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Service work without emotional labour? Role expectations of service engineers, their employers and customers in the mechanical engineering industry**

The goal of this research is to understand, if emotional labour is part of atypical service professions like service engineering. The protagonists of this study are service engineers, their employing organisations and customers (service triad). We are interested in the following questions: How do the protagonists perceive the role of the service engineers? Is emotional regulation important in this service? Is emotional labour displayed? For which purposes is it used? Our study shows, that finding technological solutions is dominating in service engineering. Yet, service engineers use not only emotional labour, but also sentimental work. The regulation and influencing of emotions serve different purposes, e.g. to build a relationship with the customer, to extract relevant information from him/her to get a technical problem solved quicker, and to cope with distress that arises from contradictory expectations. Service engineers do this although neither their employer nor the customer explicitly urges them to do so.

Key words: **emotional labour, sentimental work, service engineers, service work** (JEL: J24, L80, M54)

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Introduction

Studies on emotional labour have gained importance with the growing of the service sector. For a long time, the focus of emotional labour studies was on typical service professions, such as flight attendants (Hochschild, 1983), nurses (Wharton, 1993), or cashiers (Rafaeli, 1989).

Hence, the question arises whether emotional labour is also part of rather "atypical" service professions, such as mechanical engineering, in which technical know-how is at least as important as social competences. If found to be true, the picture of emotional labour would be extended to professions of the mechanical industry.

To explore this question, the authors conducted a research project in the field of the mechanical industry. A three way perspective, reflecting the service triad of service provider, customer, and provider organisation (see Nerdinger, 1994), is used to gain insight into the importance of emotional labour in this field. First, we investigate the perspectives of the organisation and the customer. What are their respective expectations? Thereafter we address the following questions: What do service engineers think is expected of them? What is their self-concept and which attitudes do they adopt? Are emotions and emotional regulation perceived to be important at work?

Since the first studies on emotional labour, initially carried out by Arlie Hochschild, were published, a huge number of studies have blossomed on this topic. The next three passages offer an exemplifying short overview over some research areas emphasising research activities over the last five years relevant for our own study. First, emotional labour and sentimental labour are presented. Second, we highlight theory on the individual's perspective of emotional labour. This supports our analysis on the role expectations of service engineers; especially how they see themselves. Third, we outline emotional labour in typical and atypical service professions.

Emotions at work

Emotions are always involved in life, at work and outside work (e.g. Payne & Cooper, 2001). Emotions are not easily regulated at all times, sometimes they need not to be controlled, sometimes it would serve well if individuals displayed their emotions in a socially or organisationally desired way. Especially in service tasks, a sensitized expression and handling of emotions is necessary. Two forms of handling emotions in the interaction of the service provider and the customer can be differentiated: sentimental work and emotional labour.

Sentimental work describes efforts of the service provider to influence the emotions of the customer, so that he/she shows emotional reactions that are perceived to be helpful or most suited to the given situation (Strauss et al., 1980). Thus, sentimental work is the attempt to influence emotions of others.

Emotional labour focuses on how individuals modify not the emotions of others but their own feelings in order to exhibit a behaviour which follows display rules set by an organisation (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild distinguished two modes of modifying: surface acting and deep acting. The first technique describes an individual feeling differently from the expectations of the environment, and he/she is then urged to present an appearance which is in accordance with the display rules. For example, if a

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person feels angry he/she should not let this become obvious via his/her verbal and non-verbal expressions. Not the emotion is regulated but the emotional expression. The second strategy is deep acting, which should allow a person to modify not mainly the verbal or non-verbal expression but to help him/her to feel in the "correct" way. Therefore it is not merely a manipulation of an expression but a regulation of the emotion itself (Hochschild, 1983).

There are several functions of emotional labour. One is to keep one's distance to emotions in order to continue a professional service (e.g. to distance oneself from disgust in health care, see e.g. Smith & Kleinman, 1989), another one is supposed to control the interaction between the service person and the customer and to ensure conformity in behaviour (Bogner & Wouters, 1990). As a result behaviour becomes more predictable and could protect from situations that are assessed to be inappropriate for a service (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). All in all, emotional labour can help to strengthen and stabilize the relationship to a customer and to create trust (Zapf, 2002). Moreover, it can affect the emotion of the customer. Hence, both forms of handling emotions in the interaction can be intertwined.

