



DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED IT IT FACULTY

Communication Professionals as the Office Factotum:

A Study of Emotional Labour and Well-Being in
the Communication Profession

Authors

Evelina Winberg

Jordan Thunell Idumwonyi

Master thesis:	30 hp
Programme:	Master in Communication
Level:	Second Cycle
Year:	2023
Supervisor:	Cristina Miguel
Examiner:	Guro Sanden and Lexin Lin
Report no:	2023:107
Word count:	15189

Abstract

This thesis investigated the concept of emotional labour for communication professionals in an internal communication context. Recently, the well-being of communication professionals has caught public attention in Sweden since the communication practitioner is considered an office factotum or all-purpose servant with numerous responsibilities and activities and is frequently overwhelmed by their multifaceted work assignments. The theoretical framework for this study consisted of the concept of emotional labour and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory. Previous literature has focused on emotional labour in service and health occupations in an external communication context, where the outcomes of using different emotional labour strategies have impacted employee well-being, both positively and negatively. This thesis carried out a single case study based on data collected from 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews with communication professionals from three occupational sectors in Sweden, and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that communication professionals engage in emotional labour in an internal communication context, using surface acting and genuine emotions, whereas deep acting was undiscovered. This resulted in different outcomes for their well-being, although job satisfaction remained high. Before experiencing burnout, surface acting was more prevalent, and after recovery, genuine emotions were more common. This indicated that surface acting might be considered a maladaptive self-regulation strategy and genuine emotions an adaptive self-regulation strategy. Finally, regarding the current state of knowledge, this study aimed to contribute to further comprehension of emotional labour in an internal communication context, and

additional exploration of JD-R integrated with different emotional labour strategies is suggested.

Keywords: communication professionals, emotional labour, internal communication, job demands-resources theory, well-being

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed to this thesis. First and foremost, we would like to thank all participants for their valuable contributions and time spent undergoing interviews. This study would not have been possible without their willingness to share their knowledge, perspectives, and experiences. Furthermore, we want to thank Cristina Miguel, our research supervisor, for her guidance and consistent support throughout the research process. The insightful feedback, constructive criticism, and patient mentoring all contributed significantly to the depth and quality of this thesis. Finally, our appreciation to our loved ones, Sara, and William, for their unwavering support, patience, and understanding throughout this academic journey. Their encouragement, belief in our abilities, and willingness to listen during difficult times have kept us motivated and focused.

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Introduction

Research Background

The interest in how emotions affect organisational and individual outcomes has received recognition among organisational scholars, particularly since Arlie Hochschild's (1983) pioneering work on emotional labour. Today there is compelling evidence suggesting that organisations regulate the emotional expression of their employees through feeling rules and that conforming to these rules is psychologically demanding, resulting in emotional labour among workers (Becker & Cropanzano, 2011; Yeomans, 2019). The research field of organisational communication emerged in the post-war United States (Schad, 2018). During this time, organisational communication scholars sought to improve employee work life and productivity. In the 1980s, a paradigm shift emerged that was more centred on interpretive methods. There was now a focus on communication skills, organisational culture, cross-cultural communication, and networks. Schad (2018) explained that, as the millennium approached, scholars extended their interests, and since then, organisational communication has been examined using various philosophical and theoretical approaches.

Several scholars have argued that the field of organisational communication in Sweden has primarily focused on public information, such as health and crisis communication, as well as internal communication, such as communication between management and employees, as well as communication strategies and efficiency (Palm & Sandström, 2013; Schad, 2018). Internal communication is defined by Yeomans and

FitzPatrick (2017) as a company-controlled communication system in which employees are regarded as an internal public or stakeholder group. The authors also emphasised terms like employee communication, organisational communication, and internal marketing. The managed communication system in an organisation might include various channels and activities, such as newsletters, noticeboards, employee briefings, and intranets.

Furthermore, it is crucial to understand the role of internal communication, the existing challenges, and how clear and consistent messaging, employee involvement, and feedback mechanisms are critical for the organisation (Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017).

Emotional labour has had a significant impact on a variety of disciplines, including sociology, psychology, education, and organisational studies (Bellas, 1999; Benesch, 2017; Bolton, 2005; Fuoli & Bednarek, 2022; Hochschild, 2012; Levine Brown et al., 2022; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2020). According to Fineman (2004), no academic discipline has exclusive rights to emotion, and its potential multifacetedness allows for various approaches to inform it. Fineman (2004) contended that the interest in emotion in organisational behaviour is growing because what humans feel is just as important as what they think or do. The majority of emotional labour research has focused on culturally homogeneous environments and emotional expressions in service-oriented professions and frontline workers, where positive or neutral emotions are frequently required due to the high level of interaction with clients, customers, or patients (Afsar et al., 2017; Alsakarneh et al., 2019; Dall'Ora et al., 2020; Hochschild, 1983; Kim & Williams, 2022; Oliveira et al., 2023; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2020; Van Gelderen et al., 2017; Wojcik et al., 2022). Therefore, more research has been conducted on emotional labour in an external communication context with patients and customers than in an internal communication context with co-workers and team members in organisations (Glikson & Erez, 2013). The internal communication

context is a relatively unexplored area for emotional labour research and necessitates further investigation (Grandey et al., 2007; Hu & Shi, 2015; Lee & Madera, 2019).

Several studies have explored emotional labour in education (Kelly et al., 2021; Lyndon et al., 2021; Monrad, 2017), including how academics suppress or alter emotions in interactions with students and colleagues (Bellas, 1999), how feeling rules can induce emotional labour for English language teachers (Benesch, 2017), and how preschool teachers engage in emotional labour through interactions with children, families, and colleagues (Levine Brown et al., 2022). Furthermore, Sommerfeldt and Kent (2020) investigated Public Relations professors in their encounters with colleagues and acquaintances. The authors argued that Public Relations professors are frequently required to respond neutrally to impolite statements and that combating negative remarks about the field may result in emotional labour. Sommerfeldt and Kent (2020) stated that emotional labour research should be expanded and applied to other professions to advance research.

In Public Relations in the United Kingdom, Yeomans (2019) discovered that gendered performance and identity work are characteristics of emotional labour. The author investigated how, when, and why emotional labour is used in everyday Public Relations agency practice and who is typically involved in this work. Yeomans (2019) found that emotional labour is a distinguishing feature of professionalism, and that Public Relations practitioners must constantly legitimise themselves through strenuous interactions with external stakeholders to gain respect. Furthermore, Bridgen (2011) argued that emotion is essential in day-to-day Public Relations activities and thus has a connection to individual and organisational success. The author contended that Public Relations professionals use their emotions in a complex way that moves beyond Hochschild's analysis since the personal and professional realms have become so intertwined that it is difficult to distinguish between

them. Similarly, Svedin and Juteström (2021) investigated emotional labour and the exploitation and commercialisation of the lifeworld of communication practitioners in Sweden. They discovered that social media has increased stress and encroached on their personal lives.

Research Problem

The field of communication is expanding in scope and significance, with almost every organisation, company, and authority professionalising their communication activities. Palm and Sandström (2013) argued that communication is now a fundamental productive power and an organisational inevitability. Furthermore, the contemporary communication field is occupied by various professional capacities, some generalists, others specialists, often in central positions or near centres of power. Broom and Smith (1979) developed a typology of communication practitioner roles, including expert prescriber, communication technician, communication process facilitator, and problem-solving process facilitator, implying that communication professionals should be deeply involved in organisational processes. Therefore, communication professionals frequently are expected to perform a plethora of tasks (Fyke et al., 2022; Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Killingsworth & Flynn, 2016; Simonsson & Heide, 2021; Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017). Because they often are expected to do everything, their role could be defined as a 'factotum', referring to an all-purpose servant with multiple activities or responsibilities (Merriam-Webster, 2023). Hence, Killingsworth and Flynn (2016) pointed out that communication professionals frequently are overwhelmed by their multifaceted work tasks.

The health of communication practitioners in the workplace has been widely discussed in Sweden (Bucht, 2021; Palm, 2023). The non-partisan trade union DIK (Documentation, Information, and Culture) surveyed the working environment for communication professionals, and 71% of respondents rated their overall workload as high or excessive (Bucht, 2019). Due to poor working conditions, senior communication practitioners are considering changing jobs, resulting in a brain drain within the field (Bucht, 2019). Furthermore, in the public sector, one-third of the respondents have occasionally or repeatedly encountered internal pressure to present an overly positive impression of the initiatives or operations of their organisation (Bucht, 2021). Given the high burnout rates and job strain for communication professionals in Sweden, further exploration of the influencing factors on their well-being is required. There are several implications for employees engaging in emotional labour, particularly concerning well-being (Alsakarneh et al., 2019; Diefendorff et al., 2005; Ducharme & Kwan, 2017; Guler et al., 2022; Hochschild, 2012; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Rogers-Shaw et al., 2021). According to Merriam-Webster (2023), well-being refers to the state of being happy, healthy, and thriving. Furthermore, several authors (e.g., Becker & Cropanzano, 2011; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Jeung et al., 2018) argued that organisations should strive to understand the causes, characteristics, and consequences of human emotions, how this influences their behaviour and help employees manage their emotions healthily and sustainably.

