

Examining the Role of Emotional Labor in Mediating the Relationship Between Calling and its Outcomes

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Work as calling research has clearly established the benefits of having a calling, such as, work meaningfulness and job satisfaction, and is less forthcoming in identifying the affective linkages between calling and its outcomes. We propose that because individuals with high calling find their work purposeful and significant, they are more likely to actively shape their emotions and engage in emotional regulation. This study examines the role of emotional labor in mediating the relationship between calling and its two outcomes – emotional exhaustion and job performance. The data for the study included a sample of 195 teachers from 42 daycare centers. Findings suggest that having a high calling is associated with lower emotional exhaustion and is associated with higher job performance. Also, calling is significantly associated with emotional labor, and in particular, is positively related to deep acting and negatively related to surface acting. Further, results show that both surface acting and deep acting mediate the relationship between calling and its outcomes.

Keywords: calling, emotional labor, surface acting, deep acting, emotional exhaustion, job performance

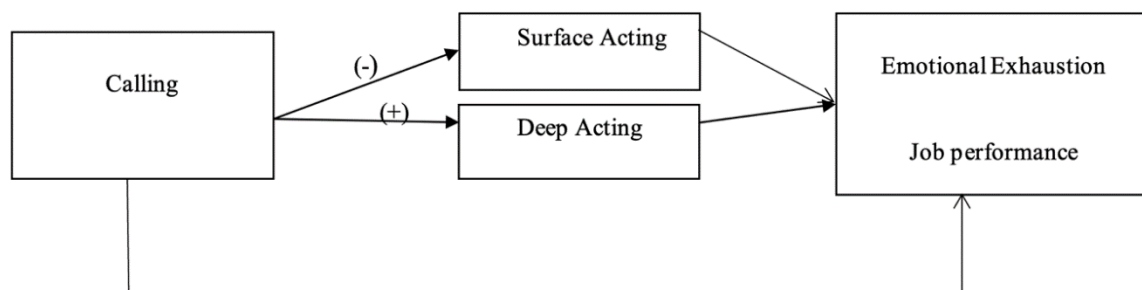
INTRODUCTION

Work as calling is defined as a belief that one's career is a pivotal element in a larger purpose and meaning in life, contributing to the betterment of others or the advancement of the greater good in some way (Duffy and Dik, 2013). Bellah and colleagues' (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton, 1985) work – *Habits of the Heart* was the first to juxtapose calling with concepts such as jobs and careers, thus sparking a burgeoning interest in the study of work as calling by organizational psychology scholars. Over the ensuing period of thirty-five odd years, numerous studies have refined their attempt, including Duffy, Dik, Douglass, England, and Velez (2018), that offers a theoretical model of work as calling (for other comprehensive reviews, refer to Dik and Duffy, 2009; Duffy and Dik, 2013; and Thompson and Bunderson, 2019). Bellah, et al.'s (1985) seminal construal of "work as a calling" serves as a bedrock for much of the literature on calling orientation or meaningful work, and consists of three distinct workplace orientations: job, career, and calling. Job orientation pertains to "making money and making a living" and focuses on securing monetary gains or ensuring economic security. Career orientation refers to one's advancement within an occupation, and this broad measure of success can confer status and prestige, whereby work becomes a source of self-esteem. Whereas calling orientation views work as an activity that is not confined

to measurable outputs or profit gains but is profound in terms of both morals and character is linked to a higher purpose, and is beyond self and in the service of a larger community.

Studies on work as calling have identified several positive outcomes. Specific findings suggest that having a calling orientation is linked to higher levels of job performance, job satisfaction, and well-being (Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997); and viewing one’s career as a calling is positively associated with work meaningfulness and job satisfaction, career maturity, career commitment, life satisfaction, and life meaningfulness (Duffy et al., 2012; Duffy and Dik, 2013). Researchers have focused on the cognitive aspects of calling, such as how individuals with a high calling think and ascribe meaning to their work or how occupational identification mediates the relationship between calling and work meaningfulness (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009), but have paid little attention towards unearthing the affective basis of calling and its outcomes. In our study, we contend that individuals with a high calling can actively shape their emotions and engage in emotional regulation. Findings suggest that the process of emotional regulation, often in the form of emotional labor, leads to increased organizational effectiveness (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1989; Fineman, 1993); increased service performance (Diefendorff and Gosserand, 2003; Totterdell and Holman, 2003); and higher levels of job satisfaction (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). In this study, we aim to explore the affective side of calling by examining the role of emotional labor in mediating the positive relationship between calling and its outcomes, such as, emotional exhaustion and job performance. Figure 1 shows the research model.

