


Service Priority Climate and Service Performance Among Hospitality Employees: The Role of Emotional Labor and Workload Pressure

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Abstract

Frontline hotel employees face a complex organizational environment that constantly makes multiple demands, creating a persistent trade-off between service as a key element of the organization's strategy and other competing or even conflicting goals. This study proposes an integrated and unique way of discerning the relationship between service climate and service performance through the prism of surface and deep acting emotional labor and suggests a new dimension of the service climate—the service priority climate. Specifically, we examined employees' use of emotional labor strategies as a mechanism that explains the relationship between service priority climate and service performance. We also investigated whether workload pressure influences this relationship. Using a multilevel, multisource study, we surveyed a sample of 245 hotel employees working in 39 departments and their direct managers. The results demonstrated that when employees regarded service as a priority compared with other competing goals, they used more deep acting emotional labor strategies, resulting in better service performance. However, this was apparent only when workload pressure was low. Implications for hospitality organizations are discussed.

Keywords

service climate; service performance; emotional labor; workload pressure

Introduction

The importance of the hotel industry has grown over the last few decades as it plays a vital role in fostering tourism and local economic development (Jones et al., 2014). The global crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic has created a challenging environment. However, it has also provided the hospitality industry with an opportunity to reestablish and maintain the good service that is critical to its survival and success. To maintain its important role, the industry must continue to deliver high-quality service to build a satisfied and loyal customer base (Salanova et al., 2005). To do so, the hotel industry must focus on the service performance of its frontline employees (Briggs et al., 2007), which refers to behaviors of attending to and helping customers (Liao & Chuang, 2004), and invest in the factors that improve such service performance.

Frontline hotel employees interact directly with customers (Chiang et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2020), provide customers with a “moment of truth” (Bitner, 1995), represent the organization (Berry, 2009), and constitute a central part of the organizational product (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). Yet, there is still much to learn regarding what organizations can do to

improve their employees' service performance (Parasuraman et al., 1988). One factor that promotes service performance is a high service climate. Such a climate is associated with positive outcomes for customers, employees, and organizations (see Hong et al., 2013, for a meta-analysis; Michel et al., 2013). Service climate refers to the shared perceptions of employees regarding the service policies, practices, and procedures that are rewarded, supported, and expected (Schneider et al., 1998). This climate is likely to be a multi-dimensional construct that encompasses individual perceptions about a wide range of service aspects in a work environment (James et al., 1990; Katz-Navon et al., 2005). Two dimensions of the service climate that may be differentiated one from the other are employees' perceptions about the service practices that are rewarded and supported (e.g.,

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Schneider, 1990) and their perceptions about the priority that their organizational unit assigns to the issue of service (e.g., Katz-Navon et al., 2005; Zohar, 2002). As employees must focus concurrently on several different goals, an organization that regards service as a key element of its organizational strategy prioritizes service relative to other competing or even conflicting demands (Katz-Navon et al., 2005). This prioritization may be referred to as a service priority climate, a dimension of the service climate, which is the shared perceptions of employees regarding the extent to which delivering high-quality service is important relative to other (sometimes competing) goals.

The relationship between service climate and service performance is well established in the literature (D. E. Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Manning et al., 2012). Studies have proposed a number of mediators to explain this relationship, such as employee commitment, job satisfaction (e.g., Hong et al., 2013 meta-analysis), and customer focused behaviors (Schneider et al., 2006). However, the association between this additional dimension of service climate, that is, the service priority climate and service performance, has not been examined. Hence, the first aim of our study is to explore this possible relationship.

In addition, we propose that the individual's use of emotional labor strategies (deep and surface acting) is a mechanism that may provide a new emotional explanation for the relationship between service priority climate and service performance. A service priority climate emphasizes specific emotional display rules for employees when interacting with customers, such as expressing cheerful and friendly emotions. Hence, employees use emotional labor strategies to plan, adjust, control, and express organizationally desired emotions in interpersonal encounters (Hochschild, 2012; Kusluvan et al., 2010).

There are two main emotional labor strategies that employees use to comply with the emotional display rules that the organization expects (Hochschild, 2012). One is surface acting, which is a form of emotional regulation, in which employees alter the public display of emotion but not the emotion itself (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 2015). The other is deep acting, which refers to a form of emotional regulation in which employees align their required and true feelings. To do so, employees use techniques that modify their perception of a situation, such as directing their attention toward pleasurable things or thoughts and reappraising the situation, to stir up or induce the required emotion. There are extensive studies of surface acting demonstrating that it is a consequence of the service climate and is linked to various indicators of poor well-being and poor performance (Grobelna, 2019; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013; Katz-Navon et al., 2019; Wang, 2020). However, studies examining the antecedents and consequences of deep acting emotional labor are less straightforward and provide inconsistent results. Thus, we propose the

service priority climate as an antecedent of surface and deep acting and explain why it is likely that this element of the service climate will be positively related to both emotional labor strategies. Furthermore, we examine whether the relationship between service priority climate and service performance is contingent on contextual factors, such as the extent of workload pressure.

As a general theoretical framework for these goals, we use the Conservation of Resources framework (COR; Hobfoll, 1988). This theory suggests that people strive to obtain, conserve, protect, and acquire resources (e.g., tangible, psychological, cognitive) and minimize any threats of resource loss. Resource loss is usually the result of role demands and the efforts invested in meeting such demands. Thus, employees attempt to conserve their resources by using only the resources required to meet the demands.