Aim and Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to further explore the concept of emotional labour in an internal communication context for communication professionals. The aim of this thesis is

to gain insight into the perspectives of communication professionals in Sweden and to establish an understanding of their subjective emotional experiences in the ever-changing field of communication. The objective of this thesis is to obtain an in-depth knowledge of their emotional labour experiences in an internal communication context, the most often utilised strategies, and the implications for their well-being. To collect data for this single case study and be able to answer the research questions, 20 semi-structured in-depth interviews with communication professionals from three distinct occupational sectors were carried out. Furthermore, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory was applied in combination with the concept of emotional labour. This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: Which workplace situations cause communication professionals to engage in emotional labour in an internal communication context?

RQ2: What are the consequences of using different emotional labour strategies for communication professionals?

Thesis Outline

This introductory chapter provided an overview of the research topic and highlighted the relevant research background of this study. The research problem was then explored by describing the challenges and consequences that communication professionals encounter in their work. Furthermore, the purpose, aim, objective, and research questions were established to explain how this study intends to fill the research gap. The literature review

chapter includes a summary of the most recent and significant literature on the topic and the theoretical framework. The methodology chapter describes the research design, sampling criteria, data collection and data analysis method, the quality criteria and ethical considerations addressed in this study. The discussion chapter presents the findings with the current state of knowledge. Finally, the conclusion chapter summarises the main findings, the implications and limitations of the current study, and provides suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Emotional labour is prevalent in the occupational sector and impacts employees in several ways; as a result, it has gained considerable attention in the organisational communication field (Hochschild, 1983). Recently, there has been substantial deliberation about the challenges for communication professionals in Sweden. Therefore, this literature review aims to summarise previous research on emotional labour, the different emotional labour strategies, and their associated implications. In addition, internal communication and emotional labour in this context, the communication profession, and the JD-R theory. Finally, the literature review concludes with a summary of the previous chapters.

Emotional Labour

Emotional labour is defined by Hochschild (1983) as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value” (p. 7). Whereas physical labour uses employees’ strength or body movements to achieve organisational goals, emotional labour uses employees’ expressions and emotions (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Hochschild (1983) differentiates between the private and public realms and highlights three related concepts: ‘emotional labour’, ‘emotion management’, and ‘emotion work’. The author proposes that emotional labour occurs in an occupational context, whereas the other two emerge in a broader social context. According to Hochschild (2012), the middle classes are traditionally socially conditioned for jobs that require emotional labour, at least in Anglo and Northern European cultures. Some authors argue that Hochschild’s (2012) notion of emotional labour is influenced by other theories, such as social psychologist Leon Festinger’s ideas about

cognitive dissonance (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2020), Goffman's impression management (Fuoli & Bednarek, 2022), Marx's wage-labour concept and alienation theory (Brook, 2009), and Freud's proposal of emotion as a signal function (Yeomans, 2019). Hochschild (1983) suggested that emotional labour is a type of workplace oppression and aimed to understand how humans become a labour instrument in modern capitalist societies shaped by the expansion of the service sector.

The occupations that involve emotional labour must meet at least one of the following criteria: (1) they necessitate face-to-face or voice-to-voice interaction with the public; (2) they demand the employee to instil an emotional state in themselves or others and (3) they enable the employer to exert some control over the emotional state of their employees through training and supervision (Hochschild, 2012). The emotional labour process involves actively managing, displaying, or suppressing emotions, as well as genuinely experiencing and expressing appropriate emotions to meet the emotional expectations and demands of a specific occupation (Becker & Cropanzano, 2011; Grandey et al., 2013). Because previous research has not always defined emotions consistently, Becker and Cropanzano (2011) argue that understanding emotion is essential before understanding the associated labour. Castells (2009) claim that emotions are deeply embedded in our brains by the evolutionary drive to survive. Mann (1999) describes the concept of emotion as "a cognitive process, an experiential feeling, a physiological change, and a behavioural aspect" (p. 353). Sommerfeldt and Kent (2020) contend that emotional labour is an internal activity performed externally, requiring employees to suppress their private feelings to exhibit more desirable and socially acceptable workplace emotions, for example, maintaining a positive demeanour. They explain that even acting neutrally, i.e., not responding positively or negatively, is considered difficult emotional labour because the employee must conceal their true feelings. Moreover,

Benesch (2017) describes emotional labour as the struggle between workplace feeling rules and internal beliefs about appropriate workplace behaviour.

The organisational rules that govern what constitutes appropriate emotional expressions in the workplace have been conceptualised in various ways. For example, feeling rules (Hochschild, 1983), display rules (Becker & Cropanzano, 2011), or emotional expression display rules (Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2020). Kim and Williams (2022) explain that emotions are negotiated, performed, and interactively used among all organisational members and are formed and managed to meet specific work demands. Historically, in Western cultures, organisations regarded certain emotional displays in the workplace as inappropriate and therefore attempted to impose a level of control (Bolton, 2005; Glikson & Erez, 2013; Hochschild, 2012; Kim & Williams, 2022; Yeomans, 2019). Benesch (2017) claims that there is a binary belief that there are positive and negative emotions, which causes certain emotions to be supported while others are diminished in the context. The author explains that emotions converge and shift within and across social contexts. Finally, Benesch (2017) asserts that, while not always explicitly stated, feeling rules can be inferred from institutional policies and guidelines implying the desired workplace behaviour.

Emotional Labour Strategies

Several authors argue that compliance with feeling rules could result in emotional dissonance; when there is a discrepancy between private feelings and public display (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2012; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). To deal with the contradiction between experienced emotions and those required, the employee will use different emotional labour strategies, including surface acting (disguising feelings or

displaying a fake emotion) and deep acting (altering emotions). Other scholars have proposed a third dimension (Diefendorff et al., 2005; Grandey et al., 2013; Guler et al., 2022), namely, natural emotional labour or genuine emotions (exhibiting actual emotions in a socially acceptable manner). For clarification, surface acting concerns changing the outward expression of emotions to conform to the feeling rules without necessarily changing the inner emotional state, thereby suppressing or faking emotions (Hochschild, 2012). Employees in the service sector frequently employ this strategy due to the expectation of maintaining a positive and friendly demeanour even when frustrated or stressed (Grandey et al., 2013). However, deep acting is the deliberate manipulation of internal emotions to align them with the desired emotional expression, thereby altering the inner emotional state (Hochschild, 2012).

Since surface acting requires more effort than other emotional labour forms, it is frequently associated with negative outcomes, such as emotional exhaustion and burnout (Alsakarneh et al., 2019; Grandey et al., 2013; Guler et al., 2022). Deep acting has been connected to more positive outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and lower levels of emotional exhaustion (Humphrey et al., 2015; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011). However, compared to genuine emotions, surface acting and deep acting are less effective (Ducharme & Kwan, 2017). Because genuine emotions allow employees to express their actual emotions in a socially acceptable manner, this strategy often results in positive outcomes for both individuals and organisations. Therefore, it is regarded as the most promising approach because it requires minimal mental effort (Grandey et al., 2013; Guler et al., 2022).

Emotional Labour Implications

There are various implications of performing emotional labour for employee well-being. The positive outcomes are related to job satisfaction, personal accomplishment, and organisational commitment (Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Üzümcü et al., 2017). However, if emotional labour is not appropriately recognised, it can be mentally and emotionally draining, leading to negative outcomes, such as burnout, emotional exhaustion, stress, job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions (Grandey, 2000; Grandey et al., 2013; Maslach & Jackson, 1984; Valeras, 2020). Furthermore, Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) explain that individuals are assumed to experience both outcomes since estimating the general effects of using different emotional labour strategies for an individual is complex due to personality differences. Additionally, job characteristics such as the frequency and variety of emotional labour will have an impact (Diefendorff et al., 2005).

Through researching flight attendants, Hochschild (1983) discovered that emotional labour could result in self-alienation. Grandey et al. (2013) highlight that emotional labour could induce emotional exhaustion and burnout because of high emotional demands at work. Similarly, Rogers-Shaw et al. (2021) argue that the likelihood of burnout and emotional tiredness at work could increase by using emotional labour. The characteristics of burnout are feelings of cynicism, detachment, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment resulting from prolonged exposure to a stressful work environment (Bakker et al., 2023; Maslach & Jackson, 1984; Valeras, 2020). Other symptoms of burnout are physical symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, and digestive problems (Hwang & Chi, 2010). Jeung et al. (2018) argue that workplace stress causes negative physiological, psychological,

and behavioural responses in employees and contend that emotional labour can occur in occupations other than the service sector.

Since workplace issues like stress and burnout are complex, they go beyond personal maladjustment. According to Bolton (2005), the political, social, and economic aspects that provide the social framework for workplace relationships must also be considered.

Alsakarneh et al. (2019) argue that employees who perform emotional labour are more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs than those who do not. Glikson and Erez (2013) explain that norms severely restricting employees' ability to express their emotions towards patients and customers have resulted in emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, Yeomans (2019) discovered that the Public Relations industry has a 25% annual staff turnover, with employees preferring to leave high-pressured workplaces rather than discuss the issues of coping with the stress of unrealistic expectations and deadlines.

Internal Communication

There are three types of communication in organisations that Apolo et al. (2017) identified: institutional communication, internal communication, and marketing communication. The authors argue that communication is one of the pillars of collaborative work, supported by the formation of bonds, emotions, and experiences. Heide and Simonsson (2011) contend that information and communication technologies could enable lateral organisational communication. Furthermore, several scholars argue that internal communication is critical for achieving organisational goals (Apolo et al., 2017; Rasmussen, 2022; Yeomans & FitzPatrick, 2017; Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017). Yeomans and FitzPatrick (2017) define internal communication as a managed communication system in which

employees are viewed as an internal public or stakeholder group. This communication system could contain newsletters, noticeboards, staff briefings, and intranets. From this vantage point, employees directly impact organisational performance and indirectly impact relationships with various external stakeholders (Lee & Kim, 2022).