**FIGURE 1
RESEARCH MODEL**



THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Outcomes of Calling

Empirical findings generally support the positive effects of calling on an individual’s work life. For instance, calling respondents scored highest on the following variables: greater life satisfaction and job satisfaction with better health (Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997). Further, compared with respondents who viewed their work as a job, calling respondents missed significantly fewer work days. Bunderson and Thompsons’ (2009) research also confirms these positive, meaning-related outcomes of calling. They find that zookeepers with a greater sense of calling were likelier to feel that their work was both meaningful and important. However, the authors also note that the consequences of having a calling are not always positive, and may have a cost. For instance, zookeepers with a high sense of calling were more likely to sacrifice money, time, and physical comfort or well-being for their work, and experienced heightened expectations.

Calling and Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion occurs when an individual experiences mental fatigue and a sense of enervation, and findings suggest that it is strongly linked to job burnout (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Employees experience emotional depletion when forced to maintain composure and pleasant demeanor in unpleasant or stressful situations, and emotional exhaustion is strongly related to absenteeism, turnover, social loafing, and performance issues (Wilk and Moynihan, 2005). However, negative job outcomes such as depression

and anxiety are more prevalent in individuals who fail to find meaning and significance in their work (Steger et al., 2006). Having a sense of meaningful purpose in what one does professionally is linked to work satisfaction and happiness, and those individuals who have greater calling are more likely to make sacrifices, such as, working for less money, working overtime without expecting any extra monetary gains, and forgoing physical comforts at work (Bunderson and Thompson, 2009). Findings also indicate that individuals who perceive their work to be “not just work” but something that is meaningful and transformational or one that contributes in the overall betterment of the society, experience higher levels of satisfaction and happiness, and lower levels of stress and emotional exhaustion (Treadgold, 1999; Steger et al., 2006).

Researchers have drawn on the job demands-resources model to explain the link between calling and emotional exhaustion (Rawat and Nadavulakere, 2015). The job demands-resources model proposes that job demands are typically evaluated as challenge stressors and are associated with less strain than demands evaluated as hindrance stressors (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Therefore, individuals who perceive their work to be a calling will evaluate high job demands as challenging rather than hindrance stressors. Further, individuals with greater calling are more likely to employ a problem-focused rather than an avoidance-focused coping style, which will help them resolve stressful situations. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Calling will be negatively associated with emotional exhaustion.

Calling and Job Performance

Job performance is the “aggregated value to an organization of the set of behaviors that an employee contributes both directly and indirectly to organizational goals” (Campbell, 1990). Research has linked calling and job performance, and findings suggest that having a calling increases work performance (Kim et al., 2018), boosts employability (Lysova et al., 2018), determines career success (Chen et al., 2018), and fosters professional competence (Guo et al. 2014).

Bunderson and Thompson (2009) propose that having a calling makes zookeepers thrive in a profession that offers few opportunities for advancement. The job of caring for animals is regarded as dirty, low-paying, and of limited status. The experience of calling allows zookeepers to view their work as meaningful, impactful, and significant. Zookeepers framed their sense of calling as a moral duty towards society, animals, and the planet, and discharging the obligation entailed making personal sacrifices in terms of monetary benefits, time, and comforts. In other words, individuals with a high calling consider their work to be a pursuit of personal passion and commitment. They are eager to engage in more contextual performance (Rawat and Nadavulakere 2015), and are willing to expend their nonwork time without pay in fulfilling the job requirements (Clinton et al., 2017). Hence, we propose:

Hypothesis 2: Calling will be positively associated with job performance.

Emotional Labor

Emotional labor is a specific stream of research that examines emotion regulation as part of the job role (Fisher and Ashkanasy, 2000). Managing emotions for a wage has been termed as emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983; Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Morris and Feldman, 1996; Grandey, 2000). Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labor as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display.” She argued that people often suppress feelings and display socially accepted emotions, and regulation of this kind aimed at complying with societal norms is known as ‘emotion work.’ When the job roles or organizational display rules require the employees to exhibit particular emotions and suppress others, emotion regulation is done for a wage. She argued that “service workers and customers share expectations about the nature of emotions that should be displayed during the service encounter.” These expectations shaped by societal and organizational norms were termed as ‘display rules’ by Ekman (cf Morris and Feldman, 1996). To adhere to these display standards, service workers must act ‘friendly’ and mask anger and disgust, even when the client/customer behavior is not ‘friendly.’