Furthermore, COR theory proposes that specific events and environments may require more or fewer resources from employees. In response to the demands of an organization with a strong service priority climate, employees increase their use of surface and deep emotional labor strategies. However, when their job also involves substantial workload pressures—a large amount of work to be done in a short amount of time—employees may suffer from a substantial loss of resources, making it harder to adhere to the climate-induced display rules (van Woerkom et al., 2016). This situation is especially likely given that frontline hotel jobs in all hotel categories are characterized by poor working conditions (Marco-Lajara & Úbeda-García, 2013), making additional workload pressures even more likely to deplete the limited personal resources that these frontline employees have to begin with. Thus, we propose that while a service priority climate is likely to enhance the use of emotional labor strategies, a high level of workload pressure is likely to deplete the employees' resources that are required for providing good service performance. In sum, we examine why (i.e., through the increased use of emotional labor strategies) and when (i.e., contingent on the extent to which there is workload pressure) there is a relationship between service priority climate and service performance.

In doing so, this study makes three main theoretical contributions to the hospitality, service, and emotional labor literature. First, we extend the service climate literature (Schneider et al., 1998) by suggesting an additional dimension of the service climate—the service priority climate. As noted earlier, this factor deals with the extent to which employees perceive that the organization emphasizes service relative to other goals. Employees face multiple demands and providing good service is only one of them. Thus, simply examining the general conceptualizations of the service climate and its relationship with performance does not indicate the relative effect of such a climate compared to these other demands. Investigating the incremental

contribution of a service priority climate above and beyond the more general conceptualization of the service climate is important.

Second, the climate literature emphasizes the importance of studying the mechanisms that explain the relationship between service climate and service outcomes (Subramony & Pugh, 2015). Using an emotional approach to the consequences of a service priority climate and the COR theory as an overarching framework, we propose an integrated and unique way of thinking about this relationship through the prism of frontline hospitality employees using surface and deep acting emotional labor strategies.

Finally, while previous studies revealed inconsistent results regarding the relationship between emotional labor and service performance (Gabriel & Diefendorff, 2015; Yam et al., 2016; see Hülshager & Schewe, 2011, for a meta-analytic review), we propose that one potential explanation for these mixed findings is the work context. Specifically, we maintain that this relationship is contingent on the level of workload pressure. The demands that result from one aspect of the job—a high level of workload pressure—may lead to a depletion of the resource reserves needed to deal with other types of job demands, thereby triggering a loss spiral (van Woerkom et al., 2016) that attenuates service performance. However, when the workload pressure is low, the climate-induced display rules increase the use of emotional labor strategies, which, in turn, increase service performance.

Literature Review and Development of Hypotheses

The Service Priority Climate and Service Performance

The service climate has been defined as “the shared perceptions of and the meaning attached to the [service] policies, practices, and procedures employees experience and the behaviors they observe getting rewarded and that are supported and expected” (Schneider et al., 2013, p. 362; see also D. E. Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Schneider et al., 1998). Employees infer the strategic service goals and the means of achieving them from organizational policies, while procedures and practices provide tactical guidelines for behaviors aligned with these policies. A climate that stresses service is associated with customer satisfaction through its influence on employees’ service-oriented behaviors such as finding out what customers need and explaining the features and benefits of the service (Hong et al., 2013; Liao & Chuang, 2004; Michel et al., 2013; Salanova et al., 2005) and ultimately the financial performance of the firm (e.g., Schneider et al., 2009).

However, organizations have multiple goals and means of attaining them, which result in the formation of multiple

climates that exist simultaneously in organizations. Examples include climates for learning (D. D. Bowen & Kilmann, 1975), innovation (Anderson & West, 1996), performance (Gelfand et al., 2012), safety (Katz-Navon et al., 2005; Zohar, 2002), and service (Schneider et al., 1998). Hence, employees experience the organizational context as a complex web of patterns, arrangements, and signals that stems from different organizational climates and sometimes creates conflicting or competing demands and expectations (e.g., Weick et al., 2005). Cues from the organizational context provide employees with direction, allowing them to determine the organization’s priorities and decide how to behave (e.g., Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick et al., 2005). Specifically, employees rely on cues from their surrounding work environments to help them develop attitudes, interpret events, and understand organizational expectations (D. E. Bowen & Schneider, 2014). The official rhetoric in service organizations is that excellent service is always a first priority (e.g., “the customer is always right”). However, maintaining excellent service often entails working at a slower pace, exerting extra effort, or consuming excessive organizational resources. Consequently, employees should understand the relative priorities between the work pace, pressures for productivity, and economic efficiency on one hand and maintaining excellent service on the other. For example, a hotel pool lifeguard might think that his or her manager expects him or her to minimize certain safety precautions, such as restricting the number of guests in the pool, to meet the customers’ expectations of being able to enjoy all facilities at all times and adhere to the hotel’s policy of “service above all.” Consequently, in this case, both employees and managers emphasize service over safety.

To decide what the organization’s priorities are, employees first seek information concerning the activities the organization rewards (Schneider et al., 1998). This information may be obtained directly from the organization’s evaluation and reward systems and by determining whether service is part of the goal setting and feedback systems. Once the required behavior is understood, employees behave so as to be rewarded. However, reward systems may incorrectly reward unwanted behaviors (Kerr, 1975). Although many service organizations intend to officially emphasize service, they may reward employees for productivity or economic efficiency. For example, frontline employees may be remunerated per hour and not for service quality. As a result, employees develop shared perceptions concerning the relative priority of a specific climate based on the way they perceive the probable consequences of their behaviors. These perceptions provide employees with an understanding of the extent to which service is prioritized in their organization (Ogilvie et al., 2017).

Thus, one dimension of the service climate focuses on the content of specific service policies, practices, or

procedures as signaling the extent to which there is a high service climate. However, the relative priority of service versus competing goals such as sales may be an additional dimension of the service climate. This dimension refers to the shared perceptions and expectations of employees regarding the balance maintained among different work-related goals (e.g., Katz-Navon et al., 2005; Ogilvie et al., 2017). When an organization prioritizes efficiency over service, employees might infer that they should “cut corners” or invest less effort in pleasing customers to work faster and minimize delays due to long queues. Whenever service issues are disregarded to enhance efficiency, safety, innovation, or productivity, workers infer that service is a low priority.