For internal communication efforts to be successful, Yeomans and FitzPatrick (2017) emphasise the importance of clear and consistent messaging, employee involvement, and feedback mechanisms. Additionally, Welch and Jackson (2007) argue that a communication strategy aligned with the mission and values of the organisation, entailing communication with all internal stakeholders through multiple channels, will cultivate a culture of transparency and trust. Hume and Leonard (2014) explain that the purpose of internal communication serves to facilitate processes and foster an environment of open communication and collaboration within the organisation rather than to gather and distribute information. Similarly, Walden (2021) argues that organisations should develop a transparent and compassionate internal communication culture in the workplace by cultivating employee well-being, which could be enhanced by allowing employees to express concerns and make suggestions through various internal communication channels. Through such implementations, organisations could improve job satisfaction and productivity while lowering the risk of stress and burnout. Furthermore, Walden (2021) emphasises the significance of management and leadership in creating a workplace environment that prioritises employee welfare. Similarly, Lee and Kim (2022) claim that leadership influences symmetrical internal communication and employee behavioural outcomes.

Emotional Labour in Internal Communication

Most emotional labour research has focused on interactions between employees and external stakeholders such as patients, customers, and clients (Grandey, 2003; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011; Yeomans, 2019). However, non-service sector employees frequently interact with internal company members such as managers and co-workers (Grandey et al., 2007; Hu & Shi, 2015; Lee & Madera, 2019; Lyndon et al., 2021). Some studies have investigated the concept of emotional labour in an internal communication context. Hu and Shi (2015) examined surface acting as a strategy in interactions among organisational members and discovered that faking positive emotions negatively impacts emotional, relational, and behavioural outcomes, as well as employee psychological well-being. Lee and Madera (2019) investigated emotional labour in co-worker-to-co-worker communication and found that co-workers frequently engage in emotional labour to suppress negative emotions and express positive ones, which aids in the maintenance of positive co-worker relationships. Li and Liu (2021) explored emotional labour for virtual teams and discovered that it impacts employee well-being and job satisfaction. The authors argue that clear communication, transparency, and providing employees with the right tools to manage emotional labour in virtual workplaces are essential for good internal communication. Pultz and Dupret (2022) investigated emotional labour resulting from using digital communication technologies among employees in agile IT consultancy firms and found that it affects employee well-being. McCance et al. (2013) discovered that social sharing among co-workers might mitigate the negative effects of emotional labour during customer interactions. Becker and Cropanzano (2011) found that emotional labour can become a shared experience for work teams, beginning when employees collectively exhibit positive emotions and avoid negative

ones. Furthermore, Ndubuisi Eze (2017) discovered that displaying positive or negative emotions affects communication simplicity and overall team performance.

Other studies have examined various outcomes of emotional labour in both external and internal communication (Afsar et al., 2017; Delgado et al., 2022; Heim, 2020). Afsar et al. (2017) investigated emotional dissonance, emotional intelligence, job stress, burnout, and the well-being of nurses and found that emotional intelligence training could improve employees' abilities to interact effectively and mitigate the negative outcomes of emotional dissonance. Delgado et al. (2022) examined the effects of emotional labour and daily interpersonal challenges for mental health nurses in interactions with patients and carers, revealing that organisational stressors could heighten relational work challenges and negatively impact well-being. Heim (2020) explored emotional labour for hotel service employees and discovered that emotional labour could function as a tool for creating better work- and service environments through social interaction. Üzümcü et al. (2017) investigated the effects of internal marketing activities on the emotional labour behaviours of employees in the tourism industry and found a relationship between internal marketing practices and surface and deep acting, leading to increased job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Furthermore, Üzümcü et al. (2017) stress the importance of considering emotional labour in internal communication and advocate for open communication, coaching, and inclusive workplace culture to mitigate any negative effects on employees.

The Communication Profession

The communication profession in Sweden has evolved in tandem with ideological and political-economic shifts, in which the distinctions between information initiatives in the public and private sectors have become increasingly blurred and impacted by a service perspective (Palm & Sandström, 2013). The development of the communication profession has led to its association with terms such as corporate communication, public relations, communication management, and strategic communication (Simonsson & Heide, 2021). Furthermore, to support their organisations properly, communication professionals must understand daily organisational life and communication processes among co-workers (Heide & Simonsson, 2011). The authors identified five challenges for communication professionals to improve internal communication within organisations. These challenges include meta-communications (communications about communication), communication development (holistically analysing, supporting, and developing all communication processes and actors in the organisation), communication conditions (encouraging a positive and open communication climate to enforce co-worker relationships), communication training (implement constructive feedback, dialogue, target group analysis, rhetoric skills, cross-cultural meetings) and continuous evaluations (to survey co-worker attitudes about the organisation).

The number of communication practitioners in Sweden has rapidly grown in recent years, particularly in the public sector (Simonsson & Heide, 2021). As a result, there has been a debate in the Swedish public media about the value of their work (Danieli, 2020; Halltoft & Bertilsson, 2020). The growing number of communication professionals has been portrayed as a waste of taxpayer money. Furthermore, critics have argued that limited

public resources should be used to develop teaching, elderly care, nursing, and infrastructure rather than fostering a positive perception of it. Simonsson and Heide (2021) argue that while making communication a management function may increase status and professionalism, it may also create pressure to prioritise managerial logic over the value of communication itself. However, this could weaken the professionalisation of communication practitioners, as communication becomes viewed solely as a support function for other organisational activities.

Several authors have highlighted the role of the communication practitioner in organisations, and it frequently is distinguished by a broad job description that includes multiple areas of responsibility (Fyke et al., 2022; Killingsworth & Flynn, 2016; Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017). For instance, their work duties might entail business acumen, written, verbal, and visual communication, working both strategically and operationally, being culturally sensitive, conducting evaluative research, and striving to understand the holistic picture, as well as providing excellent service (Killingsworth & Flynn, 2016). Furthermore, the communication profession has been influenced by digitalisation, which has resulted in the emergence of new work areas such as social media and digital marketing. Lindberg (2019) contends that technological advancements have made independence, cooperative skills, and a desire to succeed critical qualities for communication practitioners. Moreover, there is research that the role of communication professionals is perceived as somewhat ambiguous, which could be explained by the relatively young age of the profession and that the communication work might not be well-established in every organisation (Palm & Sandström, 2013). Falkheimer et al. (2017) discovered that managers and co-workers consider communication vital for their organisations on a strategic level. Although the author identified that communication professionals' work contributes to effective internal

and external communication, other organisational members misunderstood their core roles. Furthermore, while most managers valued communication, communication professionals were perceived as channel producers or technicians. Similarly, Halltoft and Bertilsson (2020) found that the role of the communication practitioner frequently is misunderstood and that communication professionals encounter several challenges in their work, such as managing expectations from others in the organisation who do not understand their roles or the overall importance of communication.

Job Demands-Resources Theory

Several studies have combined the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory with the emotional labour concept (Kim & Wang, 2018; Lee & Madera, 2019; Wojcik et al., 2022). The JD-R model was first introduced in the early 2000s and evolved into a theory by the mid-2010s (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Although the model was initially used to explain burnout, it now incorporates various aspects of employee well-being and organisational functioning. The JD-R model is a theoretical framework based on the assumption that all job characteristics can be classified as a job demand or resource. This model defines job demands as aspects of the job that necessitate consistent physical, mental, or emotional effort, such as high work pressure, interpersonal conflict, or emotionally demanding interactions, which are associated with physical and mental costs, such as stress and burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017; Bakker et al., 2014, 2023). The model defines job resources as aspects of the job that enable employees to achieve work objectives, reduce job demands and associated costs, and promote growth and development, which are

associated with social support, autonomy, feedback, and learning opportunities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; 2017; Bakker et al., 2014).

Although multiple job resources are available, working under stressful conditions is exhausting in the long run. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) explain that job demands can be classified as either hindrance (e.g., role conflict, role overload, and role ambiguity) or challenge (e.g., high workload, time pressure, and responsibility). The latter could, however, promote personal growth and achievement for the employee. Furthermore, JD-R research has consistently demonstrated that employees perform best in work environments that combine challenging job demands with job resources because such environments facilitate their work engagement. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) argue that personal demands (e.g., workaholism or perfectionism) could have similar outcomes as job demands. Likewise, personal resources (e.g., optimism and self-efficacy) could serve a similar purpose as job resources. The authors contend that job demands and resources initiate two distinct processes, i.e., a health-impairment process and a motivational process. However, access to adequate resources might help to mitigate the relationship between job demands and burnout. Furthermore, the direct relationship between job demands and resources could be influenced by factors such as the occupational sector, level of education, hierarchical level, and occupational status (Bakker et al., 2014; 2023; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

JD-R theory has been combined with self-regulation perspectives to demonstrate how job strain translates into burnout. Bakker and De Vries (2021) argue that when employees encounter high job strain, they are more likely to use maladaptive self-regulation strategies, such as avoidance or emotion-focused coping (the regulation of emotional responses to the situation) and self-undermining behaviours (poor communication, mindless errors, and interpersonal disagreements resulting in higher job demands). They are less likely to use

adaptive self-regulation strategies, such as recovery (leisure activities that divert them from work-related issues) or job crafting (proactively optimise the work environment by modifying the job demands and resources). Bakker and De Vries (2021) emphasise the importance of organisations monitoring and improving job characteristics to prevent burnout (e.g., by establishing realistic objectives and challenges, optimising job demands, and delivering adequate job resources). Bakker et al. (2023) explain that although employees react differently to different job demands, exposure to higher job demands usually generates occupational burnout.