The final judgement whether emotional labour is performed in the socially or organisationally expected way depends on the observer. Such observers can be the organisation – e.g. direct superior, colleagues – the customers – internal or external customers – and the professional him-/herself (see Nerdinger, 1994). Each observer can develop his/her own understanding of the correct way to behave and an individual interpretation of the display rules. The latter can either be explicitly written down, and even trained, or indirectly communicated (Hochschild, 1983). This calls for an analysis that includes more perspectives than only the one of the service worker – ideally of a complete service triad.

Emotions at work: the individual's perspective

The extent to which emotional labour is perceived to be important, how it can be realised and whether the chosen strategy is assessed to be successful can depend on a person's *self-concept*. In general, these processes can result from an understanding of (i) the collective self, which includes attributes shared with in-group members and distinct from others (e.g. a collectively shared concept of engineers), (ii) the individual self, which emphasises attributes that are unique for the person in question, or (iii) the relational self, which focuses on relationships with specific others (Hogg & Vaughan, 2008).

The perception of self influences how emotional labour is carried out (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). The self-concept orientation is a moderator in the relationship between emotion management in the workplace and feelings of inauthenticity (Sloan, 2007). At the same time, emotional labour can also form the self-concept (e.g. Kirk & Wall, 2010). For example, gender as part of the self-concept can influence emotional labour. In their study, Strongman and Wright (2008) explain how gender identity and the specific role understanding within a particular working setting influence display rules. They come to the conclusion that women find it difficult to show emotions if their working environment is masculine and proclaimed to be emotion-free.

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In a study by Nixon (2009) unemployed, low-skilled men were interviewed in order to find out how they could get back in the labour market and into a service job that they had been in before. This study underlines the antipathy of these men towards a regulation of emotions or emotional expressions; they do not like to engage in emotional labour, because it does not fit to their view of a masculine working-class habitus. They even prefer to stay unemployed.

According to another study the idea of masculinity explains how service workers handle problems with customers (Bishop et al., 2009). The authors explore whether bus drivers in the UK, who are requested to report anti-social behaviour during their service, comply with this request. They found widespread underreporting, which seems to be rooted in a dominant male self-perception.

In addition, specific *attitudes* are important when it comes to the challenge of handling emotions at work. For example, Sorensen and Iedema (2009) analyse the relationship between attitudes and emotional labour in a sample of clinicians. They demonstrate how attitudes towards death and dying influence emotional labour performed by physicians. Furthermore, the way the professionals exhibit emotional labour affects their own wellbeing as well as the quality of care.

Other studies analyse the role of *values,* which are a bit more general than attitudes. Schaible and Gecas (2010), who carried out a study on emotional labour and burnout among police officers, highlight the importance of self-processes and societal and institutional policing values. Although their model of influencing variables is complex, it can be stated that if dissonance was experienced, burnout could occur. Another example is the study by Sheng (2009). It describes emotional conflicts and coping strategies of life insurance agents in China and highlights the fact that organizational and working rules are often inconsistent with social norms and personal feelings. According to the author, this has led to emotional alienation and supposedly become typical for service tasks.

Finally, emotional labour is also related to perceived *external prestige*. Indeed, there is a positive relationship between perceived external prestige of the organisation, perceived organisational support, and how employees perform emotional labour in interactions with the customers (Mishra et al., 2011).

Sometimes *display rules* (based on a specific understanding of roles) are defined by the organisation explicitly. In these cases organisations communicate guidelines or offer special training to their staff. In other cases, roles and display rules are only given implicitly. There are also professions where no rules and techniques are communicated of how to behave (emotionally) correctly. For example, this is described in the case of judges (see e.g. Maroney, 2011). Here, the missing concept of emotion management could result from the legal framework which might be perceived as to be sufficient to adhere to. If legally correct behaviour is performed, no emotional labour seems to be necessary anymore. There may be similar mechanisms in mechanical engineering with the underlying "logic" that if technically correct behaviour is performed then no emotional labour is necessary anymore.

