The toll of service climate on employees: an emotional labor perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – The existing research on service climate emphasizes its benefits for customers, employees and organizational outcomes. Service climate translates into organizational expectations from service employees to continuously show appropriate emotions when engaging with clients. However, these expectations may also take a toll on employees, who need to regulate their emotions using emotional labor strategies in order to conform to the organization's expectations. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between the service climate and employees' use of emotional labor strategies, and investigate how service employees' service knowledge, skills, abilities and other attributes (KSAOs) affect this relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – In two separate studies, one with a sample including 100 nurses working in 15 wards, and the other comprised of 244 luxury hotel chain employees working in 39 departments, participants were surveyed about their perceptions of the service climate and their use of emotional labor strategies. In addition, each participant's direct manager assessed his/her service KSAOs.

Findings – Results demonstrated a positive association between the service climate and the use of surface emotional labor strategies for employees who had limited service KSAOs.

Practical implications – Organizations may choose to hire service employees based on their service-related KSAOs and develop training and development programs for those who have fewer capabilities in these areas. In addition, organizations may want to rethink the traditional climate-induced emotional display rules and emphasize instead more authentic service encounters in order to lessen the toll that service climate takes on certain employees.

Originality/value – While service climate depicts the core values and beliefs of the organization about service, and helps employees to translate them into behaviors that promote high service performance, the current paper points to a potential toll it may have on employees well-being due to their use of surface emotional labor strategies.

Keywords Emotional labour, Service climate, Service KASOs

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Service providers play a major role in face-to-face service encounters (Bowen, 2016). Despite the digitalization of customer services in recent years (e.g. Hagberg *et al.*, 2016), in real-life service encounters, service providers' added value contribution and "uniquely human approach" are still important (Bolton *et al.*, 2014; Bowen, 2016). In order to enhance the quality of service encounters, organizations have tried to improve their service climate because studies have established positive relationships between this climate and organizational and customer outcomes (e.g. Schneider *et al.*, 2013, for a review; Hong *et al.*, 2013, for a meta-analysis). Nevertheless, the potential negative consequences of service climate for the service providers have received less attention. In the current study, we address this gap in the literature and propose that service climate may also exact an emotional toll on service employees.

Service climate refers to employees' shared perceptions about the extent to which the organization emphasizes service quality throughout the production, delivery and consumption of services (Schneider *et al.*, 2013). Service climate provides meaning and implicit indicators, mental models for what constitutes appropriate service, and a frame of reference for the service behaviors and emotions on which employees should focus (Bowen and Schneider, 2014). Thus, service climate reflects the core values and beliefs of the organization about service (Horwitz and Neville, 1996), and helps employees translate them into behaviors that promote positive service encounters (Salanova *et al.*, 2005; Schneider *et al.*, 1998; Sirianni *et al.*, 2013). Service climate translates into organizational expectations from service employees to behave toward customers in a certain way, such as serving with a smile and being cheerful and courteous, and showing appropriate emotions such as appreciation and gratitude (Grandey *et al.*, 2015; Morris and Feldman, 1996; Subramony and Pugh, 2015).

However, what if the employees' emotions do not match the organization's emotional expectations? In such cases when there is a conflict between organizational expectations and individuals' actual emotions, the organization is likely to prevail (Hochschild, 1983). Employees need to manage or regulate their emotions in order to conform to the organization's expectations during customer encounters. This process is referred to as emotional labor (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005; Grandey *et al.*, 2013; Hochschild, 1983).

Specifically, employees may use two strategies to regulate their emotions while interacting with customers. The first is surface acting, which involves falsifying required emotions and suppressing felt emotions; employees simulate emotions that are not actually felt while showing the required emotions by changing their expressions, gestures or tone of voice. In surface acting, the display of the emotion or its public appearance, not the emotion itself, is altered (Grandey *et al.*, 2013; Grandey and Melloy, 2017). As a result, the emotional experience and the emotional expression are discordant (Grandey *et al.*, 2013; Totterdell and Holman, 2003). The second strategy is deep acting, which involves making efforts to actually feel and express the required emotions (Grandey *et al.*, 2013; Grandey and Melloy, 2017; Hochschild, 1983). The goal of deep acting lies in aligning one's required and true feelings. This is achieved by changing not only one's physical expressions but also one's inner feelings using imagination or recalling past cheerful experiences to generate appropriate positive emotions.

While the very reason for using emotional labor strategies is to enhance service performance, a recent meta-analysis has shown that the relationship between emotional labor and worker outcomes such as burnout and health is consistent: the use of emotional labor strategies is positively associated with negative personal consequences (Mesmer-Magnus *et al.*, 2011). In addition, as humanistic theories claim, authenticity is a basic human need which, when not satisfied, leads to losing touch with one's true self and considerable despair (Yagil and Medler-Liraz, 2013). Thus, the lack of authenticity of a service provider using emotional labor strategies has the potential to harm both him/herself as well as the service encounter (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005; Grandey, 2003; Morris and Feldman, 1996). Indeed, much of the literature on emotional labor has been devoted to the consequences of using different emotional labor strategies, highlighting their negative effects. In the current study, we take a different approach and examine a possible antecedent of emotional labor – the service climate – and investigate whether this antecedent is associated with the use of emotional labor strategies by all or only specific employees.