The JD-R theory is a flexible and heuristic model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). However, the flexibility of the model has received criticism for lacking specificity (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Bakker and Demerouti (2017) explain that the model might complicate whether a specific job characteristic represents a demand or a resource or whether an outcome is health-related or motivational. However, this depends on the work context. Schaufeli and Taris (2014) argue that while the model is an appropriate framework for understanding the complex relationship between job demands, resources, and employee outcomes, its simplicity oversimplifies the relationship between various job demands and resources. The authors emphasise the importance of contextual factors such as culture and individual differences in understanding how job demands and resources affect employee outcomes. They propose that future research address its limitations and investigate its applicability in various contexts. Furthermore, to achieve optimal results, both job demands and resources should be addressed (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014).

The integration of emotional labour in the JD-R model could explain how surface acting as a job demand and deep acting as a job resource might cause stress in distinct ways. Lee and Madera (2019) argue that surface acting is a job demand associated with an

emotional cost that is demanding and depleting, related to increased stress. However, deep acting can be viewed as a job resource because deep acting interactions are generally rated more positively than surface acting interactions, which are associated with a higher level of cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, Humphrey et al. (2015) explain that the expectation to express positive emotions and the effort necessary to achieve them are not intrinsically detrimental. The regulation strategies employed to pursue them and the conditions under which emotional labour occurs have a more significant influence. Finally, Wojcik et al. (2022) argue that job demands, such as interpersonal workplace conflict and organisational constraints, could increase burnout directly and indirectly via surface acting. However, job resources, such as organisational support, could decrease burnout directly and indirectly by reducing surface acting.

Summary

The concept of emotional labour has received significant attention in the organisational communication field and continues to spark an interest among scholars (Benesch, 2017; Bolton, 2005; Hochschild, 2012; Levine Brown et al., 2022; Sommerfeldt & Kent, 2020). The feeling rules that suggest appropriate workplace behaviour allow organisations to control the emotional expressions of employees (Becker & Cropanzano, 2011; Yeomans, 2019). By conforming to these rules, employees will use various emotional labour strategies, including surface acting, deep acting, and genuine emotions, which relate to different outcomes on well-being. Research demonstrates that surface acting is frequently associated with burnout, emotional exhaustion, job dissatisfaction and turnover intentions (Grandey, 2000; Grandey et al., 2013; Maslach & Jackson, 1984; Valeras, 2020),

whereas deep acting is connected to job satisfaction, organisational commitment and decreased emotional exhaustion (Humphrey et al., 2015; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011). However, genuine emotions is considered the most effective emotional labour strategy for employee well-being since it requires minimal mental effort (Grandey et al., 2013; Guler et al., 2022).

Research on emotional labour has primarily focused on frontline workers in service and health occupations or external communication contexts (Bridgen, 2011; Halltoft & Bertilsson; Yeomans, 2019), with limited research on emotional labour in an internal communication context. This context is critical to investigate because, unlike customer-facing jobs, communication professionals in an internal communication context interact on a much larger scale with managers and co-workers (Heide, 2017). Therefore, the current study will investigate emotional labour in a relatively recent albeit relevant context. Furthermore, to fill this research gap, this thesis will investigate the concept of emotional labour in an internal communication context with the JD-R theory. This is accomplished through an in-depth examination of communication professionals' personal experiences and perspectives, which workplace situations contribute to their use of emotional labour, and the consequences for their well-being.

Method

In this chapter, the research design, sampling method, participant recruitment, and data collection process based on semi-structured in-depth interviews are presented. Furthermore, the data analysis procedure is addressed, including the six-step process for thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006), as well as the quality criteria and ethical considerations of this study.

Research Design

This study, like Hochschild's (1983), used a qualitative approach by conducting interviews with employees. Other quantitative studies have typically measured emotional labour levels using self-rating scales, yielding more generalisable results (Diefendorff et al., 2005; Guler et al., 2022). Through in-depth insight and comprehension, qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings (Golafshani, 2003). Since the purpose of this study was to obtain first-hand knowledge and explore the perspectives and experiences of participants regarding emotional labour in an internal communication context, the researchers used a qualitative approach to effectively capture the insights, nuances, and complexities of participants. Furthermore, one of the benefits of using a qualitative research design is its flexibility (Taylor et al., 2015). Recent studies have used a qualitative research design to examine the concept of emotional labour (Kelly et al., 2021; Lyndon et al., 2021; Monrad, 2017; Rogers-Shaw et al., 2021). Hence, it has been demonstrated that the concept of emotional labour could be investigated using this approach.

This study used an interpretivist approach to understand communication professionals through their frames of reference and experience of reality. This perspective seeks understanding through qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, which generate descriptive data (Adedeji et al., 2022; Taylor et al., 2015). Furthermore, this study used a combination of inductive and deductive reasoning. The inductive approach develops theory and generates perspectives based on empirical data, whereas the deductive approach examines data based on the theoretical framework (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The inductive approach is malleable and allows researchers to revise their ideas as new data becomes available (Allen, 2017; Taylor et al., 2015). Because the concept of emotional labour for communication professionals in an internal communication context is an under-researched topic, the researchers were able to maintain some flexibility and investigate unexpected paths that arose during data collection. Furthermore, the deductive approach frequently draws from more optimistic epistemologies that refer to data as pre-existing or ready-made evidence in external reality (Swain, 2018). Hence, by using this approach, the researchers could also gather data while following the established theoretical framework of the emotional labour concept and JD-R theory.

Scholars have argued that case studies highlight the real-world context in which phenomena occur by examining, for example, a group of people in a rich, detailed, and varied way (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Heale & Twycross, 2018; Meyer, 2001; Yin, 2013). The case study method is well suited for investigating novel or understudied processes and behaviours (Meyer, 2001). Because the well-being of communication professionals in Sweden has recently received attention in the grey literature (Bucht, 2021; Palm, 2023), and the researchers were interested in investigating the concept of emotional labour in an internal communication context, this professional

group was chosen for this single case study. To determine what was previously known and to be able to conduct an in-depth investigation, the researchers reviewed relevant literature to establish a basic understanding of the case. Furthermore, to the best of their knowledge, the researchers could investigate previously unexplored theoretical connections, especially given that emotional labour has been examined primarily in commercial and external communication contexts in the service and health sectors.

Sampling Method

The recruitment of participants for this study was driven by a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling refers to the deliberate selection of participants based on their characteristics (Acharya et al., 2013; Etikan et al., 2016). This allowed the researchers to identify and select information-rich cases to achieve the most optimal use of available resources. The sampling criteria included communication professionals aged 24 to 65 in Sweden who had worked in the field for at least a year. In Sweden, entry requirements for the communication profession are relatively high, typically requiring a university degree in media and communication or equivalent (Lindberg, 2019). Therefore, as part of the sampling criteria for this study, a minimum age of 24 years was chosen. Furthermore, the sample included communication professionals of various genders, job titles, sectors, and years of experience. Ten participants from the public sector, six from the corporate sector, and four from non-governmental organisations were interviewed one-on-one. This allowed the researchers to concentrate on the similarities and differences within the case and examine their experiences from various perspectives.

In addition to purposive sampling, convenience and snowball sampling were used to find participants. When researchers recruit participants who are easily accessible to them, this is referred to as convenience sampling (Acharya et al., 2013; Etikan et al., 2016). These participants were recruited by contacting acquaintances who worked in the communication field and through announcements on LinkedIn. When researchers rely on participant referrals to recruit new participants, this is referred to as snowball sampling (Etikan et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2019). Those who were interested contacted the researchers directly, offering to participate in the study and share their experiences.

Data Collection

This study employed semi-structured in-depth interviews with communication professionals to collect data, which is a common data collection method in qualitative research (Chirban, 1996; Diccio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Warren & Karner, 2004). Taylor et al. (2015) argue that in-depth interviews are appropriate when the research interests are relatively well-defined, the researcher has time constraints, and the researcher desires an understanding of a diverse range of people. Furthermore, while participant observation might have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the case, it was neither practical nor feasible for this study. Bryman (2012) argued that interviewing is preferred in qualitative research for the flexibility of the researcher. This technique remains open to participant interpretation and regards more specific issues and topics. Therefore, due to time and access constraints, this study relied solely on interviews to collect data, which provided the researchers with a rich dataset.

The researchers developed the interview questions from the research questions without asking them directly, following the recommendations of Bryman (2012). The semi-structured interviews included a list of questions to cover the key topics with each participant (see Interview Guide in Appendix 2). They started with a set of questions to help elicit conversation and guide the interview to be more closely related to the research questions (Rabionet, 2011; Taylor et al., 2015). Because qualitative research is iterative, preliminary data analysis often coincides with data collection, resulting in changing questions as researchers gain more knowledge (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Since researchers have a central function in the qualitative research process and usually produce study-specific questions for their interviews, they become research instruments (Chenail, 2011).