Hence, when employees regard service as a top priority for the organization, they are likely to give less precedence to other goals and provide high levels of service performance (Ogilvie et al., 2017). On the contrary, when employees think that the organization prioritizes other goals over service, they are likely to invest in the other prioritized goals, resulting in poorer service performance. Hence, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive association between the service priority climate and employees’ service performance.

The Service Priority Climate and Emotional Labor Strategies: Workload Pressure as a Moderator

Customers and organizations expect employees in service encounters to express cheerful, genial, sincere, and friendly emotions and conceal negative emotions (Jiang et al., 2016; S. Xu et al., 2020a). Therefore, customer service in general and frontline hotel service in particular are jobs where there are explicit and apparent needs to manage one’s emotions, and sometimes even express emotions that may be contrary to one’s authentic feelings (Grandey, 2003). The service priority climate signals to employees the extent to which managing their emotions is important. Specifically, when organizations prioritize providing good service, there is a shared perception among employees that maintaining the expression of positive emotions in service encounters is important (Liao et al., 2009). When there is a gap between emotional expectations resulting from the climate and how employees actually feel, they may experience emotional dissonance that requires them to regulate their emotions using emotional labor strategies (C. K. Lam et al., 2010). Hence, the higher the service priority climate, the higher the likelihood of dissonance between expected and felt emotions, and the more employees need to regulate their emotions when compared with a low service priority climate.

To express the emotions required by the climate’s prioritized display rules, employees may use either surface or deep acting emotional labor strategies (Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 2012). Surface acting involves faking positive emotions and suppressing negative emotions so that positive displays will follow (Grandey, 2000). Deep acting is a conscious mindful effort to modify one’s emotions to correspond to the expected emotions and involves trying to “get into character” by simulating feeling the appropriate emotion until one actually does feel it (Grandey, 2003). When deep acting, individuals modify their cognitions or arousal using different techniques, such as imagination, concentrating on positive thoughts, or altering perspectives (Zapf et al., 2021). The use of deep acting represents a frame of mind that service providers may adopt before engaging in a service encounter (Chen et al., 2019). As a result of this deep acting, in contrast to surface acting, the customer experiences the emotions the provider displays as more authentic (Grandey, 2003; Lee & Madera, 2019). Thus, the higher the service priority climate, the higher the likelihood of employees using emotional labor strategies.

In addition to the display rules induced by the climate, employees in hospitality organizations and especially frontline hotel employees, who have constant interpersonal encounters, may experience a high degree of workload pressure (Lin et al., 2014; Sok et al., 2013). To cope with workload pressure, employees invest mental and physical resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Turgut et al., 2020), depleting their pool of available resources and leaving fewer resources available for coping with the gap between their actual feelings and the emotional demands of the service priority climate. According to the fourth principle of COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), when people’s resource pool is stretched or exhausted, they enter a “safe mode,” meaning that they are less likely to invest their emotional and energetic resources in additional domains. High workload pressure drains employees’ resources. Based on this tenet of the COR theory, this lack of resources may weaken the relationship between the service priority climate and the employees’ emotional labor strategies, because they are unwilling to invest the energy and effort needed to translate the requirements of the service priority climate into deep or surface acting. Indeed, this is especially relevant for frontline hotel employees who are often characterized as employees who are “marginalized” by their organization (Marco-Lajara & Úbeda-García, 2013). However, when the employees’ workload pressure is low, they have enough available resources for the emotional labor resulting from prioritizing service. Hence, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Workload pressure attenuates the positive relationship between the service priority climate and the use of both surface and deep acting emotional labor.

Emotional Labor Strategies and Service Performance: Workload Pressure as a Moderator

Research in general and in the hospitality realm in particular has found that surface acting usually leads to negative behavioral outcomes (Chen et al., 2019; Van Dijk et al., 2011; S. T. Xu et al., 2020b). Based on the COR theory, surface acting requires the expenditure of resources because it involves actively suppressing emotions (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Lee & Madera, 2019; Li et al., 2017) that deplete employees' mental resources and reduce their performance. In other words, the strong emotional demands resulting from surface acting are likely to exhaust employees' resources and reduce service performance (e.g., Karatepe et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2020). Thus, in accordance with the existing findings, we predict that a high level of surface acting will be negatively related to service performance. Furthermore, when workload pressures are high, this relationship will be even more negative because both surface acting and workload pressure deplete resources.

The relationship between deep acting and service performance is more complex and inconclusive. Several studies suggested that deep acting, which yields authentic emotional displays, benefits employees' performance (Huang et al., 2015; Totterdell & Holman, 2003; Wang, 2020). Their main argument is that although deep acting requires some initial self-regulation, from a resources perspective, it does not necessitate the ongoing use of cognitive demands, since there is no need to suppress, fake, or control emotions as with surface acting (Beal et al., 2006). Moreover, deep acting could restore employees' personal resources (e.g., energy or intrinsic motivation) by enhancing their positive affect and the likelihood of a positive interpersonal interaction with customers (Coté, 2005). However, while a meta-analysis by Mesmer-Magnus et al. (2012) reported a positive relationship between deep acting and performance, two other meta-analytical studies demonstrated either zero (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011) or slightly positive but insignificant (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013) associations between deep acting and job performance indicators. These inconclusive findings may be the result of different definitions or operationalizations of job performance. For example, job performance was referred to as handling customer conflict (Huang et al., 2015), job or task performance (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012), and tangible service delivery. However, other studies have assessed the intangible aspects of job performance, such as interpersonal behavior and emotional displays (Goodwin et al., 2011), the creation of social interactions, the establishment of a strong employee-customer rapport, providing the customer with important information about the social situation (Hülshager et al., 2010), and judgments about service quality (W. Lam et al., 2018). In addition, researchers

operationalized job performance and measured it with different scales depending on the definitions they used. They also used different sources of performance data such as self-rated performance evaluations (e.g., Totterdell & Holman, 2003), peer-rated reviews (e.g., Grandey, 2003), or objective measures of employee performance ratings (Duke et al., 2009). Finally, these inconclusive findings might be a result of nonwork covariates that could influence the emotional labor–performance relationship or the existence of moderators in this relationship (Zapf et al., 2021).