This paper makes three potential contributions to the literature. First, Hong *et al.*'s (2013) meta-analysis concentrated on the outcomes of service climate for the employees, such as employee satisfaction, commitment, OCB and service performance. Further research has expanded our knowledge about the relationship between service climate and these employee outcomes (e.g. Eldor and Shoshani, 2017; Gabler *et al.*, 2018; Mathies and Ngo, 2014;

Walumbwa *et al.*, 2019) and investigated the effects of the service climate on other employee outcomes such as engagement, positive emotions toward customers and a reduction in anger (see Table I for a summary of the literature on employee outcomes of service climate). However, most of this research has focused on the positive consequences of such a climate, while fewer studies explored its potential toll on employees. The few studies that did look at its potential negative results examined employee turnover and burnout (e.g. Carrasco *et al.*, 2011, 2014; Kang *et al.*, 2018) but overlooked the potential mechanisms underlying these negative outcomes. To address this gap in the literature, this study investigates such a potential mechanism – employees' use of emotional labor strategies. The increasing ubiquity of organizations that focus on service climate to improve service encounters, despite its potentially negative consequences, creates the need for more nuanced research to better understand the specific mechanisms that may explain how and why each of the consequences of the service climate occur.

Second, we also suggest that not all employees may pay an emotional toll due to the service climate. Multilevel research that allows the investigation of organizational-level practices and a variety of employee knowledge, skills, abilities and other attributes (KSAOs) is essential for understanding who suffers or benefits from the service climate (Subramony and Pugh, 2015). Hence, we suggest an exploration of the relationship between the organization's service climate and the employees' service-relevant KSAOs with regard to their influence on the employees' use of emotional labor strategies. We do so using the emotional demands-abilities (ED-A) fit model (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2016), which claims that employee performance is a result of the extent to which there is a fit between the requirements (i.e. demands) of the job and the employee's KSAOs.

Positive vs negative outcome	Type of outcome	Measured outcome	Example references
Positive outcomes	Behavior	Service performance	Hong *et al.*'s (2013) meta-analysis Walumbwa *et al.* (2019) Mathies and Ngo (2014) Mechinda and Patterson (2011)
		OCB	Hong *et al.*'s (2013) meta-analysis
	Attitude	Commitment	Hong *et al.*'s (2013) meta-analysis
		Engagement	Kang and Busser (2018) Eldor and Shoshani (2017) Barnes and Collier (2013), Carrasco *et al.* (2011) Carrasco *et al.* (2014) Bowen and Schneider (2014)
		Job satisfaction	Hong *et al.*'s (2013) meta-analysis Eldor and Shoshani (2017) Mathies and Ngo (2014) Gabler *et al.* (2018)
	Emotion	Positive emotions toward customers	Lam *et al.* (2010) Carrasco *et al.* (2011)
		Anger (less anger)	Jerger and Wirtz (2017)
Negative outcomes	Behavior	Turnover	Walumbwa *et al.* (2019) Kang and Busser (2018) Eldor and Shoshani (2017) Kang *et al.* (2018)
		Sabotage	Lee and Ok (2014)
	Emotion	Burnout	Carrasco *et al.* (2011) Carrasco *et al.* (2014)

Table I.
A summary of the literature on employee outcomes of service climate since Hong *et al.*'s (2013) meta-analysis

Finally, the current paper contributes to the service literature, which calls for further understanding of the "management of services including the outcomes of differences in service strategy and delivery across industries" (Pugh and Subramony, 2016, p. 2). By focusing on emotional labor as a consequence of service encounters in two different industries, a professional service industry – the health care industry – and a consumer service industry – the hospitality industry – we expand the potential generalizability of the results to extremely different contexts.

Literature review and hypotheses

Service climate and the use of emotional labor strategies

Organizational climate has traditionally been defined as "the shared perceptions of and the meaning attached to the policies, practices, and procedures employees experience" (Schneider *et al.*, 2013, p. 362; see also Bowen and Schneider, 2014). These perceptions inform employees about what is expected of them, rewarded and supported in delivering customer service (Schneider *et al.*, 1998). This traditional definition of climate is basically transactional in nature. In other words, employees conform to climate-induced behaviors and emotions because they believe it will elicit favorable reaction from the organization (Naveh and Katz-Navon, 2015). They adopt what they perceive to be the expected behavior not because they necessarily believe it is the best way to behave, but because they expect to gain specific rewards or approval and avoid specific punishments or disapproval (Schneider *et al.*, 2013). The service climate signals what service-focused affective behaviors are expected and rewarded, and promotes the display rules and norms regarding which emotions should be expressed and which should be suppressed (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2011; Morris and Feldman, 1996). However, complying with these expectations may result in inauthentic emotional expression (Kraak and Holmqvist, 2017; Yagil and Mendler-Liraz, 2013), when employees utilize surface emotional labor strategies to express emotions that are expected but not necessarily felt.