The researchers realised early in the data collection process that some questions were redundant and could be eliminated, while others could be adapted to better fit the conversation, which could have been avoided with a pilot study. Some questions are susceptible to behavioural shifts and interviewer effects. Open-response questions necessitate more active participation by the interviewer, and thus there is more opportunity for influence (Mangione et al., 1992). At the same time, this allows the interviewee more freedom to share their unique perspectives and provide detailed and nuanced responses (Allen, 2017; Chenail, 2011). Researchers can reduce interviewer effects by designing questions requiring less probing to produce a usable answer since this would allow them to be inconsistent across interviews (Mangione et al., 1992). To reduce interviewer effects in this sense, the researchers attempted to limit their probing and allow the participants to respond more freely. The researchers conducted 20 interviews, encompassing approximately 14 hours, with an average of 45 minutes per interview, and data saturation

was achieved by the 18th interview. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants, including pseudonyms, age, gender pronouns, job titles and years in the industry.

Table 1

Descriptors of Participants

Pseudonyms	Age	Gender Pronouns	Job Title	Years in the Industry
Alice	25	She/her	Digital Marketing Coordinator	+1 year
Benjamin	34	He/him	Communications Coordinator	9 years
Carl	42	He/him	Communication Manager	12 years
Diana	24	She/her	Marketing Manager	+1 year
Esther	28	She/her	Marketing Activation Specialist	6 years
Freya	25	She/her	Communication Professional	1 year
Gabrielle	49	She/her	Communication Professional	8 years
Harald	47	He/him	Communication Professional	7 years
Isa	45	She/her	Communication Professional	16 years
Juliette	29	She/her	Head of Communications	7 years
Katherine	56	She/her	Communication Professional	11 years
Leia	55	She/her	Communication Professional	30 years
Mia	54	She/her	Communication Professional	15 years
Naomi	25	She/her	Communication Professional	+1 year
Olivia	56	She/her	Communication Professional	30 years
Priscilla	54	She/her	Project Communicator	15 years
Ramona	49	She/her	Public Relations Communicator	12 years
Tim	30	He/him	Communication Professional	4 years
Veronica	45	She/her	Communication Professional	18 years
Sonja	51	She/her	Communications Editor	16 years

The data were collected using video and conference technology, also known as Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP)-mediated technologies, between March 22nd and April 11th, 2023. VoIP-mediated technologies are well-suited for qualitative data collection due to their availability, data management features, and security options (Archibald et al., 2019). Hence, interviewees could select their interview location, suggesting that this was a pleasant environment where they would feel comfortable. Despite the benefits of convenience and interactivity, poor audio or video quality is a common issue with VoIP-mediated technologies. This happened during some of the interviews, but it had no impact on the overall outcome because the researchers were able to repeat any questions that were difficult to interpret at the time. Furthermore, the audio recordings were made with Windows Voice Recorder and Voice Memos on iPhone, allowing the researchers to transcribe the interviews.

After the interviews were completed, the researchers began transcription, which required careful data observation and repeated and thorough listening of the recordings. The Intelligent Verbatim technique was used, and the transcripts were reviewed and corrected for accuracy against the recordings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Powers, 2005; Widodo, 2014). The transcripts were also edited for readability, such as where to place commas and periods, and any identity markers were removed. The transcription process is critical in data analysis and central to qualitative research (Mero-Jaffe, 2011; Widodo, 2014). Some factors could influence transcription quality and even the overall research project. Because transcription cannot precisely convey everything said, the researchers had to confirm that the transcript accurately represented the content of the original recording rather than how it affected the research questions and overall findings. Mero-Jaffe (2011) identified five

factors that could impact the quality of a transcript: the researcher, the interviewer, the transcriber, the interviewee, and the transcription equipment and location.

Data Analysis

This study used a realist theoretical position of thematic analysis since it focused on the experiences, meanings, and realities of communication professionals. Because theme development necessitated interpretive work that extended beyond articulations in the data and included broader understandings and theoretically underpinned meanings, this study used thematic analysis at the latent level (Taylor et al., 2015). To analyse the data, the researchers followed the six-step process for thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006), who defined this as a process for discovering, assessing, and reporting patterns in the data. Thematic analysis consists of (1) familiarisation with data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) report production (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the first step, the researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading the transcripts and becoming familiar with the entire data set. After inserting the transcripts into NVivo, the search for meanings and patterns began. In the second step, the researchers created initial codes and organised the data from the transcripts into meaningful categories. The data coding process was accomplished through a hybrid approach that combined two opposing philosophical methods of reasoning: a bottom-up, inductive, data-driven one and a top-down, deductive, theoretical one (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach has been used by several researchers (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Swain, 2018; Xu & Zammit, 2020). Thus, the interpretive approach was supported by codes that were driven by both

participant data and the theoretical framework of this study. Through this method, the researchers could generate a set of pre-empirical codes derived from the theoretical framework using deductive logic and post-empirical codes generated from new perspectives in the data using inductive logic (Swain, 2018).

In the third step, the codes were collated, which resulted in the development of overarching themes, while other codes were either discarded because they were nonessential to the research topic or grouped under a miscellaneous code. In the fourth step, the researchers refined the prospect themes to ensure that the data cohered meaningfully, with clear and identifiable divisions between them. This phase involved re-reading the entire data set for coherency and accuracy. Additionally, any other data missing from earlier stages were coded.

In the fifth step, the researchers named their themes and had a sufficient thematic map of their data. They then reviewed and described the meaning of each theme and the aspects of the data they represented. The authors wrote a detailed analysis of each theme related to the research questions. In the sixth step, the researchers presented the final themes as part of the findings of this study and included interview extracts to support and illustrate the data interpretations. After data reduction, the thematic analysis write-up included selected data extracts and accounted for a data report to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Thomas, 2006). Table 2 shows the final themes, the codes and descriptions of the codes that comprise the themes, as well as which codes are deductive, and which are inductive.

Table 2*Coding Scheme*

Theme	Code	Description of the Codes	Deductive/Inductive
Expectations of Communication Professionals	Communication Profession Requirements	The requirements that communication professionals face in their daily work	Deductive
	Professionalism	What communication professionals consider to be professional	Inductive
	Everyday Work Tasks	Work tasks performed on a daily basis	Deductive
Emotional Labour in the Communication Profession	Emotional Labour at the Workplace	The workplace situations that evoke emotional labour	Deductive
	Feeling Rules	The guidelines that govern appropriate workplace behaviour	Deductive
	Highly Sensitive Person	A personality trait that makes individuals more sensitive to various impressions	Inductive
	Emotional Labour Strategies	The different emotional labour strategies used by communication professionals	Deductive
Surface Acting in Internal Communication	Unstructured Internal Communication	When internal communication is ad hoc and work tasks turn up on short notice	Inductive
	Dissatisfaction with feedback	A lack of feedback and when delivered in the wrong context	Deductive
	Non-transparent Workplace Culture	When internal workplace communication is non-transparent and strict	Deductive
	Job Hindrances	Work overload and perceived role ambiguity from other members of the organisation	Deductive
Genuine Emotions in Internal Communication	Structured Internal Communication	When internal communication is well-structured and work tasks are well-planned	Inductive
	Satisfaction with feedback	A sufficient amount of constructive feedback delivered in an appropriate context	Deductive
	Transparent Workplace Culture	When internal workplace communication is transparent and permissive	Deductive
	Job Challenges	Sufficient workload and perceived organisational support	Deductive

Impact on Well-Being	Job Demands	Job aspects that impairs the health of communication professionals	Deductive
	Job Resources	Job aspects that promote the health of communication professionals	Deductive
	Personal Demands	The personal demands that communication professionals place on themselves	Deductive
	Job Crafting	Activities that communication professionals engage in to improve their work situation	Deductive
	Surface Acting Before Burnout	Before becoming burnt out, communication professionals use surface acting at a higher level	Deductive
	Genuine Emotions After Recovery	After recovering from burnout, communication professionals use genuine emotions	Inductive
	Years of Experience	The likelihood of experiencing the effects of stress increase with the number of years of experience	Inductive

Note. The majority of codes are deductive, based on the theoretical framework of this thesis. However, some codes are inductive, to add nuance to the themes.

Quality Criteria

Scholars propose truth value, consistency, neutrality or confirmability, and applicability or transferability as essential quality criteria in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003; Meyer, 2001; Noble & Smith, 2015). To ensure truth value, the researchers acknowledged that there is no single correct answer to the research questions because multiple realities exist. They sought to account for researcher biases that may have influenced the findings and presented participant perspectives clearly and accurately. To ensure consistency, the researchers implemented a clear decision trail throughout the analysis process and ensured that data interpretations were consistent and transparent. To maintain neutrality, the researchers remained reflexive as much as possible during the whole research process and incorporated richness by displaying data extracts from participants to support the findings, as well as similarities and differences within data accounts to represent different perspectives. The applicability of the findings is determined

by their transferability to other contexts, settings, or groups. This study supports this by combining three purposive sampling techniques and demonstrating when data saturation was reached. Furthermore, if other researchers replicate this study in the future, they may reach similar or comparable conclusions or produce different findings, because there are various ways to use and create meaning from the data (Noble & Smith, 2015).

Ethical Considerations

In any research, the protection of participants through the application of appropriate ethical principles is critical. Because of the in-depth nature of the research process in qualitative studies, ethical considerations have particular significance (Mohd Arifin, 2018). Some ethical issues must be addressed before investigation to ensure research integrity, respect for human rights, and dignity (European Commission, 2021). Before the interviews, all participants received complete disclosure about the research process and were given an informed consent form (see Appendix 1). Before consent for this study was obtained, all participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, with no pressure or compulsion, and that they could withdraw at any time (European Commission, 2021; Mohd Arifin, 2018). All participants agreed to be recorded during the interviews and were informed that the data would be destroyed once the thesis had been examined and would only be used for this study.