In an attempt to untangle these issues, we first define job performance specifically in the service context as employees performing job tasks primarily related to service (Liao & Chuang, 2004) that are behaviorally based (as opposed to emotional performance). In addition, based on the COR theory, we propose that the relationship between deep acting emotional labor and service performance is contingent on the additional job demands placed on the employee. Thus, we propose workload pressure as a moderator of this relationship.

Employees may attempt to genuinely change their emotions to seem authentically friendly and courteous to customers, which is likely to result in more energetic and enthusiastic service encounters and better service performance (Chi et al., 2011). However, if in addition these employees have a high level of workload pressure, the physical and/or cognitive loads demand resources. Hence, while deep acting restores resources, a high level of workload pressure depletes them, harming the potential for enhanced service performance. We hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3a: Workload pressure intensifies the negative relationship between surface acting emotional labor and service performance.

Hypothesis 3b: Workload pressure attenuates the positive relationship between deep acting emotional labor and service performance.

The Service Priority Climate, Emotional Labor Strategies, Workload Pressure, and Service Performance

Based on the relationships predicted in Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, we suggest a conceptual model in which emotional labor strategies serve as an underlying mechanism that explains the relationships between the service priority climate and service performance, contingent on workload pressure (see Figure 1). With regard to surface emotional labor, when the workload pressure is low, employees have available resources to regulate their emotions to conform to the climate's expectations and thus can use surface acting emotional labor strategies. In contrast, when high workload pressure depletes the employees' resources, it is more difficult to maintain the effort and persistence needed

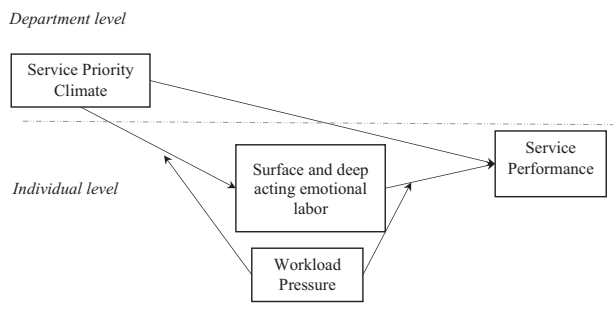


Figure 1.
The Research Model.

for surface acting. In such contexts, the higher the service priority climate, the fewer resources are available for surface acting and the poorer the service performance.

With regard to deep emotional labor, when the workload pressure is low, employees have enough available resources to regulate their emotions to conform to the climate's expectations, using deep acting emotional labor strategies. Furthermore, deep acting increases positive customer encounters, replenishing the employees' resources, which, in turn, can be used to provide better service performance. However, when the workload pressure is high, depleting the employees' resources, it is more difficult for them to maintain the effort and persistence for deep acting to conform to the climate's demands. In such contexts, the positive relationship between the service priority climate and service performance will be attenuated because the workload pressure buffers the accumulation of resources obtained through the use of deep acting strategies. Thus, we posit that:

Hypothesis 4: Workload pressure moderates the indirect relationship between the service priority climate and service performance. The indirect relationship between the service priority climate and service performance through the surface and deep acting emotional labor will be stronger when the workload pressure is low than when it is high.

Method

Sample and Procedure

We tested our hypotheses with a sample of frontline hotel employees working in a chain of luxury hotels in Israel. The study was approved by the institutional review board. The advantage of examining employees from one single chain is that all personnel are recruited through the same human resource process conducted via the hotel chain's main office. The HR department of the hotel chain agreed to the administration of this study within all of their hotels and helped with the logistics of the administration of the questionnaires to

employees. Questionnaires were administered in Hebrew or Arabic depending on the preference of the employee (translated from English and backtranslated). All employees working on the day of data collection in their hotel were asked by their direct managers to participate during their work hours and were informed that the survey was approved by the manager of the hotel chain. The employees were approached by the research assistants and asked to fill out an anonymous questionnaire regarding their perceptions about their department's service priority climate, their use of deep and surface acting emotional labor strategies, and their perceived workload pressure. The employees answered the questionnaire while sitting in a quiet room, without their direct manager present. They were told that their participation was voluntary and that their questionnaire would be matched with a performance evaluation by their direct manager but that their anonymity would be kept (as we explain below). No incentive was offered. Almost all of the employees who were approached agreed to take part (91%). The research assistants took note of who answered the questionnaire and added a number to the questionnaire that would enable them later to match the completed questionnaires to those provided by their direct manager. Direct managers of the departments included in the study were asked to assess the service performance of each of their employees on a short questionnaire. The research assistants then matched the employee's questionnaire to the manager's questionnaire and eliminated any form of identification.

The final sample included 245 employees nested within 13 hotels (between 8 and 33 employees participated in each hotel). These employees belonged to one of three departments: reception ($n = 68$), food and beverage ($n = 133$), and security ($n = 44$). Thus, overall, we had employees from 39 departments. In Israel, the security staff is regarded as frontline employees as they are positioned in the entrance to the hotel and are the first employees any customer encounters. As part of their job, the security staff must interact with the customers upon their arrival and whenever they wish to reenter the hotel. The employees' age ranged between 18 and 71 years ($M = 31$, $SD = 12.9$), seniority ranged between 1 and 46 years ($M = 8$, $SD = 8.6$), and 73% of the employees were male.