However, Naveh and Katz-Navon (2015) suggested an additional meaning to the concept of organizational climate that treats the climate as valuable by itself, separate from its instrumental benefits. In this approach, climate has a transformational influence on employees, who internalize the organization's values and norms driven by the climate. The climate signals the expected values, behaviors and emotions to the employees; as a result, the employees internalize the organization's values. Such changes in values and internalization occur when individuals behave and feel according to what is supported and expected within the organization because the content of the induced behavior or emotion—the ideas and values of which the climate is composed—is intrinsically rewarding. Individuals adopt the behavior or emotion required by the climate because it becomes congruent with their own value system and they truly believe in its merit. They behave or feel in the expected way because they have internalized the organization's values and they actually believe in the value priorities set by the organization. Specifically, the internalization of the service climate's emotional expectations is likely to result in the adjustment of felt emotions in order to display the required emotions. This process involves employees' using deep emotional labor strategies.

Hence, whether employees perceive the service climate as transactional or transformational, i.e. the employee complies with the service emotional expectation in order to gain rewards or because he/she has internalized the core service values, service climate is likely to increase the use of both surface and deep emotional labor strategies. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

> *H1.* There is a positive association between service climate and employees' use of both surface and deep emotional labor strategies.

Employees' service KSAOs
One question arising from the relationship explored above is whether all employees use emotional labor strategies or pay an emotional toll due to the service climate's expectations, or whether there is a buffer that might enable some employees to cope better with the emotional demands resulting from the service climate. We suggest that employees' service KSAOs might act as that kind of buffer, enabling some of them to cope with the emotional demands of the service climate's expectations without resorting to the use of emotional labor strategies.

Service KSAOs refer to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other individual capabilities (e.g. personality traits) that are required from service employees in order to provide good service. Service KSAOs have become increasingly important during service encounters because the definition of service has expanded to encompass the application of specialized KSAOs through deeds, processes, and performance that benefit another entity (e.g. the customer; Vargo and Lusch, 2004)[1]. Such specialized KSAOs include communication skills and abilities such as attentiveness (i.e. showing interest and empathy in conversations) and expressiveness (i.e. the use of gestures or humor to emphasize a point during interactions; Spitzberg, 1983, 2015).

A match between the employees' KSAOs and the emotional demands of the job is necessary for employees to provide good service (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2016). Based on the ED-A fit model (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2016), which is derived from the demand-ability fit model, congruence between the requirements (i.e. demands) of the job and employees' KSAOs is necessary in order to perform their job. This fit or lack thereof is also related to employees' well-being, assessed in terms of their burnout, tension at work, lack of authenticity, satisfaction of their needs and performance (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2016). In our context, emotion-related display rules, prescribed by the service climate, reflect the job demands faced by the service providers, and KSAOs are the service KSAOs we described above (Hwang and Han, 2019; Lavelle *et al.*, 2019).

Increasing service climate expectations that put more and more emphasis on constantly providing excellent service are essentially incremental emotional demands from the service provider. Such emotional demands require increasing amounts of effort and thus the risk of exhaustion (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007), making it harder for employees to display the expected positive emotions. Nevertheless, implicit in much of the work describing emotional job demands, such as those required by a high service climate, is the notion that some individuals can handle emotional demands more easily than others (Adams *et al.*, 2006; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). The idea is that individuals vary in their levels of KSAOs and that those with more KSAOs can utilize them when attempting to meet the emotional demands of their work.

When the individual's service KSAOs match the emotional demands of the climate, there is an ED-A fit (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2016). Such a fit means that even though the demands are high, the employee has the needed KSAOs to cope with them and is more capable of following the emotional display rules required by the climate. In such cases, employees are less likely to feel a dissonance between the expected and the felt emotions. Thus, an ED-A fit should result in less need to use emotional labor strategies. On the other hand, a low fit between the emotional demands of the service climate and an individual's KSAOs, i.e. a situation in which there is a high level of service climate and a low level of individual KSAOs, increases the likelihood of emotional dissonance. In such cases the employee does not have the emotional abilities to meet the incremental emotional demands expected by the climate. The emotional dissonance increases the employee's need to actively regulate his/her emotions during customer encounters, meaning having to use surface and deep emotional labor strategies. Thus, we hypothesize the following:

H2. Individual service KSAOs moderate the association between the service climate and the employee's use of emotional labor strategies such that, when the level of an individual's service KSAOs is high, the relationship between the service climate and the use of both surface and deep emotional labor strategies is attenuated.

Methods

We tested these hypotheses using samples from two different industries, a professional service industry – the health care industry –and a consumer service industry – the hospitality industry.