Hochschild (1983) proposes that emotions can be managed through two basic methods: surface acting and deep acting. First, surface acting occurs by simulating emotions that are not actually experienced. In this type of acting, there is incongruence between experienced and expressed emotion (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). Second, deep acting involves actively inducing, suppressing, and shaping emotions. Hochschild (1983) gives an example of how flight attendants successfully produced and suppressed appropriate emotions. She argues that this change might be due to training sessions aimed at teaching flight attendants to imagine the “cabin as their living room, passengers as their guests, and to treat difficult passengers as children who need attention.” Hochschild (1983) emphasized that emotional labor primarily leads to negative employee outcomes, such as stress and poor psychological well-being. She argued that a strong and positive relation between emotional labor and job stress and psychological distress might exist. The emotional display rules require employees to suppress negative emotions and the lack of a healthy expressive outlet results in emotional exhaustion and burnout. She ascribed this to phenomena known as ‘emotional dissonance.’ A service provider experiences emotional dissonance when he/she expresses organizationally desired emotions that do not represent his/her true feelings, thus creating a state of incongruence and in turn resulting in conflict and tension.

Using emotion regulation theory, Grandey (2000) compares surface and deep acting to response and antecedent focused emotional labor, respectively. Grandey (2000) defines emotional labor as “the process of regulating feelings and expression of emotions to achieve organizational goals.” According to the general model of emotion regulation, the situation provides a cue to the individual, and the individual’s emotional response tendency informs that individual and others in the social environment. Emotion regulation can occur at two points in this process – antecedent-focused and response-focused. Grandey (2000) argues that these two emotion regulation processes correspond to the emotional labor concept of deep acting and surface acting. She proposes that in antecedent-focused emotion regulation, “an individual can regulate the precursors of emotion such as the situation or the appraisal.” In emotional labor terms this means employing strategies like “calling to mind events that bring about the emotions needed in a certain situation or changing the attentional focus of personal thoughts about the situation.” In to response-focused emotion regulation, the individual modifies the physiological or observable signs of emotions. In emotional labor terms, the individual will change “his or her emotional expression instead of attempting to alter actual feelings” (Grandey, 2000).

To summarize, the surface and deep acting constructs are conceptually different and represent different motives. When individuals engage in deep acting, they try to modify their emotions to match the required displays. The intent, then, is to seem authentic to the audience; thus, deep acting has been called “faking in good faith” (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987: 32). In surface acting, employees modify their displays without altering inner emotions. This leads to emotional dissonance, or the “tension felt when expressions and feelings diverge” (Hochschild, 1983). Thus, surface acting seems to have negative effects on employee well-being. Employees perform deep acting to appear more authentic leading to better performance. Surface acting, on the other hand, will be more strongly related to employee well-being than deep acting. The next section examines the relationship between calling and emotional labor.

Calling and Emotional Labor

Individuals with a high sense of calling enjoy high life and job satisfaction and have low absenteeism (Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997). Such individuals are more mature about their career development process, can clearly articulate their interests and abilities, and are firm about their career choices (Duffy and Sedlacek, 2007). Individuals with a high calling perceive their work as intrinsically meaningful (Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997). We argue that these individuals would be more likely to expend increased effort in actively inducing and shaping their emotions, thereby engaging in more deep acting and less surface acting. In deep acting, individuals would try to alter their inner feelings to match their emotional displays. In surface acting, feelings are changed from the “outside in,” whereas feelings are changed from the “inside out” in deep acting (Hochschild, 1983). Individuals with a strong calling are less likely to engage in surface acting, as they would not want to “mask” their expressions of emotions but rather make an effort to genuinely alter them. The passion and meaningfulness that individuals with a high calling derive from their work will

prompt them to engage in deeper forms of emotional regulation, such as deep acting. Through deep acting, such individuals will attempt to express genuine emotions rather than feigned emotions. Thus, we hypothesize that:

***Hypothesis 3a:** Calling will be negatively associated with surface acting.*

***Hypothesis 3b:** Calling will be positively associated with deep acting.*

Surface Acting and Deep Acting as Mediating Mechanisms

Through engaging in more deep acting rather than surface acting, individuals with a high calling will be more emotionally sensitive and emotionally involved in their interpersonal interactions at work. Emotional exhaustion is a state of plain enervation and mental fatigue (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Individuals attempt to minimize the gap between inner and expressed emotions in deep acting. However, researchers contend that modifying internal states in deep acting is effortful and may lead to reduced cognitive resources and emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2003). Many studies have found deep acting to have a weak effect or be unrelated to emotional exhaustion (Bono and Vey, 2005; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003; Totterdell and Holman, 2003). In surface acting, there is a gap between individuals' inner emotions and the expressed emotions that harm employees' physical and psychological well-being (Hochschild, 1983). Several studies find a positive association between surface acting and emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003; Martinez-Inigo, Totterdell, Alcover, and Holman, 2007). Therefore, we hypothesize that,

***Hypothesis 4:** Surface acting will mediate the relationship between calling and emotional exhaustion.*

Both forms of emotional labor – deep acting and surface acting – are effortful and represent different intentions (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2003). In deep acting, individuals modify their feelings to seem authentic. A daycare teacher, for example, may try to understand a child's problem by imagining the problem from the child's perspective and being sensitive to the child's needs. Individuals with a low calling are much less attached to their work and would not expend effort to engage in high levels of deep acting. They would most likely resort to surface acting to modify their affective displays without changing their inner feelings (Grandey, 2003). In surface acting, individuals usually experience emotional dissonance due to a discrepancy between their inner feelings and outer expressions. Individuals engage in surface acting to conform to the display rules. A daycare teacher, for example, would respond to an angry and irritable child by keeping a straight face and hide her own irritability. Surface acting, is therefore also known as "faking in bad faith" (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987: 32).

Hochschild proposed that "deep acting has always had an edge over simple pretending in its power to convince" (1983: 33). In deep acting, individuals change their internal state and, thereby, have more authentic expressions. In contrast, in surface acting the individual only manages to display inauthentic expressions (Grandey, 2003). Researchers find that deep acting is related to higher performance ratings, while surface acting is negatively related to performance (Grandey, 2003). For example, in their study on customer service interactions, Groth et al. (2009) find a positive relationship between deep acting and key service quality dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness and assurance. Individuals with a high calling perceive their work as more rewarding and are likely to engage in less surface and more deep acting. Therefore, we hypothesize that both forms of emotional labor – surface acting and deep acting – will mediate the relationship between calling and job performance.

***Hypothesis 5a:** Surface acting will mediate the relationship between calling and job performance.*

***Hypothesis 5b:** Deep acting will mediate the relationship between calling and job performance.*

METHOD

Participants and Procedures

The data for our research consisted of a sample of 195 teachers from 42 daycare centers in the Midwestern area of the United States. The daycare centers in our sample were sourced from a state-generated list of licensed daycare centers. The data was collected in two phases. In the first phase, teachers and aides working in classrooms with 3- and 4-year-old children were administered a survey. The field researchers administered the surveys and collected back on the same day. In the second phase, approximately after 3 months, trained observers rated the teachers on their interaction with children using the Emotional Availability Scales (Biringen, Robinson, and Emde, 1998).

One hundred and thirty-six teachers and 67 aides completed the survey with an overall response rate of 91%. After excluding the missing values from the survey, the final sample had 195 teachers, and 95% of the respondents were female. The average age of the respondents was 38 years (s.d.=13.8), and 81% identified their racial background as White. All the survey respondents were high school graduates or higher.

Measures

Calling

The calling scale was adapted from the scale developed by Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz (1997). Calling orientation describes those individuals who work for the meaningful fulfillment of doing so, and also desire that their work is socially valuable and significant (Wrzesniewski, et. al., 1997). Five items were answered on the Likert scale: 1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*. Examples are “I enjoy talking about my work to others”; and “My work is one of the most important things in my life” (Cronbach’s alpha = .72).

Surface Acting and Deep Acting

Items measuring surface acting and deep acting came from the emotional labor scale developed by Brotheridge and Lee (2003). The surface-acting scale consisted of three items, and the deep-acting scale consisted of three items. Individuals responded to each item on a 5-point Likert scale assessing frequency (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*). A sample surface acting item was, “Pretend to have emotions that I don’t really have,” and a sample deep acting item was, “Really try to feel the emotions I have to show as part of my job.” The internal consistency reliabilities for these scales were .71 for surface acting and .80 for deep acting.