Measures

Service Priority Climate was assessed using five items adapted from Katz-Navon et al. (2005). While their original scale focused on the safety climate, we kept the items but replaced the word "safety" with "service." All items were reverse scored. Sample items are "In my department, service is often overlooked" or "In my department, to get the work done, one must ignore some service aspects." We aggregated this variable to the department level after obtaining adequate agreement indices: average $R_{wg} = 0.62$, Intraclass Correlations coefficients: $ICC1 = 0.11$, $ICC2 = 0.46$. As

this adapted measure has not been used previously, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of this measure and the service climate measure developed by Schneider et al. (1998). In addition, we examined its convergent and discriminant validity.

To show that the service priority climate is a distinct factor that is not included in the traditional service climate measure (Schneider et al., 1998), we conducted a CFA analysis with the items from both measures. The CFA confirmed that a model with two independent factors fitted the data well, $\chi^2(64) = 110.44$, $p < .001$; comparative fit index (CFI) = .95; normed fit index (NFI) = .90; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .05, and had a much better fit than a model in which we constrained the two factors to be correlated at 1.0, $\chi^2(65) = 381.52$, $p < .001$; CFI = .68; NFI = .65; RMSEA = .14; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 271.08$, $p < .001$.

Convergent validity is established by showing that constructs that theoretically ought to be related are, in fact, related. Thus, we examined the relationship between the service priority climate and the commonly used service climate measure developed by Schneider et al. (1998). Indeed, we found that the correlation between these two climate measures at the department level was .57 ($p < .001$) and at the individual level was 0.42 ($p < .001$). Finally, Cronbach's alpha for the service priority climate was .84 and for Schneider's measure was .82. Put together, each measure has a high degree of internal consistency, and each measure is distinct from the other.

Discriminant validity is established by showing that constructs that theoretically ought not to be related are, in fact, not related. There is no reason to assume that the extent to which department members are intrinsically motivated will be related to the extent to which they feel that the organization prioritizes service. We assessed intrinsic motivation by the scale used in previous research (Amabile et al., 1994; Grant, 2008; Menges et al., 2017) and adapted it to the service context. Participants were asked to report, "Why are you motivated to provide good service?" The intrinsic motivation scale included five items (e.g., "Because I enjoy it"; $\alpha = .8$). Indeed, the correlation between intrinsic motivation and service priority climate was weak and nonsignificant at both the individual and team levels ($r = .06$ and $r = -.002$, respectively).

Surface and deep acting emotional labor were assessed using six items from the hospitality emotional labor scale (Chu & Murrmann, 2006). An example of an item assessing surface emotional labor is: "I put on a mask to express the right emotions for my job," $\alpha = .70$. An example of an item assessing deep emotional labor is: "When getting ready for work, I tell myself that I am going to have a good day," $\alpha = .74$.

Workload Pressure was assessed using three items adapted from Amabile et al.'s (1996) scale. A sample item is "I have too much work to do in too little time," $\alpha = .78$.

Service Performance—each department manager was asked to answer six questions regarding each of his or her direct employee's service-related performance. Service performance was assessed using Liao and Chuang's (2004) scale that was based on Borucki and Burke (1999). Similar to Liao and Chuang (2004), we discussed specific items with hotel managers and determined that six of the seven items in the original scale could adequately capture the nature of hotel service performance. Examples include assessments about the extent to which the employee is "friendly and helpful to customers" and "asks good questions and listens to find out what a customer wants," $\alpha = .94$. On all scales, responses ranged on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 = *not at all*, to 5 = *very much so*.

Control variables. We controlled for the employees' gender, age, and organizational tenure to make sure that the relationships found were above and beyond any potential effect these variables have on the use of emotional labor strategies and service performance.

We estimated three different CFA models to show that perceptions about service priority climate, deep acting emotional labor, surface acting emotional labor, workload pressure, and intrinsic motivation are distinct factors. The CFA model with five independent factors fitted the data well, $\chi^2(142) = 272.53$, $p < .001$; CFI = .92; RMSEA = .06, and had a significantly better fit than any of the other models in which we constrained two factors to be correlated at 1.0. For example, when constraining deep and surface acting emotional labor to be correlated at 1.0, the model was a poorer fit, $\chi^2(143) = 499.70$, $p < .001$; CFI = .78; RMSEA = .10; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 227.17$, $p < .001$, as was a model where we constrained climate perceptions and workload pressure to be correlated at 1.0, $\chi^2(143) = 454$, $p < .001$; CFI = .81; RMSEA = .09; $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 181.47$, $p < .001$.

Data Analysis

Employees were nested within 39 different departments. Hence, we analyzed the data using random coefficient modeling (RCM; Goldstein, 1987) with the SAS Mixed procedure. The advantage of RCM is that by modeling residuals at Level 2 or 3 (with the employee serving as the level-one unit of analysis), such models acknowledge that employees working within the context of the same department may be more similar to one another than to employees affiliated with different departments (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). We framed our analysis around the moderated mediation model implied by our hypotheses. Accordingly, we first tested for the moderating effects proposed in Hypotheses 2 and 3 separately. Next, we tested for the moderated mediation model (Hypothesis 4) based on Edwards and Lambert's (2007) equations for a model incorporating a first- and second-stage moderated mediation model (Template 58, Hayes, 2013). We estimated the sampling distribution of the

Table 1.
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among the Study's Variables.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender ^a	1.27	.44							
2. Age	31.14	12.91	-.07						
3. Organizational tenure	8.32	8.73	-.12*	.53***					
4. Service priority climate ^b	3.67	.48	.12*	-.14*	-.08				
5. Deep acting emotional labor	3.85	.91	-.06	.30***	.19**	-.02			
6. Surface acting emotional labor	4.02	.88	.03	.08	.15*	.03	.01		
7. Workload pressure	3.05	1.02	-.13*	.21**	.13*	-.17**	.09	.29***	
8. Service performance	4.25	.67	-.03	.15*	.13*	.17**	.07	-.08	.12

^a1 = male; 2 = female.

