nasadenie pozornosti, obe emočno-regulačné stratégie sú zahrnuté v definícii zaujatej činnosti, a ich dôsledky na vyhorenie (Maslach Burnout Inventory). Podľa našich výsledkov majú kognitívna zmena a nasadenie pozornosti, merané v súčasnosti ako jednodimenziálny faktor, odlišný vplyv na vyhorenie u zamestnancov: kognitívna zmena sa spája s nízkou úrovňou vyhorenia, zatiaľ čo nasadenie pozornosti sa pozitívne spája s vyhorením.