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Organisational setting: emotional labour in typical and atypical service professions

In the beginning, emotional labour was mainly examined within classical service and helping professions, e.g. nurses (Wharton, 1993; Bone, 1997), flight attendants (Hochschild, 1983), secretaries (Wichorski, 1994). The perspective has been widened over the last years. There are still studies carried out in typical helping professions, e.g. clinicians in an ICU (Sorensen & Iedema, 2009), nurses (Seery & Corrigall, 2009), or other helping settings (e.g. childcare workers, Seery & Corrigall, 2009), in schools (e.g. teachers, Kirk & Wall, 2010), or the public security sector (e.g. police officers, see Schaible & Gecas, 2010). The perspective has been further widened to other professions that have not been part of a core group study before such as soldiers (Shipman et al., 2010), judges (Maroney, 2011), life insurance agents (Sheng, 2009), pharmaceutical representatives (Mishra et al., 2011), or hair salon workers (Hill & Bradley, 2010). Additionally, emotional labour in jobs with lower levels of service tasks were studied, e.g. workers in the television industry (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008), or accountancy (Strongman & Wright, 2008). The broadened analysis of emotional labour in quite different working settings reflects the awareness that emotions are important in all work fields and are not only necessarily restricted to classical service jobs.

Initially, emotional labour has often been analysed for female jobs or gender equal jobs but relatively rarely for male dominated service jobs. Exceptions were mentioned before, e.g. soldiers.

In classical service areas (e.g. care, physicians), the customer requires assistance and emotional labour is part of the attempt to support the customer to solve his/her problems more effectively. Alternatively, emotional labour can serve as a means to satisfy the customer, who has the option to change to another service agent if he/she is not satisfied with the service (e.g. flight attendants). Moreover, sentimental work can support this attempt.

For the underlying study, the authors concentrated on an atypical sector of service: service engineers. Engineers in the mechanical industry offer diverse services to the customer. Their work consists mainly of troubleshooting machines. Further, they bring machines into service, do maintenance work, are responsible when machines are moved, work at the service hotline, advise the customer regarding machines, and do trainings on new machines. In short, service engineers are responsible for solving a problem for the customer. But in contrast to other services that are associated with emotional labour, service engineers are not primarily solving a problem of the customer as a person (e.g. hairdresser, service in a restaurant) but the fault of a machine.

In the case of service engineering, the customer nevertheless highly depends on the work of the service engineer and there is not an easy way to switch to another service worker if the customer is not satisfied with the service. Because service workers are often highly specialised, their knowledge cannot be easily transferred to others. This leads to a specific dependency, and is another reason not to change the service personnel. Mostly, the problem of the machine or technical system goes along with logistic challenges in the production line and enormous costs. Then, it might be more

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important to solve the technical or mechanical problem quickly, instead of receiving special social service.

Case study: emotional labour of service engineers

Research questions

Considering the similarities and differences in typical service areas and taking into account the above outlined theoretical considerations regarding the individual's perspective of emotional labour, the case study is meant to answer the following questions for the mechanical industry:

- What do organisations expect from their service engineers?
- What do customers expect from service engineers?
- What do service engineers think is expected from them?
- What are service engineers' self-concepts and attitudes towards their work?
- Is emotional labour required and displayed by service engineers? For which purposes?
- Does emotional labour, carried out by service engineers, differ from typical service professions?

Methodology

Studies on emotional labour use a wide variety of methodological approaches. It started with a qualitative approach by Hochschild (1983) continued by e.g. Rafaeli and Sutton (1991), or Tolich (1993). After that, a strong tendency to refer to quantitative approaches by using standardized questionnaires can be observed, especially in Germany, in order to study the consequences of emotional labour (Seery & Corrigall, 2009; Zapf, 2002). Nevertheless, other approaches have been applied as well. These include (i) ethnographic accounts (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008), (ii) narrative analysis (Kirk & Wall, 2010), (iii) combinations of the above, such as nonparticipant field observations and in-depth interviews (Hill & Bradley, 2010), or (iv) multimethodological approaches (e.g. combinations of observations from patient case studies, ward rounds and family conferences, open ended interviews with focus groups, Sorensen & Iedema, 2009).

For our own study, we applied a qualitative methodological approach: qualitative interviews. This approach enables us to study the individual experience of emotional labour, the strategies, and role expectations (see also Coolican, 2004). It examines the topic from three perspectives: service professionals, their employers and their customers. This should enable us to get a detailed view on the interaction of the service engineer with the customer.