^bDepartment level variable.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2.
Random Coefficient Modeling Analysis With Deep Acting Emotional Labor and Service Performance as the Dependent Variables.

Effect	Deep Acting Emotional Labor			Service Performance			
	Model 1 Est. (SE)	Model 2 Est. (SE)	Model 3 Est. (SE)	Model 4 Est. (SE)	Model 5 Est. (SE)	Model 6 Est. (SE)	Model 7 Est. (SE)
Intercept	3.20 (.18)	3.19 (.58)	.68 (1.38)	3.96 (.15)***	2.86 (.47)***	3.69 (.26)***	2.64 (.60)***
Gender	.02 (.13)	.04 (.13)	.03 (.13)	.09 (.10)	.11 (.10)	.08 (.10)	.11 (.10)
Age	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.01 (.00)	.01 (.00)	.01 (.00)	.01 (.00)
Tenure	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Service priority climate		.01 (.13)	.69 (.37)		.28 (.11)*		
Workload pressure		-.01 (.06)	.82 (.42)*			.07 (.04)	.40 (.17)*
Service priority climate × Workload Pressure			-.22 (.11)*				
Deep acting emotional labor						.02 (.05)	.29 (.15)*
Deep acting emotional labor × Workload pressure							-.09 (.04)*
Random variance—Department	.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.07 (.03)*	.05 (.03)*	.07 (.03)*	.07 (.03)*
-2 log likelihood	573	568.1	564.1	423.8	418.2	418.3	414.6
$\Delta - 2$ log likelihood (assuming same n)		0	4*		5.6*	2.8	3.8*

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

indirect effects nonparametrically through bootstrapping and used information from the bootstrap sampling distribution to generate confidence intervals for the indirect effects (Preacher et al., 2007).

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study's variables. In this table, all variables were at the individual level except for the service priority climate, which was at the department level.

In support of Hypothesis 1, the results demonstrated a significant positive relationship between the service priority climate and service performance ($b = .28$, $SE = .11$, $p < .05$;

see Model 5 of Table 2). In partial support of Hypothesis 2, the interaction between the service priority climate and workload pressure on deep acting emotional labor was significant ($b = -.22$, $SE = .11$, $p < .05$; see Model 3 of Table 2). Model 3 differed significantly from Model 2, which tested for the main effects of service priority climate and workload pressure ($\Delta - 2$ log likelihood = 4, $p < .05$). The interaction is plotted in Figure 2. The simple slope analysis indicated that the beneficial effect of a service priority climate on deep acting emotional labor was apparent at low levels of workload pressure ($b = 0.68$, $SE = 0.31$, $p < .05$). When workload pressure was high or medium, the relationship between the service priority climate and deep acting emotional labor was nonsignificant ($b = -0.07$, $SE = 0.42$, $n.s.$ and $b = -0.05$,

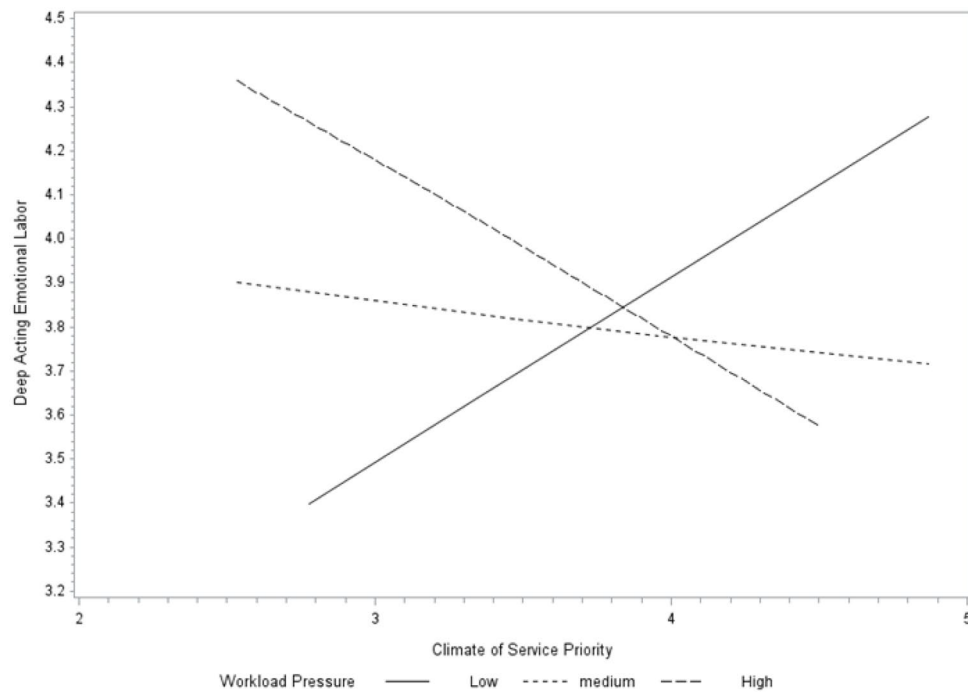


Figure 2.
Workload Pressure as a Moderator of the Relationship Between Service Priority Climate and Deep Acting Emotional Labor.

$SE = 0.13$, $n.s.$, respectively). The random variance between departments was nonsignificant in all models where deep acting emotional labor was the dependent variable. We found no such relationship when surface emotional labor was the dependent variable.

In an attempt to understand this nonfinding, we investigated the surface emotional labor variable further. This variable had a mean level of 4.02 on a scale of 1 to 5, a standard deviation of 0.88, a median of 4.17, and was skewed (skewness = -1.33) and with a heavy tail (kurtosis = 2.65). It seems that in the hotel chain we examined, beyond the level of deep emotional labor strategies used by the employees, the majority used surface emotional labor strategies, minimizing the ability of this variable to be related to any other variable of a more normal distribution.

