

## **Emotional labour and the role IM.**

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### **Introduction:**

In recent times, the academy has become interested in exploring the issue of emotion within the context of employment. Many discipline bases now explore the issue of emotion, through such concepts as emotional intelligence, emotional dissonance, bounded emotionality, emotional development and emotional labour. These concepts have been tied to many existing discourses including feminism, Marxism, psychology, counseling, sociology, organisational behaviour, strategic management and HRM.

The concept of emotional labour (EL) is associated with the capture of emotion within the labour process and more specifically an extension of the psychological contract to include an expectation that employees impart an emotional content to their labour power. Yet, in terms of understanding how employees come accept that they are expected to render an emotional content, the literature is a little sparse but tends to concentrate on explanations related to supervision and communication.

This paper adds a further dimension to the theorized explanation of 'how' EL comes to be and it argues that a core mechanism which is largely unacknowledged is *internal marketing*. Internal marketing (IM) is already widely theorized in the discipline base of marketing but is largely being overlooked within the organisational theory and by extension the EL literature.

Although standard definitions of marketing concentrate on the external relationships an organisation has with customers or within a marketplace, a growing sub-discipline within marketing also examines internal relationships. This internal marketing concept borrows from organisational theory and particularly focuses on the relationship between organisational culture and service quality. The guiding rationale of the IM concept is that an organisation's ability to satisfy internal customers is an integral part of satisfying external customers (Barnes & Morris 2000).

At a deeper level, inherent within the development of the IM concept is the reconceptualisation of *organisations* as chains of exchanges transacted by internal suppliers and customers in a quasi market. Through this reconceptualisation, a three-part rhetoric of market and

service orientation and empowerment of employees is developed, each of which contribute to employees being more likely to be receptive to *buying into* the organisation's interests. Therefore, the paper concludes that IM can be theorized as playing a core role in attaining an EL content to the work through two mechanisms linked to this *buy in*: first, in reinforcing the behaviours, norms and value systems of organisational culture, second, through its impact on the psychological contract.

### **Internal Marketing**

The guiding rationale of IM is that an organisation's ability to satisfy internal customers is an integral part of satisfying external customers (Barnes & Morris 2000). Inherent within the IM paradigm is the reconceptualisation of organisations a chains of exchanges transacted by internal suppliers and customers. The IM concept has recently emerged within the field of marketing (George 1990; Piercy & Morgan 1991) and has resulted shifts within marketing - enlarging the ubiquitous *four P's* (product, price, place, and promotion) with another four P's (policies, procedures, protocol, and performance) (Thomas et al. 1991). Joseph (1996) now claims that because of this shift, 'no marketing plan can be considered complete unless it includes strategies for reaching and winning over its internal customers'.

Traditional approaches within the marketing discipline have tended to concentrate on attaining and retaining external customers (Grenler et al. 1994; Barnes & Morris 2000). It has tended to focus on satisfying these external customers as a means of stimulating customer loyalty in order to remain profitable (Barnes 1989; Heskett et al. 1995). But IM adds a new rationale to marketing - an organisation's internal relations and systems are as important as its external relations because the ability to satisfy internal customers is an integral part of satisfying external customers (Barnes & Morris 2000). Therefore, IM can be defined as selling the organisation to its employees (Gronroos 1985), in order to motivate employees 'for service-mindedness and customer-oriented behavior by an active, marketing-like approach, where marketing-like activities are used internally' (George & Gronroos 1991). Similarly George (1990) adds that IM is the process of ensuring that employees at all levels understand the organisation and its various activities in order to improve quality:

...the application of marketing, human resources management, and allied theories, techniques, and principles to motivate, mobilize, co-opt, and manage employees at all levels of the organization to continuously improve the way they serve external customers and each other (Joseph 1996).

Rafiq and Ahmed (1993) define IM through its three main practical outcomes for organisations and employees. First, organisations using an IM approach tend to have a higher than usual *market orientation*, second they tend to adopt a *service orientation* and third, they often demonstrate a higher than usual *empowerment of employees*. This three-part approach to conceptualizing IM is adopted in this paper.

#### *a) Market Orientation*

As mentioned above, IM tends to be associated with a high *market orientation* among organisations that adopt it. Yet unlike the externalised/consumer approaches inherent in the traditional approaches to marketing, the ‘market orientation’ implied in conjunction with the IM concept is focused both internally and externally. Underlying the internal market paradigm is the reconceptualisation of the ‘organisation’ as a quasi market (Brooks et al.1999). This reconceptualisation of the organisation reflects relational wave developments within the discipline of strategic management associated with the ‘value chain’ proposed by Porter (1985). The value chain divides the operations of an organisation into a series of interrelated activities that form a supply chain to produce a good or a service. Porter’s interpretation also differentiates between those activities that are directly involved in adding value to the product or service and those activities whose role is secondary because they only support the value adding activities (Brooks et al. 1999).