Study 1

Sample and procedure

Emotional labor occurs in a wide variety of industries and occupations, one of which is the caring professions (e.g. nurses, doctors and other health care workers, as social workers; Berry and Bendapudi, 2007; Humphrey *et al.*, 2008). These professions require displays of sympathy and concern due to the stressful events such as illness, injury or personal problems that the recipients of such care face on a daily basis. We first tested our hypotheses using a sample of nurses in a medium-size public health care center in Israel. In sum, 100 nurses working in 15 wards participated in the study. The hospital's management agreed to the administration of this study within all hospital wards, and the research unit within the health care center helped with the distribution of questionnaires to the nurses. The latter were randomly approached by the research center staff and asked to fill out an anonymous questionnaire regarding their perceptions of the ward's service climate and their emotional labor strategies. The research center staff took note of who answered the questionnaire and added a number to the questionnaire to match it to a particular nurse. In addition, the head nurses of the 15 wards included in the research were asked to assess the service KSAOs of all of the nurses who answered the independent variables questionnaire on a separate short questionnaire. Using the number added to each nurse's questionnaire form, the research center staff then matched the nurse's and the head nurse's questionnaires, eliminating any form of respondent identification.

Measures. Service climate was assessed using a seven-item scale adapted from Bowen and Schneider (2014), based on Schneider *et al.*'s (1998) original scale. Items were rated on a scale from 1 ("Totally disagree") to 5 ("Totally agree"). Example items are: "How would you rate efforts to measure and track the quality of service in your ward?" and "How would you rate the recognition and rewards employees in your ward receive for the delivery of superior service?" While we initially used Schneider *et al.*'s (1998) original seven items, a factor analysis and reliability checks resulted in the deletion of two items. Cronbach's α equals 0.80. We aggregated this variable to the ward level after obtaining adequate agreement measures (average $R_{wg} = 0.82$).

Surface emotional labor was assessed using the two items included in Grandey's (2003) scale. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which, when providing service to patients, "I try to hide the negative feelings I have towards the patients" and "I try to hide my anger towards the patients" on a scale from 1 ("Not at all") to 5 ("Very much so"). Cronbach's α equals 0.90.

Deep emotional labor was measured using three items included in Grandey's (2003) scale. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which, when providing service to patients, "I try to feel the emotions I ought to feel," "I really attempt to feel the feelings I should present to others" and "I put a lot of effort into feeling the emotions I should present to others" on a scale from 1 ("Not at all") to 5 ("Very much so"). Cronbach's α equals 0.83.

To assess the nurses' service KSAOs, we asked the head nurses from each ward to respond to four questions regarding each nurse's service KSAOs. The items were based on Spitzberg's (2015) constructs and included, for example, the extent to which the nurse is "attentive to the patient's needs and takes measures to adhere to these needs" and

"is empathic towards patients." Items were rated on a scale from 1 ("Not at all") to 5 ("Very much so"). Cronbach's α equals 0.91.

Control variables. In order to rule out possible confounding effects, we controlled for gender, organizational tenure and age.

Data analysis

Given that the nurses were nested in 15 different wards, we analyzed the data on the basis of random coefficient modeling (RCM; Goldstein, 1987) using the SAS Mixed procedure. This approach allows for testing the nesting of nurses within wards. The advantage of RCM is that by modeling residuals at level two (with the individual nurse serving as the level-one unit of analysis), such models acknowledge that nurses working within the same ward may be more similar to one another than to nurses affiliated with different wards (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002). Indeed, there were significant between-ward variances in service climate (F(42, 505) = 1.73, $p < 0.01$; ICC (1) = 0.05; ICC (2) = 0.25). We first tested the main effect of ward-level service climate on the two emotional labor variables (*H1*). Then, we assessed the moderating effect of service KSAOs using mean-centered variables (*H2*). In addition, we examined the variance inflation factors (VIFs) related to the regression coefficients. The VIFs were all below 5, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a serious problem.

Results

Table II presents the means, standard deviations and correlations for all of the study's variables.

H1 claimed that there would be a positive relationship between service climate and both surface and deep emotional labor strategies. As Model 2 in Table III shows, we found support for this main effect when the dependent variable was surface emotional labor ($b = 1.11$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that as the ward's service climate increased, so did the use of surface emotional labor strategies. We did not find support for this main effect with regard to deep emotional labor.

H2 claimed that employees' service KSAOs would moderate the relationship between the ward's service climate and employees' emotional labor strategies, so that in the case of employees with high levels of KSAOs, this positive relationship would be attenuated. As Model 3 in Table III indicates, the interaction between service KSAOs and the service climate was significant when the dependent variable was surface emotional labor (estimate = −1.25, $p < 0.05$). In order to understand the nature of these interactions, we conducted a simple slope analysis, which is depicted in Figure 1. As the figure illustrates, for respondents with high and medium levels of KSAOs there was no significant relationship between the ward's service climate and the use of surface emotional labor. However, for respondents with lower levels of service KSAOs, there was a significant positive relationship between the ward's service climate and the employees' surface emotional labor. These results indicate that for employees with lower-level KSAOs, the more their ward's

	n	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	97	1.78	0.41						
2. Age	97	39.09	9.12	0.20					
3. Tenure	95	9.83	9.51	0.12	0.64***				
4. Ward's service climate	101	4.2	0.28	0.03	−0.10	−0.08			
5. Employees' KSAOs	99	4.66	0.49	0.22*	0.21*	0.13	0.02		
6. Surface emotional labor	98	4.07	0.88	−0.02	−0.01	0.07	0.12	−0.01	
7. Deep emotional labor	98	3.31	0.92	−0.08	0.08	0.16	−0.01	−0.13	0.37***