We used an interview guideline (see Table 1). A loose structure of the questionnaire enabled the interviewer and the interviewee to put emphasis on individual topics and to bring in new aspects (see Flick, 1996). The interviews were recorded by tape and literally transcribed afterwards.

For the analysis of the interviews, we refer to the qualitative content analysis of Mayring (1995), which was further developed by Gläser and Laudel (2006). Thereby, a

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category system is used. The categories resulted from theoretical analysis – and they can be modified or amplified by new findings. In our case, such categories are, e.g. factors that could influence the process of regulating emotions, such as role understandings of relevant social groups. For most categories, information provided by our interviewees is compared and interpreted by looking at other important statements. If possible, causal mechanisms are identified.

Table 1: Interview guideline

Topic 1	Professional background of participant
Topic 2	Analysis of working activities of service engineers
Topic 3	Requirements of service work
Topic 4	Way of contact and interaction with customers
Topic 5	Emotional labour, strategies in the interaction with customers
Topic 6	Reflection on competencies and trainings of service engineers

In total, twenty interviews were conducted: ten interviews with service engineers, five with service managers, and five with customers in different mechanical engineering companies in Germany. The emphasis was put on service engineers in order to find out more about their self-concept, work routine and their emotional labour.

Table 2: Information on interviewees

Pseudonym	Organisation 1-10	Number of employees within department	Number of training days (social skills)
Taylor	1	35	4
Robinson	1	35	8
Wright	1	35	4
Thompson	1	35	4
Brown	2	30	-
Green	2	30	-
Hall	2	30	-
Williams	3	7	-
Wood	3	7	-
Clarke	3	7	-
Johnson	4	60	2
Jackson	4	60	2
Mitchell	4	60	2
Walker	5	5	4
Smith	1	n.a.	n.a.
Bennett	1	n.a.	n.a.
Klein	2	n.a.	n.a.
Miller	3	n.a.	n.a.
Barker	4	n.a.	n.a.
Jones	4	n.a.	n.a.

The participating companies covered medium and large sized companies. Most had no or only short training modules for the interaction with customers (see Table 2). One company started to train all service engineers in the interaction with the customer (e.g.

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via role plays) for several days. None of the companies had formal service guidelines on customer interactions. In one company, general rules about customer interaction existed.

The service engineers participating in the study were all men (no women were working in this area at the companies).1 They had been working between six months and 17 years in this area. Details are outlined in table 2 with pseudonyms for the interviewees.

Although this study includes three perspectives, our study can only serve as a case study because of the small number of interviews. Furthermore, due to practical reasons the service managers chose the service engineers who were interviewed. Since the working schedule of service engineers is strongly influenced by unpredictable events (i.e. faults of machines) only those engineers available at the time were allocated for interviews. In that respect, our study presents exemplifying results that could provide impulses for further research. It does not claim a generalisation of the results.

Results

In order to get an idea about the relevance, validity, and specific concept of emotional labour of service engineers it is helpful to ask which roles service engineers are supposed to take. Firstly, the article sheds light on the perceived role and expected emotional labour of service engineers by the organisation. Next, the perspective of customers is described, and finally, attention is drawn to the perception of service engineers. The quotations used in the following discussion are generalizable for the conducted interviews unless stated otherwise.

What organisations expect from their service engineers

One key expectation set by the organisation is *efficiency*. In return, the organisation offers supporting working conditions that include back office support and flexible regulations with regard to time sovereignty and decision autonomy.

Because of the freedom which is granted to service engineers and due to the high-cost products they have to care for, the organisation expects strong *loyalty* from the service engineers and a professional, socially competent behaviour.

> "The service engineer has to be loyal; he has to show a good behaviour to the customers" (Mr. Taylor, service manager).

In this context loyalty means not to abuse the granted freedom for personal use/interests, but to adhere to the rules set by the employer and representing the employer's interests. This is particularly important as service engineers work at the customers where most of the time they cannot be controlled directly.

Loyalty can also include the expectation that the service engineer acts as a "detective" and "inspector" himself. He is expected to determine whom/what caused the machine's breakdown. If the machine broke down due to a constructional fault, the

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1 The ratio of women in engineering is in general low – only 16% of all employees in the mechanical engineering industry were women in 2010. While the service industry is a female dominated business (56.5% of all employees in the service sector are women, Statistisches Jahrbuch, 2011, p. 95), this is not the case for service engineering.