#### *b) Service orientation*

The second major practical outcomes associated with organisations utilising an IM approach is a higher than usual service orientation. Service orientation can be seen as being largely interlocking with market orientations as within a value chain approach, quasi-market conditions are constructed in which employees are encouraged to strive to meet the needs of internal and external customers alike (Brooks et al. 1999).

Implied in service orientations dependent upon IM is the expectation that internal customer will have more power to assert their sovereign prerogatives and rights as consumers than they would have as employees. Accordingly, in much of the IM literature, an equalizing of the power of customer and supplier is assumed to be linked in some way to an improvement in the interpersonal component of their relationship (Rafiq & Ahmed 1993; Quester & Kelly 1999). Joseph (1996) takes this concept further by explaining to safeguard against problems in the interpersonal relationship, employees should be schooled to stage optimum service encounters – dramaturgy:

Employees shape these moments of truth, not only by the tasks they perform, but also by the way they look, act, talk, and interact with the customer, with other customers, and with fellow workers. Employee behavior must therefore be carefully orchestrated and managed (Joseph 1996).

Joseph (1996) goes as far as to suggest that how employees are dressed, speak, what they say, their facial expression, and personality should all be scripted and that where these are naturally inconsistent with the organisation's intended image they should be concealed.

*c) The empowerment of employees*

The third definitive aspect of an organisation's adoption of IM is empowerment of employees. This is also interlinked with the previous two outcomes identified. Empowerment is linked to the service orientation in that there is an assumption that the best way to serve customers better is to free up employees to provide good service. It is linked to the market orientation by virtue of the fact that via a value chain led reconstitution of employees as internal customers there is an implication that they have a degree of control over exchanges within the organisation and this then provides them with sovereignty over the internal context of the organisation.

Empowerment of employees is associated with efforts by the organisation to focus the attention of employees upon customers in order to improve customer satisfaction via employee-customer interactions (Quester & Kelly 1999). The principal means identified in the literature through which organisations tend to try to achieve a refocusing of employees is associated with enhanced 'knowledge' – communication, training, education and information dissemination (Cahill 1995; Foreman & Money 1995; Rafiq & Ahmed 1993). Also associated with enhanced 'knowledge' is the assertion that organisations hoping to utilise an IM approach should spend more time and effort in human resource management activities, especially in the recruiting, hiring and retaining 'suitable' employees (Quester & Kelly 1999).

Thus, the literature relating to the 'empowerment of employees' in organisations utilising IM can be seen as operating at two levels. First and most obviously, employees are properly equipped, trained and permitted by the organisation to act in a semi-independent manner (Bak et al. 1994; Cahill 1995; Quester & Kelly 1999). This facet of the empowerment relates to the sovereignty they attain from the 'marketisation' and commodification of the activities of the firm via the value chain. This facet of empowerment also has strong links with employee development and training because it

is logically assumed that serve customers employees must be ‘resourced’ with the necessary skills and responsibilities (Harrington & Akehurst 2000).

Second, and at a much deeper level, empowerment of employees as something that is done to the collective group called employees by the organisation. It can be seen in terms of the HRM activities associated with *fit*. That is to say that organisations utilising an IM approach will endeavor to only recruit, retain, promote, develop, train and reward a certain group of employees who are *empowered* by their acceptance of both the market and service orientations central to an IM approach. Illustrations of this second theme relating to empowerment in the IM literature can be seen in the way selection devices used to isolate employees with the *right* disposition are advocated. Another illustration of this second approach to the ‘empowerment’ of employees is in the recognition that selection of employees should include a consideration of those most ‘open’ to the organisational IM rhetoric (Joseph 1996). For example, for Joseph (1996), recruitment is analogous to the process of segmentation and selection of target markets in traditional consumer oriented marketing. This analogy implies that the targeting and selection processes involved in hiring new employees will exclude those groups the organisation cannot *capture*.