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

Table II.
Study 1 – means, standard deviations and correlations among the study's variables

| | Model 1 90 | | Model 2 90 | | Model 3 89 | | Model 4 88 | |
n	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Intercept	3.84***	0.46	−0.85	1.57	−22.76	12.21	−4.99	12.58
Gender	−0.13	0.20	−0.1	0.19	−0.13	0.22	−0.07	0.18
Age	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Tenure	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.004	0.01	−2.86*	1.26
Ward's service climate			1.11**	0.35	6.46*	2.94	2.08	3.06
Employee KSAOs					5.14	2.60	1.47	2.74
Ward's service climate × KSAOs					−1.25*	0.63	−0.35	0.67
Tenure × KSAOs							0.68*	0.31
Ward's service climate × tenure							0.55*	0.27
Ward's service climate × tenure × KSAOs							−0.13*	0.06
Random variance	0.19	0.17	0.09	0.09	0.04	0.08	0.05	0.06
−2 loglikelihood	207.6		198.6		213.9		181.8	
Δ−2 loglikelihood with same n			9**		3.5		10.4*	

Notes: $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$; $***p < 0.10$

Table III.
Study 1 – RCM analysis for hypotheses testing surface emotional labor as the dependent variable

Figure 1.
Study 1 – simple slope analysis for the interaction between service climate and employees' KSAOs with surface emotional labor as the dependent variable
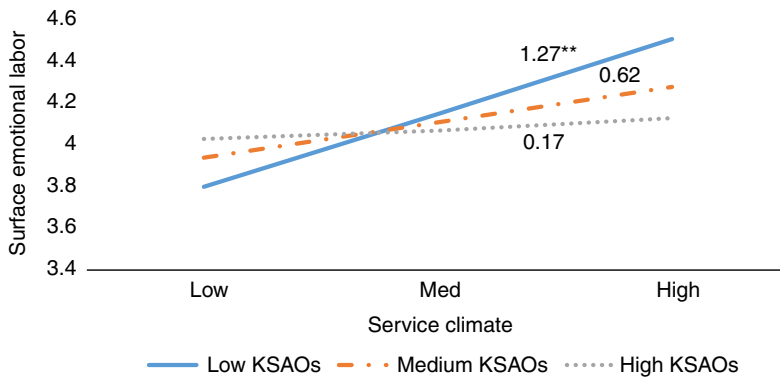
Note: $**p < 0.01$

climate was oriented toward service, the more they employed surface emotional labor strategies. The interactive effect was not significant when the dependent variable was deep emotional labor.

Although service climate is a group-level concept and the R_{wg} score justified aggregation to the unit level (Kozlowski and Klein, 2000), it is possible that different individual perceptions of the service climate that were not apparent when aggregating the service climate scores of the employees within the same ward had an effect on the emotional labor scores. Therefore, we conducted an additional analysis of the same models with service climate at the individual level. The results of this analysis were similar to those presented above.

Finally, we conducted a *post hoc* analysis to examine whether the moderating effect of KSAOs was different for long-term employees vs those who had been with the organization for only a short period. Organizational tenure refers to the time an employee has worked within an organization. This concept is distinct from job experience (Tesluk and Jacobs, 1998), which can be accumulated through work in several different organizations. Employees with a short tenure in the organization may need to invest more resources and

energy in coping with the uncertainty that results from their new role or from working in an unfamiliar organizational climate (Hochschild, 1983). Moreover, long-tenured employees are likely to down-regulate negative feelings (e.g. Carstensen *et al.*, 2011), and thus are less likely to choose to simply fake positive emotions and continue feeling negative emotions such as irritation or anxiety internally (Sliter *et al.*, 2013). In other words, long-tenured employees are less likely to use surface emotional labor strategies. These findings strengthen the assumption that at least with regard to surface acting, the above hypothesized relationships are less likely to occur in the case of long-tenured employees.

As Model 4 in Table III shows, the results demonstrated that the three-way interaction between tenure, service KSAOs, and service climate was significant when the dependent variable was surface emotional labor (estimate $= -0.13$, $p < 0.05$). However, our findings indicated that in the short-tenure condition, the moderating effect of KSAOs on the relationship between service climate and surface emotional labor ceased to exist (see Figure 2), whereas the interaction was significant for long-tenured employees (see Figure 3). The three-way interaction for deep emotional labor was not significant.
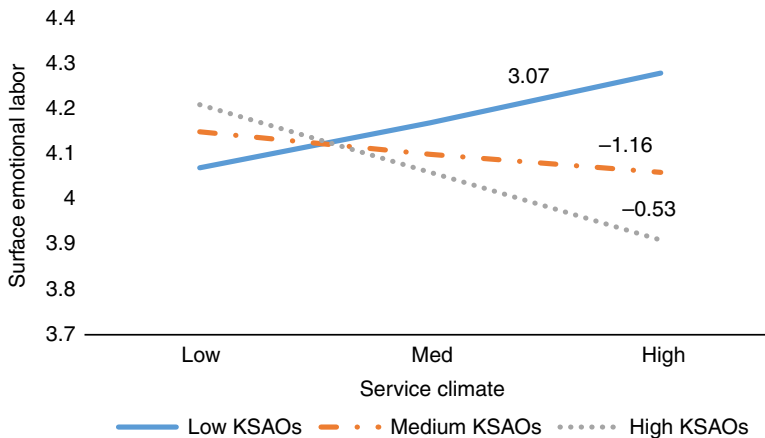