Emotional Exhaustion

To measure emotional exhaustion, five items were adapted from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Some items included were: “How often do you feel emotionally drained from your work?”; and “How often do you feel that working with children all day is really a strain for you?” (Cronbach’s alpha = .87). Respondents were asked to rate on the following frequency scale: 1 = “never”; 6 = “everyday”.

Job Performance

Job performance was assessed using the Emotional Availability (EA) Scales developed by Biringen, Robinson, and Emde (1998). Emotional availability refers to an individual’s emotional responsiveness and ‘attunement’ to another’s needs and goals (Emde, 1980). The EA Scales describe and assess four dimensions addressing the emotional availability of the teacher about the children—sensitivity, structuring, nonintrusiveness, and nonhostility. Teacher sensitivity refers to a teacher’s awareness of and responsiveness to the children, creativity during play, quality of conflict negotiations, and the affective quality of the teacher–child interactions. Teacher structuring refers to the ability of the teacher to structure or scaffold interaction in a way that engages the children in sustained interactions. Teacher nonintrusiveness refers to the teacher’s ability to be available without intrusions on the children’s autonomy. Teacher nonhostility

refers to ways of talking to or behaving with children that are not abrasive, impatient, or antagonistic (Easterbrooks and Biringen, 2000). Trained observers assessed teacher interaction with children in each classroom. For every teacher, four different teacher-child interactions were assessed to rate the teachers. The average scores of the four EA scales were computed for every teacher. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .82.

Control Variables

Status was based on the job title of the respondent. Those who held the teacher job received a score of one and those who held the assistant/aide received a score of zero. Of the 195 in the final sample, 68% (132) were teachers and 32% (63) were assistants/aides. Tenure was assessed by the years the employees had worked in the child care center. The average tenure was 6.2 years.

RESULTS

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for each of the variables in the study are presented in Table 1. Previous studies have found a low to moderate correlation between the subscales of surface acting and deep-acting (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003; Grandey, 2003). In our study, we found a significant positive correlation between surface acting and deep acting, $r = .35, p < .01$. We found a significant positive correlation between calling and deep acting, $r = .17, p < .05$. We also found a significant negative correlation between calling and surface acting, $r = -.28, p < .01$.

**TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, ICC AND CORRELATIONS**

Variables (n=195)	Mean	s.d.	ICC(1)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Status (Aide=0; Teacher=1)	0.62	0.49	0.27	1					
2 Tenure (years)	6.11	5.89	0.4	0.08	1				
3 Calling	3.6	0.75	0.26	-0.01	0.01	1			
4 Surface Acting	2.5	0.69	0.26	0.01	-0.01	-.28**	1		
5 Deep Acting	3.12	0.93	0.24	0.04	.12*	.17*	.35**	1	
6 Emotional Exhaustion	2.25	1.08	0.35	0.06	-0.08	-.36**	.36**	0.08	1
7 Job performance	5.1	0.76	0.59	.18*	.16*	.17*	-0.12*	0.16*	-0.01

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

The sample consists of a hierarchical data structure with two levels of random variation: variation among teachers and aides *within centers (level 1)* and *among centers (level 2)*. We estimated the random coefficient models using hierarchical linear modeling (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, and Congdon, 2000). We employed a set of regression equations as suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986) to test for mediation. First, we tested regression path coefficients for independent links between study variables. Table 2 presents these results. Next, we tested a regression equation to determine the link between calling and the dependent variables once surface-acting (or deep-acting) were entered into the equation. A full or partial mediation of surface acting (or deep acting) is established if the significance between calling and the dependent variable(s) is reduced or nulled. Table 3 presents these results. Finally, we ran the Sobel test to determine the significance of the mediated effect of surface acting and deep acting (Sobel 1982; Krull and Mackinnon, 1999). Table 4 presents these results.