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construction company pays for the service; if not, the customer pays. It is easier to draw conclusions if the customer informs the service engineer extensively about what had happened. Hence, the service engineer needs to establish a cooperative relationship with the customer, knowing that trust and openness can be disadvantageous for the customer. Loyalty to one's employer ensures that the service engineer does not concede the customer any advantages at the expenses of the organisation.

All in all, employers of service engineers expect loyalty and customer orientation. However, there are no specific expectations expressed by managers regarding emotional labour.

What customers expect from service engineers

The link between customer and company is the service engineer. He represents the company to the customers and is responsible for the communication between the two. Adams (1976, p. 1177) refers to boundary position jobs that work at the borders of the company as "face of the organisation". In fact, Adams points at sales representatives and purchasing agents. In the case of industrial services, service engineers seem to take an even more important role between customer and supplier. The relationship with the customer starts with the buying of a machine and lasts until it is scrapped.

When customers are asked about their expectations from service engineers the picture is quite homogenous. For all questioned customers it is most important to get an immediate service and a technically competent service engineer who solves the problem. Furthermore, customers hope to receive extreme time flexibility – the service engineer should be able to come instantly and stay until the machine works.

> "If the service engineer comes the same day, it is highly appreciated" (Mr. Bennett, customer).

If time consuming modifications of the machine have to be carried out, e.g. for installation of prevention devices, this should be done at weekends.

> "If I could plan this, I would schedule it for the weekend. The company has already done such a thing several times. I found this very positive and consider it to be the future. Because then you can use the rest of leisure time to repair the machines" (Mr. Bennett, customer).

Time flexibility is sometimes expected without consideration of human recreational needs or regulations. Time sovereignty is ignored and work is organised according to organisational needs but without reference to leisure time of staff. The human being is not seen anymore, only the machine and production line. The service engineer should be available irrespective of the hours he has worked before and should stay as long as necessary:

> "We or I have started at 10 a.m. today and went home at 3 a.m. in the night. (…) Everything went wrong. And he [the service engineer] stayed with me and (…) worked so hard (…). He stayed until we solved the problem and he did not say that he needed to go home, although he could have said that and probably should have said due to regulations" (Ms. Miller, customer).

The described situation may have caused a role conflict for the service engineer: on the one hand, he is supposed to exhibit loyal behaviour to his employer, which also includes working efficiently and specifically for his responsibilities, while on the other

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hand, the customer demands a service orientation which may exceed what the service engineer is allowed to do. In this case, he delivered service tasks well above usual working hours and possibly breached legal regulations.

As stated before, besides time flexibility and immediate availability, technical know-how is very important for customers. Because service engineers need to possess highly specialised knowledge, customers feel dependent on them.

> "(…) as a customer you depend in such situations pretty much on the service engineer. Because, if you do not know enough about the machines, and that is often given, this knowledge is not within your company but in the supplier's company, you do not have any choice" (Ms. Miller, customer).

Apart from the main duty to solve the technical problem, the customer hopes to get more information about his machine. This may reduce the knowledge gap between the customer and the supplier. For example, the customer expects the service engineer to provide technical advisory service.

> "I wish to speak to the service engineer. We always do it like that. (…) It is very important not only to see the recent crash (…), but to consider the whole constitution of the machine. (…) That is what I expect from a service engineer. He should not try to minimize the recent failure, but he should take the whole technical system into consideration" (Mr. Bennett, customer).

All interviewed customers talk a lot about immediate and indefinite availability of the service as well as about technical know-how. In contrast to this, they do not expect much with respect to soft skills. If they are mentioned at all, they remain at the level of "normal social behaviour" (Mr. Bennett, customer). It is even explicitly stated that socially correct behaviour is *not* primarily important.

> "They [social competences] are not necessarily required. (…) He [the service engineer] should just avoid making any bad impression in this respect" (Ms. Miller, customer).

It is interesting to see that the one customer, who explained time flexibility to be of highest priority, explicitly excuses emotional reactions that might interfere with display rules:

> "If he [the service engineer] had been working for another customer the last 12 hours and he is now on the way home, wishing to lay down and sleep, (…) if he is called and asked to go to another customer without a break (…) suppose he gives in, and says something stupid, that is normal, since someone can overreact. That is absolutely normal" (Mr. Bennett, customer).