Figure 2.
Study 1 – employees with short tenure: simple slope analysis for the interaction between service climate and employees' KSAOs with surface emotional labor as the dependent variable
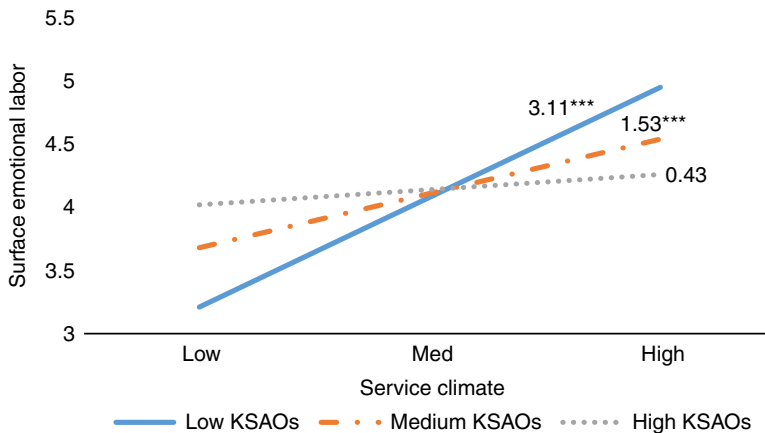

Note: ***$p < 0.001$

Figure 3.
Study 1 – employees with long-term tenure: simple slope analysis for interaction between service climate and employees' KSAOs with surface emotional labor as the dependent variable

Study 2

Sample and procedure

Given that Study 1's results might be context-specific, because as it was conducted within the health care context where employees serve patients and their families, we tested whether our results could be generalized and applied to a different service context. Thus, we collected additional data from hospitality employees working in a chain of luxury hotels in Israel. A sample of 244 employees nested within 13 hotels participated in the study (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 ($n = 44$). The employees' ages ranged between 18 and 71 (mean $= 31$, SD $= 12.9$), and their seniority ranged between 1 and 46 years (mean $= 8$, SD $= 8.6$). In sum, 73 percent of the employees were male. The hotel chain's HR department agreed to the administration of this study in all of their hotels and helped with the logistics of administering the questionnaires to employees. Questionnaires were administered in Hebrew or in Arabic (translated from English and back), depending on the employee's preference. All employees working on the day the data were collected in their hotel were approached by research assistants and asked to fill out an anonymous questionnaire regarding their perceptions of their department's service climate, their use of emotional labor strategies and the additional control variables. The research assistants took note of who answered the questionnaire and added a number to the questionnaire form to match it to a particular employee. In addition, the direct managers of the 39 departments included in the study were asked to assess the service KSAOs of each of their employees on a separate short questionnaire. Using the number added to the employees' questionnaire forms, the research assistants then matched the employees' questionnaires to the manager's questionnaires, eliminating any form of respondent identification.

We used the exact same measures and data analysis processes presented above for Study 1.

Results

As in Study 1, there were significant between-department variances in service climate ($F(42, 505) = 1.73$, $p < 0.01$; ICC (1) $= 0.05$; ICC (2) $= 0.25$). In addition, we examined the VIFs related to the regression coefficients. The VIFs were all below 5, suggesting that multicollinearity was not a problem.

Table IV presents the means, standard deviations and correlations among all of the study's variables.

As Model 2 in Table V indicates, the main effect of service climate on the use of surface emotional labor strategies was not significant. In addition, similar to Study 1, *H1* was not supported with regard to deep emotional labor.

However, we did find support for *H2*, which claimed that service KSAOs moderate the relationship between the department's service climate and employees' use of emotional labor

	n	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender	243	1.27	0.44						
2. Age	239	31.23	12.96	−0.08					
3. Tenure	237	8.35	8.76	−0.12	0.53***				
4. Department's service climate	244	4.24	0.34	0.05	0.03	0.11			
5. Employees' KSAOs	230	4.25	0.67	−0.04	0.16*	0.14*	0.18**		
6. Surface emotional labor	244	4.07	0.80	0.03	0.06	0.15*	0.04	−0.05	
7. Deep emotional labor	244	3.69	0.96	0.02	0.18**	0.16*	0.12	0.05	0.25***