This deeper view of empowerment equates with the organisational psychology literature describing cooption. Cooption is associated with the degree to which employees identify with the organisation and it is associated with ‘morale, pride, loyalty, customer orientation, and a sense of ownership among employees’ (Joseph 1996), or as Harris (1996) explains, it is about winning, the ‘hearts and minds’ of employees. For IM, co-option is the equivalent concept to ‘brand loyalty’ in consumer marketing (Joseph 1996). Cooption is also a powerful concept in explaining the link between IM and EL as it seems that without high levels of cooption, it is unlikely employees will buy into the dramaturgy of service encounters necessary to have constantly positive ‘moments of truth’.

### **Emotional Labour**

Within the literature, EL tends to be associated with the capture of an employee’s emotions via the labour process. More specifically, much of the literature exploring EL implies that many organisations now create the environment in which the psychological contract with employees is extended to include an expectation that employees impart an emotional content to the labour power that they render up in return for remuneration.

Ashforth and Humphery (1993) describe EL as ‘...the display of expected emotions...’ while Andrew and Feldman (1996) add that it involves the ‘effort, planning, and control needed to

express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions'. Thus, one of the central tenets of the EL research is that certain social, managerial and professional control systems exist which require certain groups of workers to create and maintain 'acceptable' public emotional displays for the ends of the organisation (Hochschild 1983). What is deemed 'acceptable' in terms of these required emotional displays is circumscribed and dictated by normative hegemonic social, professional, educational and managerial forces. Further, that the reason for these required emotional displays is to 'sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (Hochschild 1983, 7).

Andrew and Feldman (1996) further argue that one of the key aspects to define EL is that it has involved the shift from individuals expressing of emotion for their own personal ends to emotion being treated as a 'marketplace commodity'. Along this line of thinking, many researchers discussing the role of emotion in the workplace characterise the requirement in the workplace to render certain emotional displays in interpersonal relationships as exploitative (Lively 2000). This market place commodification of emotion relies upon standardised 'display rules' social rules about what is appropriate for certain occupational groups. For example, receptionists and flight attendants are expected to be friendly and cheerful, funeral directors are supposed to appear somber and reserved (Ashforth & Humphrey 1993), nurses are meant to be caring to patients while remaining subservient to consultants and debt collectors and bouncers are supposed to be intimidating (Sutton & Rafaeli 1988; Sutton 1991; Andrew & Feldman 1996).

The problem with EL (and the literature surrounding this concept) is the supposition that organisations have strong levels of control over the (emotional) behaviour of employees. Such a supposition belies the fact that the effort involved in adopting 'appropriate' emotions, in matching display rules or in accepting emotional dissonance takes an effort for employees. An effort of sufficient magnitude that probably renders customer satisfaction and organisational efficiency, productivity and profitability as insufficient incentives in, and of, themselves. How then do organisations 'convince' employees to accept that EL is part of their psychological contracts? The answer can perhaps be theorized in the effect the concept of IM will have upon employee's perceptions of the psychological contract they have with the organisation and the organisation's culture.

### **Explaining Emotional Labour through Internal Marketing**

The prime functionalist link between the concepts of EL and IM can be demonstrated through reference to organisations' tactical and strategic goals. Many organisations have material goals that

are best able to be achieved through customer perceptions that the organisations' employees are customer and service oriented. Often, organisations have attempted to build such perceptions by channeling employees' behaviour through the use of one of two obtrusive control mechanisms – direct or bureaucratic control (Perrow 1986). These being manifest in close supervision for direct control and rules or scripting the interaction between employees and customers for bureaucratic control. Traditionally these two obtrusive control systems have been augmented by personnel or HRM activities employee behaviour can be obtrusively controlled because of the types of employees that are selected and developed to be put into the 'front lines'. Thus, an organisation's selection and then recruitment, reward, remuneration, training, development, supervision and punishment policies and procedures have a bearing in encouraging the 'correct' behaviours.

However, many organisations increasingly seem to be attempting to control the behaviour of employees at a less obtrusive and more concertive/normative level (Perrow 1986). This approach to management has engendered two changes in managerial practice – first a move away from Tayloristic divisions between conception and execution by devolving limited powers to non-managerial employees, and second a reduction in emphasis (but probably not an eradication) of close supervision and bureaucratic rules. This devolution and change in emphasis is evidenced in the adoption of practices such as participative management, self-managing teams, quality circles, TQM, semi-autonomous work groups, 360 degree appraisal.