In support of Hypothesis 3b, the results demonstrated a significant interaction between deep acting emotional labor and workload pressure on service performance ($b = -0.09$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .05$; see Model 7 of Table 2). Model 7 differed significantly from Model 6, which tested for the main effects of workload pressure and deep acting emotional labor ($\Delta - 2 \log \text{likelihood} = 3.8$, $p < .05$). The interaction is plotted in Figure 3. The simple slope analysis indicated that the beneficial effect of deep acting emotional labor on service performance was apparent at low levels of workload pressure (although not significant at the traditional $p < .05$,

it was significant at $b = 0.27$, $SE = 0.16$, $p < .10$). When workload pressure was high or moderate, the relationship between deep acting emotional labor and service performance was nonsignificant ($b = -0.10$, $SE = 0.11$, $n.s.$ and $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.06$, $n.s.$, respectively). The random variance between departments was significant in all models where service performance was the dependent variable. We found no such relationship when surface emotional labor was the independent variable, refuting Hypothesis 3a.

Finally, we tested the fourth hypothesis regarding the moderated mediation. As we found no relationship with regard to surface emotional labor, we conducted the analysis with only deep emotional labor as the mediator. Results of a bootstrap procedure demonstrated that the 90% confidence interval of the indirect effect did not include zero when workload pressure was low (90% CI: [0.004, 0.04]), yet, when workload pressure was high or moderate, there was no indirect effect. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

To show the incremental contribution of service priority climate above and beyond the more general conceptualizations of service climate, we conducted an additional analysis. We reran the same analyses as earlier controlling for service climate (Schneider et al., 1998). Results were very similar to the ones presented earlier, indicating that the effects of service priority climate were above and beyond the effects attributed to the traditional measure of service climate. More

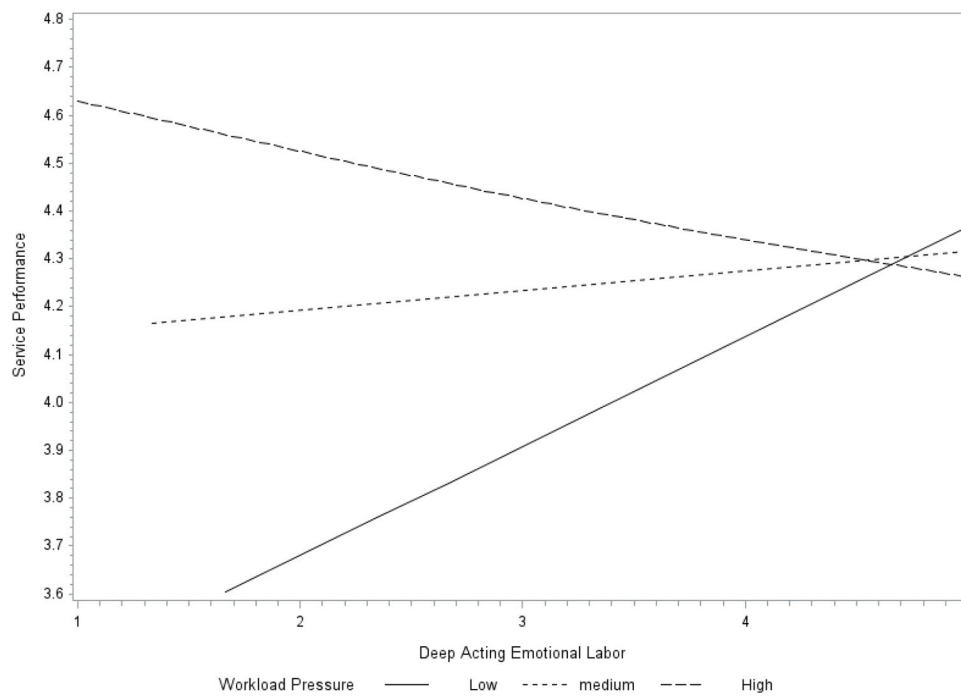


Figure 3. Workload Pressure as a Moderator of the Relationship Between Deep Acting Emotional Labor and Service Performance.

specifically, when deep emotional labor was the dependent variable, there was a significant difference between the model including the control variables and the traditional service climate variable and a model that also included service priority climate, workload pressure, and the interaction between them ($\Delta - 2 \log \text{likelihood} = 9.8, p < .01$).

In addition, we examined service priority as an individual-level perception. Thus, we reran all of the abovementioned models, replacing service priority climate with the individual's perceptions regarding the priority of service. The interaction between service priority and workload pressure was not significant when deep acting emotional labor was the dependent variable ($b = -0.09, SE = 0.05, n.s.$). Thus, service priority climate was associated with deep acting emotional labor (contingent on workload pressure), while individual-level perceptions about priority were not. This result strengthens our assertion that deep acting emotional labor is related to the service priority climate as a joint property of both the unit and the individual (Ashforth, 1985). It is the joint understanding of the unit members of the priority assigned to service that is related to their service-related behavior (i.e., deep acting emotional labor).

Discussion

Frontline hotel employees work on multiple goals simultaneously, and thus, prioritization is crucial for their effective

functioning. Indeed, the study results demonstrated that service priority climate is related to service performance above and beyond the traditional notion of service climate. Moreover, the results provided an explanation for the relationship between service priority climate and service performance by showing that the use of deep emotional labor strategies mediated this relationship. Yet this was apparent only for employees who perceived their job as involving low levels of workload pressure. When workload pressure was medium or high, deep emotional labor no longer explained the relationship between service priority climate and performance. Thus, only when workload pressure was low, the service priority climate was related to the use of deep emotional labor strategies that then translated into better service performance.