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.10$

Table IV.
Study 2 – means, standard deviations and correlations among the study's variables

n	Model 1 231		Model 2 231		Model 3 218		Model 4 218	
	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Intercept	4.18***	0.15	4.15***	0.64	−3.47	3.80	3.18	5.05
Gender	−0.13	0.11	−0.13	0.11	−0.11	0.11	−0.09	0.11
Age	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Tenure	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02**	0.01	−1.70*	0.79
Department's service climate			0.01	0.15	1.90*	0.91	0.36	1.21
Employees' KSAOs					1.75*	0.88	1.47	2.74
Dept.'s service climate × KSAOs					−0.43*	0.21	−0.10	0.28
Tenure × KSAOs							0.40*	0.19
Dept.'s service climate × tenure							0.37*	0.18
Dept.'s service climate × tenure × KSAOs							−0.09*	0.04
Random variance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
−2 loglikelihood	520.0		520.0		506.0		471.6	
Δ−2 loglikelihood with same n			0		37.1***		34.4***	

Notes: $*p < 0.05$; $**p < 0.01$; $***p < 0.10$

Table V.
Study 2 – RCM analysis for hypotheses testing surface emotional labor as the dependent variable

strategies, such that in the case of high levels of KSAOs, the positive relationship will be attenuated. As Model 3 in Table V indicates, the interaction between service KSAOs and service climate was significant when the dependent variable was surface emotional labor (estimate $= -0.43$, $p < 0.05$). When trying to understand the nature of this interaction, we found a pattern similar to that presented in Figure 1. Also, in this sample, the interaction with deep emotional labor was not significant.

As in Study 1, we conducted an additional analysis of the same models with service climate at the individual level and obtained similar results to those presented above.

In addition, we conducted a *post hoc* analysis by adding tenure to the model. As Model 4 in Table V shows, the three-way interaction between tenure, service KSAOs and service climate was significant when the dependent variable was surface emotional labor (estimate $= -0.09$, $p < 0.05$). We did not find a significant three-way interaction when deep emotional labor was the dependent variable. Here too, the pattern of the interaction was similar to that shown in Figures 2 and 3.

Discussion
While most of the research on employee outcomes of service climate has focused on its positive consequences for customers (Schneider, 1990; Schneider *et al.*, 2013) and employees (see Table I), the current study demonstrated that it also takes an emotional toll on at least some employees, that is, those with low levels of KSAOs because it is associated with employees' use of emotional labor strategies. Specifically, the results indicate that service climate makes emotional demands that employees can meet by the use of surface emotional labor, which researchers have consistently found to have a negative impact on their well-being (Mesmer-Magnus *et al.*, 2011). Furthermore, Subramony and Pugh (2015) recommended that research should provide additional cognitive, affective and behavioral explanations for positive and negative service interactions. The current study adheres to this recommendation and provides empirical support for a cognitive and affective explanation for employees' experiences during service interactions.

In an attempt to summarize the literature on the effects of service climate on employee outcomes since Hong *et al.*'s (2013) meta-analysis, Table I shows that service climate is associated with different employees' behaviors (e.g. Walumbwa *et al.*, 2019), attitudes (e.g. Kang and Busser, 2018) and emotions (e.g. Carrasco *et al.*, 2011). While the articles in the

table document some negative effects of service climate on employees, it is apparent that additional research, such as the current study, is needed in order to more fully understand the potential toll of service climate.

Although we did hypothesize a similar pattern of relationships for both surface and deep emotional labor strategies, the results related to deep acting were not significant. Hülsheger and Schewe's (2011) meta-analysis regarding emotional labor strategies concluded that deep acting demonstrated weak relationships with indicators of impaired well-being and job attitudes. Thus, regardless of whether deep emotional labor is an outcome or an antecedent, it seems there is a need for different theoretical explanations regarding the use of deep as compared to surface emotional labor strategies. If, indeed, climate has both transformational and transactional elements, as we posited above, our results indicated that the transactional element was related to enhanced surface acting, but the transformational element was not related to the use of deep emotional labor strategies. Thus, it may be that heightened emotional demands resulting from a high-level service climate are more strongly associated with the transactional elements of the climate. Moreover, given that research regarding the use of different emotional labor strategies has been more consistent regarding the negative effects of surface acting compared to those of deep acting, the finding that service climate impacts surface emotional labor is especially important. Surface acting that results from a high-level service climate is more likely to be perceived as inauthentic by customers, prompting a negative reaction from them and exacerbating the negative effect on the employees (Chi and Grandey, 2019; Grandey *et al.*, 2005).

In addition, the service literature highlights the importance of exploring the moderators of the key relationships between organizational and customer-related variables, including features related to the service and the unit, as well as internal service (Bowen and Schneider, 2014). To this list of moderators, we added a variable that relates to the service providers and examined its effect in two very different contexts. The study's results demonstrated that the relationship between service climate and the use of surface emotional labor strategies was contingent upon the employee's KSAOs. Specifically, employees with low levels of KSAOs used surface emotional labor strategies in order to comply with the service climate's expectations. For these employees, there seemed to be a mismatch between the emotional demands of the service climate and their personal abilities. On the other hand, for employees with high levels of KSAOs, high demands did not seem to be related to the use of surface emotional labor strategies, probably due to the fit between these demands and their abilities.