As these normative approaches to controlling employees can be separated into two categories – group and individual. Group approaches to normative control are most commonly identified in the literature. These approaches shift the emphasis on interpersonal control through authoritarian and legitimate managerial power bases to intra-group control through social and referent power bases via collegial self-policing. In group approaches to normative control, individuals are likely to adopt their group norms and values because of the threat to the basic need for affiliation that rejecting these norms and values would probably herald. However, this phenomenon is not new; human relations theorists have highlighted the power of the group in controlling individuals for decades. What is newer is the heightened mechanism for controlling the behaviours of individuals when they operate without the direct normative influence of a group. It is the contention of this paper that IM is the mechanism for reforming the control structures in organisations to allow the normative capture of individual behaviour.

### *Emotional Labour and Market Orientation*

As previously highlighted, inherent within the IM concept is the conceptualisation of the organisation as a value chain made up of discrete internal customers and quasi market conditions. In taking such an approach, the place of employees in an organisation is also reconceptualised and psychological contracts reconstituted. Rather than being a passive and interchangeable part of the organisation, employees are encouraged to view themselves as internal purveyors and customers of intra-organisational products. They are further encouraged to see their own 'downstream' colleagues as internal customers as well.

This shift in philosophy of what it means to be an employee has a number of effects that magnify the potential for both normative control and EL to be expected and to be rendered. In particular, employees gain a sense of 'ownership' over their tasks or services via dualism of the accountability they have to their own downstream internal customers and because of the added power they have with their in relations with their internal suppliers. This ownership increases the level of responsibility and employee is likely to feel for their work and will also have the effect of increasing the emotional connection an employee will feel with the products and services of the organisation. Thus, IM might be expected to result in emotional connection with the tasks, products and services of an organisation which in IM parlance is focused on satisfying internal customers in order to ultimately satisfy external customers (Barnes & Morris 2000).

### *Service orientation*

Emotional labour emanates from the heightened service orientation associated with IM result from the extension of the internal customer philosophy. If employees are schooled to think of themselves as active instead of passive in the provision of service, they are likely to be more motivated to care about the interpersonal outcomes involved in service encounters - their 'moments of truth' are likely to be emotionally 'felt' rather than superficially encountered. Thus, while Joseph (1996) offers the concept of standardised staging during service encounters - dramaturgy – as a feature of IM, she is approaching the matter from a bureaucratic control frame of mind and is perhaps missing a powerful point. If a normative orientation to control is adopted, an employee might be encouraged to 'buy into' the value systems of the organisation and these encounters need not be staged because employees may enter into 'appropriate' interpersonal behaviours naturally.



### *The empowerment of employees*

The third definitive aspect associated with organisations adopting IM is the empowerment of employees. As identified previously, the literature relating to the empowerment of employees can be seen as operating at two levels. First, empowered employees can be seen as those equipped, trained and permitted by the organisation to act in a semi-independent manner (Gummeson 1991; Cahill 1995; Varey 1995; Quester & Kelly 1999). This dimension of empowerment can be seen as intimately linked to an emotional content in the labour process because in removing the traditional forms of obtrusive control associated with Taylorist and bureaucratic organisations, there is an increased degree of self-reliance expected of employees. Therefore, there is more scope and expectation that empowered employees invest their 'whole self' in their task rather than some managerially circumscribed superficial self. Second, as identified above, the empowerment of the collective group of people called employees is associated with HRM 'fit'. In this approach, the EL content is accessed by organisations only recruiting and developing those employees who are 'empowered' because of their propensity to accept the organisation's IM approach (or in other words, buy into the organisation's value systems). In this situation, only those employees open to cooption because they have the 'right' disposition will prosper within the organisation.

As cooption of this kind is ultimately measured by the degree of identification the employee demonstrates towards, and the general pride and loyalty the employee has in the organisation and its brands, products and services, a core part of any assessment as to the disposition of employees will be the degree of EL they voluntarily render when required.

### **Conclusion**

This paper theorizes an explanation of 'how' EL comes to be rendered up and it argues that one of the core mechanisms involved is IM. The central philosophy of IM is that an organisation's ability to satisfy internal customers is an integral part of satisfying external customers (Barnes & Morris 2000). But in operationalising this concept IM reconceptualises the 'organisation' as a chain of exchanges, activities and actions transacted by internal suppliers and customers in a quasi market with market and service orientation and empowerment of employees as key tenets.

The paper concludes that these tenets underpinning the IM concept may act to influence the redesign of the traditional transactional psychological contract that has developed through the managerial world's preoccupation with obtrusive control mechanisms. The 'new' psychological contract may contribute to employees being more receptive to 'buying into' the organisation's

interests by adopting beliefs, norms, values, attitudes and behaviours that are sympathetic to the interests of the organisation and often these require the rendering of emotional labour.

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