To put it differently, the customer expects the service engineer to work more than 12 hours without a break and in turn he does not expect emotional labour.

Nevertheless customers understand that service engineers need to cope with emotions of staff, who work with the broken machine.

> "Certainly, he [the service engineer] is always the man at the front and if the machines goes frequently wrong, then definitely he has to watch out, that he keeps a positive mood at the customer's" (Mr. Smith, customer).

In this case, a combination of sentimental work and emotional labour could be necessary, but respective expectations are very low and stay rather vague.

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What service engineers think is expected from them

Service engineers perceive role expectations similar to those described by the service managers above. They know they are expected to be loyal. One recurringly described role is the mentioned "detective", when the customer tries to veil that he might be responsible for the breakdown.

> "Normally you don't know the customer, that's why you ought to know (...) is it really true what he is telling you or is it just a tale? (...) so you will try to get as much information as you can get beforehand. And to weigh them against each other; it might be that (...) the Philippino (...) responsible for the cleaning tells you totally different things than the chief engineer does" (Mr. Jackson, service engineer).

In case of doubt, a service engineer asks different people who might not even be in charge of the machine. Yet, asking different people can cause distrust and conflict among staff working at the customer's company and it can deteriorate the relationship between staff and service engineer, especially on the long run. Thus, the employer organisation can demand roles from their service engineers which bring them into uncomfortable situations:

> "(...) the failure only occurs during the night shift. (...) someone, who has no experience will fail, because he won't find a failure. (...) some failures don't even exist; I dare say you need knowledge of human nature. Yes, you have to question that: 'Is the salary not paid on schedule?' And so you talk to the people and you try to get in discussion with them, then most people are just glad that they can give their anger free reign. And possibly the problem solves all by itself" (Mr. Thompson, service engineer).

This case can be even more delicate for the service engineer as the technical problem is caused by anger – either because of an emotionally caused lack of concentration or by intended sabotage. Of course, the service engineer knows that if he made his result public, the person in question could lose his job. Potential underreporting could stem from the wish to remain loyal to other individuals – instead of being loyal to the organisation.

Self-concept of service engineers and their attitudes towards their work

Service engineers characterize themselves (like a collective self, see Hogg & Vaughan, 2008) as engineers – and not primarily as service staff. They define the main content of their job by technical and methodical knowledge required for solving the problem with the machines of the customers.

> "Well, you grow with the job. (...) The technical side is the most important, the other stuff – well, the technical side you will learn as well with the years" (Mr. Robinson, service engineer).

The work they fulfil is highly relevant for the customer as a broken machine often causes a shutdown of the production. This fact is pricy for the customer and therefore the service engineer finds himself under pressure to solve the customer's problem as quickly as possible. The service engineers react to problems, which may differ by case.

Service engineers mostly solve technical problems at the machine – and not at a desk in an office of their employer. Therefore, they have to drive to the customer, where they work unsupervised. All interviewees describe this fact as a very positive aspect of their job.

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> "More or less, that you are your own boss. As long as you do your work properly no one wants anything from you. There is no superior breathing down your neck" (Mr. Thompson, service engineer).

This means that service engineers can work autonomously and independently. They are not under direct social control of colleagues or superiors; the only one who can exert control is the customer. Yet, service engineers mostly have a knowledge advantage as described before, and customers greatly depend on their service.

It becomes quite obvious that these attributes are different to other service tasks in hierarchical settings which imply e.g. caring for others, team working, and limited career perspectives. The quoted attributes could present a work setting particularly preferred by men as described by Croson and Gneezy (2009): Men are more risk-affine (with respect to high stake decisions) as well as more interested to work on their own or in a competitive setting. For the interviewed service engineers it seems to be positive to work alone without any cooperation with team colleagues, to make decisions on their own, to be on the road a lot, to have time autonomy, and to have to cope with heavy physically challenging tasks. They are the "saviours" who possess the knowledge and power to solve a severe cost-intensive problem.

The described aspects might lead to the assumption that emotions are not primarily relevant in this area of service. Yet: Is this actually the case? What is the service workers' perspective?