Given that the results were similar in both the health care and hospitality contexts, they may help us understand the effects of service climate on a broader plane. While it is possible to claim that the effects of such a climate on emotional labor are related to the type of service required from health care professionals and the need to display sympathy and concern in stressful events like sickness, injury or personal problems, it seems that service climate has the same effect regardless of the specific service that is required. For some employees, the service climate was also associated with the use of surface emotional labor strategies even in more positive contexts in which events are usually happy and relaxed. Another important difference between the two contexts is the ability of the customers to take responsibility for positive emotional exchanges during the service encounter. Emotional labor requirements from employees are essential when sick patients are concerned, due to the latter's inability to take responsibility for the emotional exchange. However, in other contexts, the responsibility for a positive encounter may be shared between the service provider and the customer.

Most of the previous research that examined the consequences of surface and deep emotional labor has shown, at least in regard to surface acting, the potential for negative implications such as burnout (Grandey *et al.*, 2013) and a decrease in performance (Grandey, 2003). Being among the few studies that have examined the antecedents of emotional labor (e.g. Morris and Feldman, 1996), the current study suggests ways to minimize the use of emotional labor strategies, for example, by training employees on specific service skills.

While previous research has found that employees with tenure are less likely to choose to simply fake positive emotions (Sliter *et al.*, 2013), we documented that this is not the case for employees who have limited KSAOs. This finding underscores the vulnerability of such employees to the potentially negative impact of a demanding service climate. One possible explanation for this finding is that employees who have limited KSAOs who manage to survive in the organization in spite of the high level of the service climate's emotional demands probably do so by faking positive emotions through surface acting strategies.

Implications for practice

Researchers and practitioners in the field of customer service recognize that service encounters can be very demanding for frontline employees, underscoring the importance of helping employees cope with these demands (e.g. Bolton *et al.*, 2014). The findings of this study indicate that service employees' KSAOs play an important role in helping them avoid the use of surface emotional labor strategies when the demands of the service climate are high. Ironically, even in service organizations that prioritize service above all, such a demanding service climate may in the long run actually hurt service provision due to the emotional labor it exacts from at least some employees.

These results have implications for human resource management practices such as employee hiring, training and development. When hiring, organizations may try to select employees based their relevant service KSAOs such as service orientation, attentiveness, empathy and expressiveness. Furthermore, they may want to make this process more specific. They should assess the organizational demands and needs prescribed by the service climate, and then use a method to choose appropriate candidates based on the specific fit of their KSAOs to these specific needs.

It is not only important to recruit people with such KSAOs, but also equally critical to help current employees acquire such skills and abilities through training and development interventions. Training initiatives should focus on developing the above-mentioned service KSAOs but may also include developmental interventions such as job rotation in different aspects of the service profession to help employees acquire these KSAOs by experiencing different service jobs and working alongside different service providers. Similarly, work simulations focusing on the specific needs of the customers may help employees and organizations sharpen their skills, enhance their professional knowledge and improve their service interactions. Such simulations may also help employees deal with tricky service situations and give them the opportunity to develop their own ways of dealing with these situations before they occur in real life, in a manner that is consistent with the climate expectations. Finally, mentoring programs provide not only knowledge but also feedback and supportive encouragement that give employees confidence in their ability to deal with customer interactions in the appropriate manner.

All of these suggestions relate to methods of helping employees attain the KSAOs needed to meet the demands of the service climate. However, a different approach would be for organizations to change their perception of service encounters and to understand that emotional display rules that dictate perpetual smiling and cheerfulness are not essential and may not have the value attributed to them. By rethinking these rules of emotional display and emphasizing authentic encounters, organizations can lessen the toll that the service climate takes on certain employees.

Limitations and future research

The present research benefitted from a study design that included data collection from multiple organizations, multiple sources, and two levels of analysis. Nevertheless, like any study, it suffers from a number of limitations. First, a longitudinal design would strengthen the ability to infer causality. Second, future research may examine whether the different

results concerning deep and surface emotional labor are indeed based on different perceptions of the service climate as being transactional vs transformational. Third, future research could investigate customer satisfaction and employee service performance together with employees' emotional labor. Finally, it is important to note that the KSAOs considered in this research were specifically communication KSAOs that include attentiveness and expressiveness. These specific KSAOs are relevant to the service context and thus have the potential to buffer the emotional demands of the service climate. Future research may wish to explore whether other KSAOs have a similar buffering effect in other climates.

Note

1. Vargo and Lusch (2004) defined service, noting that, "the common denominator of most service definitions is 'activities' or 'processes'" (p. 326). This activity or process, in turn, implies applying something and doing something for the benefit of some entity. Accordingly, we define service as the application of specialized competencies (skills and knowledge) through deeds, processes and performance for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; see also Gronroos, 2000, p. 48 for a similar conceptualization).

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