Our main effect result that service priority climate is related to service performance shows the importance of the organization prioritizing different goals to employees. Organizations with a high service priority climate reward service above all else, clarifying what is indeed important to them. Understanding the high priority of service potentially motivates employees to take greater ownership of and responsibility for service, which, in turn, increases their service performance. In contrast, perceptions that service ranks low on the hierarchy of goals indicates to the employees that other goals are more important and rewarded, resulting in poorer service performance.

Furthermore, we pinpointed the role that deep acting emotional labor has as an underlying mechanism that explains the relationship between department-level service priority climate and employees' service performance. Through the prioritization of service, organizations encourage "service with a smile" and a "happy workforce." These emotional display rules are regarded as in-role expectations (Diefendorff et al., 2006) that increase employees' use of deep acting emotional labor strategies and, in turn, lead to better service performance. However, as mentioned previously, this seemed to occur only when the level of workload pressure was low, indicating that the effective use of deep emotional labor strategies is contingent on employees having available resources to do so.

Our study contributes in several ways to the hospitality literature, which is interested in uncovering the factors contributing to the service performance of frontline hotel employees (Clark et al., 2009). First, we suggested the dimension of service priority climate, defined as the shared understanding regarding the degree of importance ascribed to service within an organizational department over other competing goals. It refers to employees' perceptions about the balance the organization expects among multiple goals, such as service, safety, innovation, and productivity. Given that multiple climates exist simultaneously in organizations, each climate emphasizes the importance of its specific goal, and thus, there seems to be a need for a prioritization climate as well. Second, our results extend the knowledge about emotional labor (Grandey, 2000, 2003) by identifying when service priority climate is related to deep acting and when deep acting is related to service performance. Specifically, our study results revealed that workload pressure is a boundary condition for these relationships since workload pressure drains employees' resources. Certain working conditions and constraints are demands that deplete the resources available for employees to provide good service. Specifically, a work context with a high level of workload pressure depletes employees' resources, leaving them less able to invest the effort needed to use deep acting emotional labor strategies required to meet the socioemotional display rules of the service climate and to provide good service. Moreover, when employees must juggle a high-pressure workload with deep acting, the former interferes with the positive consequences of such acting, weakening the relationship with service performance. It is important to note that workload pressure by itself was not related to deep emotional labor but rather served as a conditioning factor for the relationship between service priority climate and deep acting. This result may indicate that for frontline hospitality workers, it is not the pressure on its own that interferes with deep acting or performance, but a combination of such pressure with strong display rules or additional resource demands.

Our results did not support the association between service priority climate and surface acting emotional labor. One possible explanation for this lack of relationship may lie in the meaning of the service climate. Specifically, the traditional definition of service climate is essentially transactional, that is, the behaviors or emotions that employees perceive as rewarded and supported by the organization when serving customers (Schneider et al., 1998). Such a climate may result in surface acting emotional labor because employees express emotions that are expected from them but not necessarily felt to be rewarded (Katz-Navon et al., 2019). Furthermore, in hospitality, surface emotional labor is a rather strict job requirement (i.e., "if you don't feel it, fake it") relevant for all employees regardless of the specific organizational climate or stress level. However, when it comes to deep emotional labor, the service priority climate indeed has an effect and contributes to deep emotional labor. In contrast to the traditional definition of service climate, the concept of organizational climate can stand by itself, separate from its instrumental value (Naveh & Katz-Navon, 2015). According to this approach, the climate has a transformational influence on employees, and they internalize the organization's norms and values driven by the climate. They behave or feel as expected because they genuinely believe in the priorities set by the organization. Specifically, hospitality employees may internalize the value of service as a priority, resulting in an adjustment of their felt emotions to display the required emotions (the use of deep emotional labor strategies) and not simply put on a mask (the use of surface emotional labor strategies). If indeed climate has both transformational and transactional elements, our results may indicate that the service priority climate in hospitality is more transformational in nature. Thus, it is related to the use of deep emotional labor strategies but not to surface acting.

Managerial Implications

Organizations are likely to benefit by setting strict priorities to signal to employees where to invest their resources. Thus, managers should be consistent in emphasizing service over other (and sometimes conflicting) organizational goals by, for example, highlighting it in performance evaluations, performance feedback, and rewards. This issue may be especially important in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, since the global environment, particularly in hospitality, is characterized by uncertainty and multiple competing goals such as safety versus service. In such circumstances, employees need to clearly understand the organization's priorities. In addition, to minimize workload pressure, organizations should encourage employees to translate the climate into deep acting emotional labor by providing them with opportunities to craft their job or the organizational tasks in a manner that is more suited with

the climate. Alternatively, training might help employees minimize workload pressure. One such training example may be time management training. An additional, less intuitive training for coping with workload pressure is integration training (Parker & Axtell, 2001), whereby employees learn to see a situation from the customer's point of view and react less actively to the workload.

Limitations and Future Research

In the current study, service performance was measured using a scale rated by the employees' direct managers. Future research may wish to compliment this measure with customers' assessments of their satisfaction with the service encounter and their perceptions about the authenticity of the service providers' emotions (Van Dijk et al., 2011). In addition, the study's participants were from a single country. Future research may wish to include participants from multiple countries to enhance the generalizability of the results. Moreover, future research may wish to further explore the relationship between service priority climate, surface acting, and customer outcomes. The study's nonsignificant relationships among these variables suggest that there may be additional contextual variables that are involved in this triangle. Finally, the study's theoretical framework provides a resource-based explanation for the proposed model and emphasizes and measures workload pressure as a context that depletes resources. Future research should examine additional factors such as personality, attitudes, context, and interactional dynamics that replenish resources and enable service workers to provide outstanding service in addition to examining organizational demands.

To sum, the hospitality industry relies heavily on those who directly interact with customers, yet, this specific workforce is often neglected in hospitality research (Ballantyne et al., 2009). The results of our study revealed a set of important insights relevant both to theory and to practice about the roles that goal prioritization, deep emotional labor, and workload pressure play in improving the service performance of frontline hospitality employees.

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