Because confidentiality and anonymity are crucial aspects of social research (European Commission, 2021; Mohd Arifin, 2018; Swedish Research Council, 2002), the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 was followed to ensure participant protection and the ethical aspects of this research (European Commission, 2021). Wiles et al. (2008) defined

research confidentiality as not disclosing information provided by a participant to others and presenting findings in such a way that individuals cannot be identified, primarily through anonymisation. In this study, the anonymity and confidentiality of participants were protected by not disclosing their names or identities during data collection, analysis, and reporting. All participants received pseudonyms, and their workplaces remained unrevealed. Furthermore, after transcription, the interviewees were given the opportunity to read their statements and change anything sensitive.

The researchers had to be aware of their prior assumptions and knowledge and how this could bias the analysis (Bryman, 2012; Mehra, 2002; Taylor et al., 2015). Since they were interested in the well-being of communication professionals and the concept of emotional labour, this could imply that the topic under investigation was personal to the researchers as two future communication practitioners. Hence, researcher reflexivity was especially important in this context. While the researchers could not avoid their worldview entirely, they attempted to remain open to the discoveries that emerged during data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the researchers maintained that the study was an ongoing learning experience, which scholars have argued could assist researchers to set aside their own biases and discuss the knowledge gained from participants (Bryman, 2012; Mehra, 2002; Taylor et al., 2015).

In qualitative research, interviewing acquaintances raises ethical questions because the level of connection between the researchers and participants might introduce bias into the study (Brewis, 2014; Chenail, 2011; Mero-Jaffe, 2011; Quinney et al., 2016). Although these were few compared to the total number of participants, people with whom the researchers already had a relationship could impact behaviours and responses during the interviews. When researchers have the status of insiders, they must be sensitive and

maintain integrity (Quinney et al., 2016). One potential issue of interviewing people familiar to the researchers is that they might assume they already understand their viewpoints, clouding the data analysis procedure (Quinney et al., 2016). Another issue is that participants might want to assist the researchers with the study and thus respond in a way that the researchers want to hear rather than discuss their opinions, which may affect the quality of the interview (Brewis, 2014; Taylor et al., 2015). According to Taylor et al. (2015), novice observers tend to study friends and familiar surroundings. However, avoiding these settings is a recommendation rather than a rule, which allowed the researchers to sample enough participants for their thesis.

Discussion

In this chapter, the researchers will present the themes that emerged from the data analysis and discuss them with the current state of knowledge. Since the purpose of this thesis is to investigate the concept of emotional labour for communication professionals in an internal communication context, three overarching themes and two subthemes appear from this single case study: the first theme is *Expectations of Communication Professionals*, the second is *Emotional Labour in the Communication Profession*, which includes two subthemes: *Surface Acting in Internal Communication* and *Genuine Emotions in Internal Communication*, and the third theme is *Impact on Well-Being*. Finally, this chapter concludes with a presentation of the main findings in response to the research questions.

Expectations of Communication Professionals

The findings reveal that communication professionals regularly encounter high expectations to achieve organisational goals. Many participants explain that they are responsible for content production and design, GDPR compliance, employer branding, business acumen and comprehending new technology. Depending on the size of the organisation and the sector in which participants work, they are responsible for internal communication to varying degrees through newsletters, staff briefings, and intranets. Therefore, in accordance with Yeomans and FitzPatrick (2017), they can be seen as an internal stakeholder group involved in managing the communication system at their workplaces. Many participants explain that they work with communication conditions to enforce co-worker relationships by encouraging a positive and open communication climate. Several participants state that they oversee communication development, which

includes holistically analysing and developing communication processes within the organisation. Some participants express that they are responsible for communication training, implementing constructive feedback and target group analysis. These findings are consistent with some of the challenges that communication professionals face concerning improving internal communication, as identified by Heide and Simonsson (2011), who argue that understanding daily organisational life and communication processes is essential for developing internal communication within an organisation. Furthermore, Apolo et al. (2017) and Yeomans and FitzPatrick (2017) argue that internal communication is critical for achieving organisational goals, which might explain why several participants are expected to undertake an active role in internal communication at their workplaces. The following data extracts demonstrate some of the workplace expectations for communication professionals:

“I suppose it varies quite a bit depending on what role you have and in which organisation [...] you work. Perhaps it is the challenge that it can be so incredibly broad that it can demand so much of you. You should be a TikTok expert, but you should also be able to write long communication plans, lead meetings or be very creative in workshops [...] as well as having opinions about internal and external communication”. (Tim)

“I would say that one needs to be a multi-artist today to work as a communication professional. If one works alone as I do, one has to wear 45 different hats: one is an image expert, one should write good texts, one should know social media, one should ideally be web-savvy within different web production programmes [...] and you must be operational, you must know events, you must try to work strategically internally, you must work with

both internal and external communication, and these are just a few of the things that fall on the communication professional today". (Olivia)

Many participants report that other organisational members repeatedly misunderstand their primary role and workload, which coincides with the difficulty in measuring and evaluating actual results because communication efforts are frequently seen over time rather than immediately after implementation. This makes it difficult to explain the significance of their work, particularly among those who work as communication professionals alone at their workplaces. Isa supports this by explaining that her work is all about values, routines, internal communication, and establishing organisational structures, all of which she finds to be unfortunately quite invisible. This is consistent with Falkheimer et al. (2017), who contend that the view of communication professionals is somewhat ambiguous and that other organisational members perceive them as channel producers or technicians. Furthermore, the position of the communication practitioner has significantly been displaced because of societal developments, according to Palm and Sandström (2013), which might explain the vagueness regarding the communication profession as well as the fact that several participants explain that they frequently are expected to take on additional work responsibilities outside of their job description. Many participants agree that the workload is excessive, and the expectations are unrealistic, which can be overwhelming and demanding. This is compatible with Killingsworth and Flynn (2016), who argue that communication professionals are frequently overwhelmed by their multifaceted work duties.

Emotional Labour in the Communication Profession

The feeling rules manifest differently at the workplaces of participants, with both unwritten rules and sets of guidelines. This is consistent with Benesch (2017), who explains that, while not always explicitly stated, feeling rules can infer from institutional policies that recommend desired workplace behaviour. Many participants report that their workplaces accept all emotions and have an open atmosphere, albeit not all emotional expressions are permitted because they are in a professional environment. Several participants explain that they frequently experience an internal emotion while sometimes publicly displaying something else, indicating that they follow the feeling rules by using different emotional labour strategies. According to Hochschild (2012), adhering to the feeling rules will necessitate employees performing emotional labour. Many participants describe that negative emotions, such as frustration and irritation are allowable if they maintain a respectful attitude towards others and can communicate this constructively. This is consistent with Welch and Jackson (2007) and Walden (2021), who argue that allowing employees to express concerns and make suggestions through various internal communication channels can improve an open and compassionate internal communication culture.

Since acting on anger is unacceptable and exhibiting overjoy is not always appropriate in a professional atmosphere, many participants explain that they maintain a more neutral attitude in the workplace and agree that positive emotions are altogether more welcome. Several participants believe that workplaces should be professional and constructive, which could explain why many participants use surface acting when they are experiencing negative emotions and genuine emotions when they are experiencing positive emotions. This follows

Benesch (2017), who states that certain emotions will be supported, while others will be dampened in the context, indicating the presence of more normative emotions. This is consistent with Li and Liu (2021), who argue that organisations should emphasise the importance of clear communication and transparency and provide employees with the tools they need to manage emotional labour in the workplace.

Some participants argue that the communication profession is a service profession, which entails assisting others with various communication efforts, driving their organisations forward and making others appear in a better light. Hence, they must sometimes set aside their work to assist other organisational members, which necessitates ongoing task and time prioritisation. This requires them to display either a positive or neutral demeanour as part of their employment, which Sommerfeldt and Kent (2020) characterise as emotional labour. This is consistent with the definition of 'factotum', which refers to an all-purpose servant with multiple activities and duties (Merriam-Webster, 2023), as well as the expansion of the service sector (Hochschild, 1983) and the development of the communication profession as a result of ideological and political-economic changes (Palm & Sandström, 2013).

Several participants explain how emotions impact their occupation in various ways. This is congruent with Kim and Williams (2022), who explains that emotions are negotiated, performed, and interactively utilised by all organisational members and that they are produced and managed to fulfil specific work requirements. Hochschild (2012) argues that occupations involving emotional labour must meet at least one of the following criteria: (1) face-to-face or voice-to-voice interaction with the public; (2) employees instilling an emotional state in themselves or others; and (3) employers are able to exert some control over their employees' emotional states through training and supervision. The first criterion

suggests a focus on an external communication context. However, in an internal communication context, communication professionals interact with other organisational members more frequently than with the general public and external stakeholders. This is similar to what Glikson and Erez (2013) propose and relates to Ndubuisi Eze (2017), who contends that displaying positive or negative emotions has an impact on the simplicity of communication and overall team performance.

The findings show that participants working in larger organisations, whether in the public or corporate sectors, have daily face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with co-workers in their department, the management, and employees from other departments. Participants in smaller organisations, whether in the corporate or non-governmental sectors, have face-to-face or voice-to-voice interaction with co-workers and the management at least three days per week. Regardless of their occupational sector, participants agree that they must sometimes instil an emotional state in themselves or others to accomplish organisational objectives. Thus, the findings confirm that the communication profession meets two of Hochschild's (2012) three criteria for occupations involving emotional labour.