The perceived importance of emotion regulation of service engineers at work

The interviews with service engineers give an interesting picture of the relationship between service engineers and customer and through this, how service engineers work (emotionally) with their customers. For example, service engineers describe that the regulation of emotions is foremost necessary to encourage the customer to provide information about the machine.

> "One has to be able to calm him [the customer] down, if he is nervous and upset. One has to, that's actually very important, (...) many people have a kind of a problem, they want to assure that they are not the culprit. This means, in case of doubt, that he [the customer] retains some information" (Mr. Wood, service engineer).

This description shows the irelevance of sentimental work (Strauss et al., 1980) as the interviewee emphasises the importance of influencing the customer's emotions. It can be assumed that service engineers also use emotional labour for sentimental work.

This shows the above mentioned other side of the coin. Not only is the customer depending on the service engineer, but the service engineer is depending on the customer as well. At this point a differentiating picture of the customer is required to be introduced. On the one hand, the customer can be the firm/owner/business leader. On the other hand, the interaction can be with the worker(s) who work(s) with the machine that has to be repaired. In that case, the staff might be reluctant to give information if they have handled the machine in an incorrect way and they might try to avoid their company paying for the service supplied by the engineer.

With respect to the future interaction with the customer a service engineer might see the need to establish trust and enhance customer retention (see Zapf, 2002). Emotional labour is required by the service engineer when the customer is upset, disturbs,

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or distracts the service engineer from his work, or when the customer puts pressure on the service engineer because the customer wants his machine to be repaired as soon as possible. The service engineer has to deal with the sentiments he meets at the customer's workplace.

> "We are sort of the first contact person. This means we often serve the role of a buffer. Meaning that we basically absorb the moods, sentiments, the – yeah – aggressions, the justified aggressions of the customer" (Mr. Mitchell, service engineer).

Again, the interviewee describes a way of emotional regulation which can embrace emotional labour of the service engineer on the one side and sentimental work on the other side. The professional has not only to deal with his own feelings, but also with the customer's emotions.

> "(...) you must not let – how shall I put it – control you (...). I will make myself mad, if I think all the time: 'Oh, oh, oh within one hour 100 000 Euro are wasted here.' Due to this I will not be faster, due to this I am not able to do my work any better. I have to concentrate on my work and I have to tell myself: I will do the best I can as fast as I can" (Mr. Wood, service engineer).

The description could also reflect internalised organisational expectations. These expectations unleash pressure which can cause severe distress. Concentrating on specific aspects and emotional labour can help coping.

> "Yes, well, sometimes you have to wear a mask, because you are actually upset" (Mr. Clarke, service engineer).

In this example, surface acting is the strategy of work. This becomes particularly important when customers react impatiently, nervous, or angry.

> "It happens frequently that you would love to catch him [the customer] and perhaps put him in the next cupboard and close the door. When you have finished [your work] take him out again" (Mr. Hall, service engineer).

The service engineer might feel the necessity to react politely and friendly, even though the customer is aggressive. And in turn, it would enhance the situation if the customer's emotional state gets better.

One service engineer describes how he uses the strategy of empathy as a method of deep acting, in order to dissociate from the situation (see Haubl & Rastetter, 2000).

> "Well, I try to put myself in the customer's position. What kind of problem does he have? How would you react? And, oh, yes, okay! I would probably feel the same, yes. I mean, I would be peeved as much as he is, be peeved or get mad. (...) And then, yes, you try to filter it. What kind of problem does he have? (…) how can you handle him, so that he will calm down, so that he will be realistic again" (Mr. Green, service engineer).

If the strategy of empathy above worked, it could relax the situation and help to build a positive atmosphere, so that he can start working on the machine.

Empathy serves as a means to stick to certain display rules. It can prevent from emotional dissonance, which describes the contrast between felt emotion and displayed emotion. This is an important aspect as researchers have described emotional dissonance as one of the most demanding aspects of emotional labour, fostering signs of exhaustion (e.g. Zapf, 2002). Morris and Feldman (1996) suggest that emotional dissonance is more difficult to display and therefore more labour intense.

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Sometimes emotional dissonance does not only occur when a service engineer is *unable* to be empathic and has to control his feelings, as described above. It can be provoked *due to* empathy as described by the next example.