TABLE 2
RESULTS OF HLM ANALYSES FOR THE OUTCOMES OF CALLING

	Emotional Exhaustion		Job Performance	
	Model 1a	Model 1b	Model 2a	Model 2b
Intercept	2.37**	2.39**	5.06**	5.07**
Status (Teacher=0; Aide=1)	0.14	0.07	0.11	0.17
Tenure (years)	-0.01	-0.01	0.01	0.01
Calling	-.52**	-.31**	.26*	0.13
Surface Acting		.58**		-.20*
Deep acting		-0.03		.26*
Deviance Statistic	558.46	525.13	290.64	266.39
Number of estimated parameters	11	22	11	22
Chi square test		33.33**		24.25*

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

Table 2 summarizes the results of HLM analyses testing Hypotheses 1 and 2. All the “a” models include the control variables and the independent variable (calling); and the “b” models add the mediators. Hypothesis 1 states that calling will be negatively associated with emotional exhaustion. As can be seen in Models 1a and 1b, call has a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion ($p < .01$), thereby supporting hypothesis 1. Models 2a and 2b show that calling has a positive relationship with job performance ($p < .01$), thereby supporting hypothesis 2.

Table 3 summarizes the results of HLM analyses testing Hypotheses 3a and 3b. Hypothesis 3a asserts that calling will be negatively associated with surface acting. As shown in Model 3, calling has a negative relationship with surface acting ($p < .01$). Hypothesis 3b states that calling will be positively associated with deep acting. Results show that calling positively correlated with deep acting (Model 4, $p < .05$). Thus, both Hypotheses 3a and 3b were fully supported.

To test for the mediation effect in Hypotheses 4a, we entered calling, surface acting, and deep acting into the regression analysis for emotional exhaustion. We also entered deep acting to see if it had any mediational effect. According to the steps suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986), the mediation effect can be established if both calling and emotional exhaustion have a significant relation with surface acting and if the relation between calling and emotional exhaustion is significantly lower (partial mediation) or no longer significant (full mediation) when surface acting is entered into the equation. As seen in Model 3b (in Table 2), there was a partial mediation effect for surface acting, $p < .01$ ($z = -3.03$, $p < .01$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 4.

TABLE 3
RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSES FOR SURFACE-ACTING AND DEEP ACTING

	Surface Acting	Deep Acting
	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	2.53**	3.14**
Status (Aide=0; Teacher=1)	0.02	0.17
Tenure (years)	0.01	0.02
Calling	-0.28**	0.19*
Deviance Statistic	403.16	500.14
Number of estimated parameters	11	11

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

TABLE 4
RESULTS OF TESTS OF INDIRECT EFFECTS AND TOTAL EFFECTS

Variables	Indirect Effect	Total Effects	z
Calling --> Surface Acting --> Emotional Exhaustion	-0.16	-0.47	-3.03**
Calling --> Surface Acting --> Job Performance	0.06	0.19	2.19*
Calling --> Deep Acting --> Job Performance	0.05	0.18	2.50*

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

To test for mediation effects in Hypotheses 5a and 5b, we entered calling, surface acting, and deep acting into the regression analysis for job performance. Results indicate that when surface acting (and deep acting) were entered into the equation, calling was less statistically significant, and there was a full mediation effect for both surface acting ($p < .05$) and deep acting ($p < .05$; see Model 5b, Table 2), thereby supporting both Hypotheses 5a and 5b. The Sobel test results confirm the significance of the mediated effects of surface acting ($z = 2.19$, $p < .05$) and deep acting ($z = 2.50$, $p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

The main goal of this study is to examine whether emotional labor mediates the relationship between calling and its outcomes. In particular, the study examines three sets of relationships: Firstly, calling and its association with emotional exhaustion and job performance. Secondly, calling and its relationship with emotional labor in terms of surface acting and deep acting. Finally, the mediating role of emotional labor in the relationship between calling and its outcomes. Our findings indicate that stronger calling was associated with less emotional exhaustion. This is consistent with the few initial findings on calling and its relationship to emotional exhaustion (Rawat and Nadavulakere, 2015).

Further, our study results also prove a positive association between calling and job performance. In their recent review on the calling literature, Thompson and Bunderson (2019) lament that very few studies have examined the relationship between calling and performance and all of the studies have almost exclusively relied on self-reported performance measures. In our study, job performance was measured by trained external assessors. We find that workers with a high calling have greater job performance. This is in line with previous literature on calling, which suggests that individuals with a high calling treat their work as a “duty towards society” and are more willing to make sacrifices, thereby ensuring high performance (Kim et al., 2018; Bunderson and Thompson, 2009).