Surface Acting in Internal Communication

The first emotional labour strategy that the participants use is surface acting, which refers to disguising feelings or displaying a fake emotion (Grandey et al., 2013; Hochschild, 2012). Many participants employ surface acting to appear more compliant and helpful, such as when they receive insufficient information, are assigned tasks on short notice, or are allocated responsibilities that are not part of their job description. This aligns with

Sommerfeldt and Kent (2020), who argues that emotional labour is an internal activity performed externally that sometimes requires employees to suppress their private feelings to exhibit more desirable and socially acceptable emotions at work. Another reason why several participants use surface acting is to maintain their professional image at work. This includes respecting co-workers, performing, and completing work tasks, assisting others, being responsive and active as well as meticulous and thorough. Few participants employ surface acting to resolve conflicts and settle arguments with other organisational members. This is consistent with Lee and Madera (2019), who argue that co-workers frequently use emotional labour to suppress negative emotions and express positive ones, potentially aiding in the maintenance of positive co-worker relationships.

Many participants experience feelings of anger, frustration, and irritation during interactions with other organisational members who frequently misunderstand their workload and core role, or when they are not recognised for completing a time-consuming and energy-intensive task, forcing them to conceal their internal feelings. This agrees with Üzümcü et al. (2017), who emphasise the importance of considering the emotional labour involved in internal communication and that organisations should strive for open communication and coaching to reduce any impairing effects on employees. Furthermore, some participants explain that they hide feelings of frustration and irritation during internal meetings when they openly receive negative feedback of their work from other organisational members, rather than in a private setting where they would be more comfortable being honest and explaining themselves. Alice supports this by saying that she pushes away her feelings instead of taking the fight, especially when she comes up with a solution to a problem, and others are against that idea. Overall, surface acting is more common among participants who describe their workplace's internal communication as ad

hoc or lacking a proper structure, where they must deal with problems as they arise. Priscilla affirms this by mentioning that she once worked at an organisation where everything was chaotic, and they were continuously overburdened with new tasks, resulting in misunderstandings among employees, in which she could not be honest about her emotions. This internal communication structure was detrimental to her job satisfaction, eventually prompting her resignation, which is consistent with Alsakarneh et al. (2019), who argue that surface acting is related to turnover intentions. Furthermore, few participants argue that emotions affect them differently because they are highly sensitive, causing them to become emotionally overburdened more frequently than their co-workers and necessitate more time for recovery, and thus, use surface acting every day to suppress emotions caused by stress. This corresponds to Rafaeli and Sutton (1987), who explain that evaluating the influence of various emotional labour strategies on an individual is difficult, with both positive and negative outcomes possible. The following quotes demonstrate why communication professionals use surface acting:

“I believe that you can have more emotions than you show at work, that you still hold back, and that it’s probably for your own safety that you don’t want to show too much, that you’re afraid of showing too many emotions, so, of course, you hold back anger maybe. You might be so annoyed at someone who doesn’t listen or that you don’t get along that you try to swallow it, so it’s more likely that you try to hold it in [...]” (Naomi)

“You have to hide a little joy too. You can’t keep cheering just because you’ve managed to publish something. [...] I can say that it is clear that you hold back emotions or frustration or something like that every day basically.” (Priscilla)

Genuine Emotions in Internal Communication

The second emotional labour strategy that the participants use is genuine emotions, which refers to exhibiting actual emotions in a socially acceptable manner (Guler et al., 2022). Some participants report being calculating and strategic when using genuine emotions at work to make professional decisions. Many participants report that they prefer to express themselves honestly if it is appropriate for the situation, suggesting that their articulated emotions coexist with their experienced emotions and allow them to maintain appropriate workplace behaviour. Several participants claim that it is easier to use genuine emotions if they are regarded as positive, and that if they experience any negative emotions as a result of interpersonal disagreements, such as anger, frustration, or irritation, they strive to convey this constructively. This is congruent with Grandey et al. (2013), who explain that authentic emotional experience and expression is the most effective emotional labour strategy because it requires the least amount of mental effort. Furthermore, some participants report that if they believe they have been treated unfairly, they can be honest about it. However, in arguments or instances where displaying genuine emotions can impair their professional image or negatively affect the recipient, in which participants are unable to articulate their emotions constructively, they employ surface acting as a protective measure. Another situation in the workplace where several participants use genuine emotions is when they receive constructive feedback in an individual setting, where they feel more comfortable explaining themselves and being honest about their emotions. The following quotes demonstrate the use of genuine emotions as a strategy:

“I’m probably quite open about my feelings in general, I have a fantastic workplace, so it’s almost only positive here”. (Mia)

“I believe I have managed to regulate my emotions well so far [...] If I disagree with something, I try to express it directly but constructively, so it doesn’t come across as just negativity”. (Veronica)

Several participants engage in social sharing to vent their concerns or frustrations when they know others will support or listen to them. This is consistent with McCance et al. (2013), who argue that social sharing among employees can reduce the negative impact of emotional labour during customer interactions. However, in this case, this applies to interactions with internal company members, such as co-workers and managers. Some participants report that they receive emotional support from managers and must suppress their emotions in front of some of their co-workers. Diana supports this by explaining that she can always be open and honest with her managers. Others report that they suppress their emotions in front of managers and receive better support from their co-workers. Carl verifies this by stating that his co-workers are more supportive. This implies that, depending on how well others understand them, the participants will use either surface acting or genuine emotions with various organisational members. Finally, participants who work in organisations with clear and transparent internal communication and proper structure, as well as when receiving constructive feedback, are more likely to express genuine emotions, which is consistent with Walden (2021), who argue that transparency and trust are valuable aspects of an open internal communication climate.

Impact on Well-Being

The findings reveal that high job demands, such as an excessive workload, multiple areas of responsibility, and unrealistic expectations, negatively impact the well-being of participants in terms of burnout, exhaustion, and stress, partially because they must perform surface acting. This emotional labour strategy, according to Lee and Madera (2019), can be understood as a job demand with a demanding and depleting emotional cost and is consistent with Grandey et al. (2013) and Guler et al. (2022), who argue that emotional exhaustion and burnout are regular health impairment outcomes of surface acting. Furthermore, this agrees with Bakker et al. (2023), who argue that job demands include consistent physical, mental, or emotional effort, such as high work pressure, interpersonal conflict, or emotionally demanding interactions, which result in physical and mental costs, such as burnout and stress. Olivia supports this by saying that there is a daily element of stress as a communication professional today, which is not always understood by the rest of the organisation.

According to Bakker and Demerouti (2017), job demands can be either a hindrance, such as role ambiguity and work overload, or a challenge, such as high workload and responsibility. Many participants express frustration that they are overburdened and that others do not understand their primary role, referring to a job hindrance. Some participants believe that responsibility encourages their personal growth and achievement, referring to a job challenge. Thus, the findings indicate that job hindrances have the most significant negative impact on participants' well-being.

The findings demonstrate that the greater the freedom and responsibility, the greater the personal demands of participants. This is consistent with Bakker and Demerouti (2017),

who explains that personal demands like workaholism or perfectionism can have similar consequences as job demands. Some participants report experiencing low self-esteem and performance anxiety when quantity is preferred over quality, since they do not have enough time to immerse themselves in one area. When the personal demands are greater, some participants use surface acting to avoid sharing their anxiety and the individual demands they place on themselves to appear more engaged and capable at work. However, when the job demands outweigh their personal demands, as a result of a lack of creative space and when their full capacity is not being utilised, the participants are more comfortable using their genuine emotions, provided that there is clear and transparent internal communication. Priscilla confirms this by saying that she has been fortunate in recent workplaces with competent management and being able to express herself objectively as well as emotionally, such as frustration with monotonous work tasks.

The findings show that participants receive various amounts of feedback at their workplaces. Many participants state that instances of positive and constructive feedback have a beneficial influence on them, which can be linked to perceived organisational support. Several participants mention that they are content with their workplace's internal communication and feel better supported with high transparency and emotional permissiveness, in which they feel comfortable expressing their genuine emotions. This is consistent with Wojcik et al. (2022) who argue that organisational support can be regarded as a job resource that will also reduce the use of surface acting. Several participants use surface acting in organisations where internal communication is perceived by participants as ad hoc and there is a lack of feedback or recognition for performing work duties, indicating a lack of perceived organisational support.