> "Or, if I notice at the customer's how a company treats its employees, then I feel sometimes – yes, it is a mentally exploiting company – then I don't feel comfortable. I feel, there is a discomfort" (Mr. Thompson, service engineer).

The service engineer goes on to explain that he would try not to let this discomfort become visible, but try to remain neutral. Thus, he suppresses his real feelings of discomfort, showing the appearance requested by the organisation. Emotional labour is used to adapt to the circumstances and to engage in the service engineer's role as detective and not so much as technician, so that he can find the reason for the bad production.

> "By creating the impression, that he is doing correctly whatever he is doing. (...) I have to be calm myself (...) even if he is doing something wrong (…), if I told him immediately: 'Every child can do this!' In this instant he would get even more nervous" (Mr. Wood, service engineer).

Again, emotional labour goes along with sentimental work. Both can improve the cooperation and speed up the technical solution.

Conclusion

The purpose of the case study presented was to find out firstly, whether emotional labour is also part of rather atypical professions like service engineering in the mechanical industry, and secondly, which role expectations are linked to service engineers.

The interviews with service managers and customers show that neither the organisation nor the customers have specific expectations regarding emotional labour. While service managers – as central representatives of the employing organisation – expect the service engineer to serve the customer with a reasonable level of socially correct behaviour and to perform the task efficiently, the most important expectation is loyalty to the company. The latter is achieved by an internalisation of organisational goals. Thus, the customer is served at his convenience while the interest of one's own company has a high(er) priority. The way in which socially correct behaviour should be displayed remains rather implicit.

The customers put emphasis on a flexible service engineer, who works any time (i.e. until late, on weekends), solves their problems quickly and advises them on further potential issues with the machine. To the customer, emotions seem to be of little importance. On the contrary: a socially incorrect behaviour is even excused as long as the technical problem is solved. Therefore, it can be concluded, that customers are rather unaware of the "service work" which service engineers perform. Considering the statements of the organisations' representatives and the customers, we could speak of service without emotional labour –which differs from classical service areas. Yet, the picture shifts when the perspective of the service engineers is included.

Service engineers refer to themselves as engineers not as service staff. Their work is dominated by finding a technical solution for a problem of a machine, which varies from product to product. Still they require and display emotional labour, and they try to influence emotions of others (sentimental work). Emotional regulation is a means

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to cooperate with the customer and to build a relationship with them. Although this is not acknowledged by customers, it is necessary, in order to get the required information to solve the fault of the machine.

It was interesting to observe during data collection that some of the service engineers were rather reluctant to talk about emotions at work. They emphasised that their work is technical, and not communication based. Maybe this could be explained with reference to Bishop et al. (2009, p. 22): The culture of masculinity influences behaviour and attitudes towards work. Status and superiority are not expressed by "the servile nature of customer service work", but rather manual labour. Service work is related to showing emotions, which is perceived as non-masculine (see also Strongman & White, 2008).

As outlined above, other service engineers describe in quite some detail their strategies of emotional labour with the customer and emphasise the fact that emotional labour is part of the job. Those service engineers were trained in service delivery and the interaction with the customer. Training, whether offered by the organisation or taken privately, might have influenced their attitude and thus, their way of reflecting on and handling emotions at work.

Compared to other "typical" service professions (e.g. flight attendants, nurses), which are dominated by the interaction and performance in front of the customer, the work of service engineers is dominated by the physical and analytical part of the work. Nevertheless, service engineers depend on the customer and his information to solve the problem. And, the ability to build a relationship with the customer influences the service experience of the customer (Czepiel, 1990). Yet, service engineers are just as much in a challenging position as flight attendants or nurses. On the one hand, they have to satisfy the requirements of their employing organisation. On the other hand, they are confronted with the customer, who might be in a bad mood or not willing to cooperate, or who expects investigative duties to find out (personal) grievances in the customer's organisation.

A fact which supports the display of emotional labour by service engineers is autonomy at work. There are no specific rules how to display emotions, so service engineers are more flexible in their behaviour. Godwyn (2006) points out how autonomy influences the way emotional labour is perceived. Autonomy can foster confidence and satisfaction.

Although our findings are limited to a case study, it has become obvious, that service engineers perform emotional labour in an atypical environment. This finding is interesting as it offers a more complex view on industrial service work, which has so far been underrepresented within the research area of emotional labour.

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