The constructs of surface and deep acting represent different motives. When engaging in deep acting, an actor attempts to modify feelings to match the required displays. The intent, then, is to seem authentic to the audience; thus, deep acting has been called “faking in good faith” (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987: 32). In surface acting, employees modify their displays without shaping inner feelings. Doing this entails experiencing emotional dissonance, or tension when expressions and feelings diverge (Hochschild, 1983). Individuals with a high calling perceive their work as intrinsically meaningful (Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997). These individuals would be more likely to expend increased effort in actively inducing and shaping their emotions, thereby engaging in more deep acting. In deep acting, individuals would make an effort to alter their inner feelings to match their emotional displays. In surface acting, feelings are changed from the “outside in,” whereas feelings are changed from the “inside out” in deep acting (Hochschild, 1983). The study results show that individuals with a strong calling are likely to engage in more deep acting and less surface acting. Extant research on emotional labor suggests that deep acting is positively linked to performance (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987; Grandey, 2000), and surface acting is negatively related to job satisfaction (Abraham, 1998; Morris and Feldman, 1997). Similarly, calling literature proposes that individuals with a high sense of calling are likely to perceive their work as meaningful and enjoy higher levels of job satisfaction (Wrzesniewski, et al., 1997). However, previous studies have ignored the link between calling and emotional labor in terms of deep acting and surface acting. Our study finds that individuals with a high calling engage in more deep acting and less surface acting. We contend that individuals with a high calling are more emotionally sensitive and emotionally involved in their work, and therefore engage in more deep acting. Conversely, we argue that individuals with a low calling engage in more surface acting, as they have less emotional resources to access and manage their emotions.

Further, our results show that surface acting mediated the relationship between calling and emotional exhaustion. In surface acting, there is a gap between the worker’s inner and expressed emotions, resulting in greater emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003). We also found support for surface and deep acting as fully mediating the relationship between calling and job performance. This finding suggests that individuals with a high calling will engage in less surface acting, promoting higher ratings of job performance. In surface acting the individual only manages to display inauthentic expressions (Grandey, 2003). Therefore, displaying less inauthentic expressions leads to low job performance. As Hochschild proposed, “deep acting has always had an edge over simple pretending in its power to convince” (1983: 33). In deep acting, individuals change their internal state and thereby have more authentic expressions. Researchers find that deep acting is related to higher performance ratings (Grandey, 2003). Thus, our study findings contribute to the literature on calling by finding evidence that individuals with a high calling engage in greater deep acting, leading to higher job performance.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are a few limitations of our study. The study’s results might suffer from common method variance as the variables were sourced from a single dataset. Another limitation of the study is the generalizability of the findings. Our sample comprises of daycare providers, specifically, preschool teachers and teacher aides. Future researchers should consider testing the mediating and moderating factors between calling and its outcomes across other professions and extending the findings beyond the daycare setting. Further, we find that while surface acting mediates the relationship between calling and emotional exhaustion, deep acting mediates the relationship between calling and job performance. It will be interesting to replicate some of these findings in an experimental setting by manipulating contextual features and then observing the effects on job performance.

Practical Implications

Our findings have important practical implications. The pursuit of calling at work has major positive benefits to individual and organizational well-being. Our findings suggest that individuals with high calling experience lower levels of emotional exhaustion and display increased job performance. Identifying the existence of having a calling and its impact on various job outcomes such as performance, engagement, satisfaction, absenteeism, stress, turnover intentions, etc. can assist in designing a better fit between

employee expectations and workplace requirements. Having a calling can help employees connect their work responsibilities and career aspirations with larger organizational goals, providing them with a sense of overarching purpose. Organizations can benefit by crafting jobs that have potential calling orientation or by incorporating elements that underscore the nature of calling: purpose, significance, and meaningfulness.

CONCLUSION

Our study makes several important contributions to the extant literature on work as calling. It extends the previous literature on calling by highlighting the benefits of having a high calling: less emotional exhaustion and greater job performance. Another contribution of this study is to integrate the constructs of calling and emotional labor to better understand the causal mechanisms of why calling leads to positive outcomes. Workers with a strong calling engage in more deep acting and less surface acting. Further, our findings suggest that surface acting is important in influencing the relationship between calling and outcomes such as emotional exhaustion and job performance. Thus, the negative effects of surface acting are more pronounced in impacting emotional exhaustion. On the other hand, we find that deep acting mediates the relationship between calling and job performance. This implies that deep acting or displaying more authentic expressions play an important role in influencing a worker's job performance.

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