In response to high job strain, Bakker and De Vries (2021) argue that employees are more likely to engage in maladaptive self-regulation strategies such as emotion-focused coping (emotion regulation) and self-undermining behaviours (e.g., interpersonal disagreements). The findings indicate that many participants use surface acting as a form of emotion-focused coping to maintain their professional image, be perceived as cooperative and appear less discontent when faced with job hindrances. This is consistent with Humphrey et al. (2015), who contend that the regulation strategies used to pursue and exhibit positive emotions, as well as the larger conditions under which emotional labour occurs, have a greater impact on employees' negative well-being than emotional labour itself. The following quote exemplify the impairment of well-being for communication professionals:

“I believe that the overall stress level for communication professionals is probably quite high, and there was a report about that from DIK not so long ago, that communication professionals were the profession with the highest rate of burnout, which I can completely understand. I believe that if you're a little younger and willing to do a lot of things where you don't have the courage to say no [...] burnout comes like a letter in the mail”. (Sonja)

In regard to high job strain, Bakker and De Vries (2021) explain that employees are less likely to use adaptive self-regulation strategies such as recovery (leisure activities) or job crafting (proactively optimising the work environment). The findings reveal that some participants, for example, meditate and take recovery breaks at work to relieve stress. This suggests that they use job crafting as an adaptive self-regulation strategy to optimise their work environment. Furthermore, several participants who have previously endured burnout

explain that they used surface acting at work to hide feelings of frustration and irritation before going on sick leave. However, once recovered, they use genuine emotions as the primary strategy. The same participants note that with age and experience, they have become better at coming up with counterclaims, setting healthier boundaries at work, and not taking on more than they can handle in order to reduce stress and improve their job circumstances. This could imply that experiencing and expressing genuine emotions is a type of adaptive self-regulation strategy in terms of job crafting and is consistent with Guler et al. (2022), who argue that genuine emotions frequently result in positive outcomes for employees and the organisation. Because surface acting and deep acting are the two more established emotional labour strategies, with the former associated with a job demand and the latter with a job resource (Lee & Madera, 2019), this might explain why there is little research on genuine emotions associated with JD-R. However, considering the findings of this study, genuine emotions could be viewed as an adaptive self-regulation strategy or possibly a job resource.

The findings reveal that access to a sufficient amount of job resources positively impacts the well-being of participants. Several participants have access to social support, autonomy, feedback, and learning opportunities, which Bakker et al. (2014) exemplify as some job resources. These job resources are more common among participants working in larger organisations and less common among participants working in smaller organisations, which agrees with Bakker and Demerouti (2017), who explain that the size of the organisation and the occupational sector may be influencing factors. Furthermore, communication professionals who work alone have greater expectations than those who work in a communication department and have several co-workers to rely on. Participants state that this is a valuable asset that they would not trade for anything. Overall,

participants with substantial resources and challenging job demands believe that their company invest in them. Bakker and Demerouti (2017) contend that JD-R research has consistently demonstrated that employees perform optimally in work environments that combine challenging job demands with job resources since such environments facilitate their work engagement and personal growth. Leia supports this by explaining that if she is not challenged and there is a lack of expectations on her job, it has a negative impact on her well-being because that is what she enjoys about her work.

Several participants suggest additional resources to improve their work environment. These suggestions include on-the-job training regarding their frequent work tasks, proper and functional technical equipment, management with professional experience in communication, hiring more staff to aid in time management, more structured and strategic planning, better task delegation and that organisations must clearly define the role of the communication professional to ensure that they are valued and understood. Bakker and De Vries (2021) emphasise the importance of organisations monitoring and improving job characteristics to prevent burnout, such as establishing realistic goals and challenges, optimising job demands, and providing adequate job resources. Furthermore, Alsakarneh et al. (2019) argue that employees who perform emotional labour are more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs than those who do not. The findings of this study contradict this because, despite using surface acting, many participants report high levels of overall job satisfaction.

Main Findings and Research Questions

RQ1: Which workplace situations cause communication professionals to engage in emotional labour in an internal communication context? The findings demonstrate that certain workplace situations cause communication professionals to use different emotional labour strategies in an internal communication context. They use either surface acting or genuine emotions, and deep acting was undiscovered in this study. However, which emotional labour strategy they employ is determined by their perception of the profession, the overall structure of internal communication, their years of experience and personality differences. Essentially, the communication profession involves emotional labour because it requires communication professionals to interact face-to-face or voice-to-voice with other organisational members, as well as elicit an emotional state in themselves or others. Table 3 shows which workplace situations cause communication professionals to engage in emotional labour in an internal communication context.

Table 3

Situations at Work that Cause Emotional Labour

Research Question 1	
Surface Acting	Genuine Emotions
1. Interpersonal disagreements	1. Interpersonal disagreements
2. Receiving negative feedback during internal meetings	2. Receiving constructive feedback in a one-on-one setting
3. Assisting other organisational members with work tasks on short notice	3. Social sharing or seeking emotional support from coworkers or managers

The findings reveal that different factors motivate communication professionals to use surface acting. First and foremost, communication professionals use surface acting to hide feelings of anger, frustration, and irritation to present a positive or neutral demeanour in order to adhere to the feeling rules and meet the expectations of their profession. This corresponds to their perceptions of the communication profession as a service profession in which they are expected to perform as a factotum. These emotions arise from the workload that communication professionals experience, as well as the fact that other organisational members frequently misunderstand their workload and primary role. Second, surface acting is more common among communication professionals who perceive their workplace's internal communication as non-transparent, ad hoc, or lacking a formal structure and where they routinely deal with problems as they arise. Third, the more years of experience communication professionals have, the less they use surface acting in an internal communication context. Fourth, due to personality differences, communication professionals will use surface acting to varying degrees. The findings show that highly sensitive individuals become emotionally overburdened more frequently than their co-workers and, as a result, use surface acting daily.

The first workplace situation that causes communication professionals to use surface acting is during interpersonal disagreements when they feel misunderstood and uncomfortable sharing their emotions and wish to maintain positive co-worker relationships. The second workplace situation that causes them to use surface acting is when they receive negative feedback about a communication-related task during internal meetings attended by several organisational members in order to appear compliant or neutral, even though they may be frustrated. The third workplace situation that causes communication professionals to use surface acting is when they must assist other

organisational members with work tasks on short notice in order to maintain a professional and cooperative attitude in the workplace, although they may feel overwhelmed.

The findings reveal that different factors motivate communication professionals to use genuine emotions. First and foremost, communication professionals prefer to use genuine emotions because they wish to remain authentic. This strategy is more prevalent when experiencing happiness internally because positive emotions are overall more encouraged due to existing feeling rules in the workplace. These emotions often arise from completing larger work tasks or receiving positive feedback from other organisational members. Second, genuine emotions are more prominent among communication professionals who perceive their workplace's internal communication as permissive, transparent, and structured. Third, the more years of experience communication professionals have, the more they tend to use genuine emotions in an internal communication context.

The first workplace situation that causes communication professionals to use genuine emotions is during interpersonal disagreements when they feel comfortable sharing feelings of irritation while maintaining a respectful attitude towards their interlocutor. However, if they struggle to articulate their emotions constructively, communication professionals turn to surface acting as a protective approach. The second workplace situation that causes them to use genuine emotions is receiving constructive feedback in a one-on-one setting where they can provide explanations and eventual counterclaims. The third workplace situation that causes communication professionals to use genuine emotions is engaging in social sharing and seeking emotional support from co-workers or managers, depending on their relationships and how well others understand them, in which they can express if they are overwhelmed or feel unfairly treated.

RQ2: What are the consequences of using different emotional labour strategies for communication professionals? The findings demonstrate that there are several consequences of using different emotional labour strategies for communication professionals. However, the emotional labour strategy they employ will have different outcomes for their well-being. This is confined by the job demands and resources at their workplaces and their years of experience. Table 4 shows the consequences of using different emotional labour strategies for communication professionals.

Table 4

Consequences of Using Different Emotional Labour Strategies

Research Question 2	
Surface Acting	Genuine Emotions
1. Burnout, exhaustion, and stress	1. Stress relief
2. Turnover intentions	2. Work engagement
3. Perceived lack of organisational support	3. Perceived organisational support
4. Increased job strain	4. Decreased job strain

The first consequence of using surface acting as a maladaptive self-regulation strategy in response to high job strain for communication professionals is burnout, exhaustion, and stress. This finding confirms the health-impairing process of using surface acting as an emotional labour strategy. The second consequence of surface acting is turnover intentions, which occur when communication professionals leave their places of employment due to high job strain and the purposeful suppression of emotions. This finding suggests that surface acting can be viewed as a job demand, leading to resignation. The third consequence of using surface acting is that communication professionals perceive a lack of

support from their organisations, particularly when there is a lack of time for recovery, and where this emotional labour strategy is required to maintain their professional image and a cooperative work environment. The fourth consequence of surface acting is that hiding or suppressing feelings of anger, frustration, and irritation, combined with work overload, adds to the already existing job strain.

The first consequence of using genuine emotions as an adaptive self-regulation strategy in response to high job strain for communication professionals is stress relief, which can be achieved by frequently using job crafting to improve their work environment through mediation and recovery breaks. Additionally, the most notable finding is that surface acting is more prevalent among participants before burnout, whereas after recovery, genuine emotions are the primary strategy for setting healthier boundaries and being more honest about their capabilities at work, both of which have a positive impact on participants' well-being.

The second consequence of using genuine emotions as a means of job crafting through actively optimising the work environment is that communication professionals feel less overwhelmed by work tasks, which increases work engagement. The third consequence of using genuine emotions is perceived organisational support, which occurs when communication professionals can express their emotions, such as disappointment, and feel heard by their organisations. The fourth consequence of using genuine emotions is decreased job strain because this strategy can be viewed as a job resource that allows communication professionals to avoid hiding or suppressing their emotions at work. Finally, the findings show that job satisfaction among communication professionals remains high regardless of which emotional labour strategy they employ.

Conclusion

Main Conclusions

This study aimed to investigate the concept of emotional labour and the well-being of communication professionals in an internal communication context. To collect data for this single case study, the researchers conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20 communication professionals in Sweden of various ages, genders, titles, and years in the industry from three occupational sectors. After data collection, the researchers used thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data following the six-step process by Braun and Clarke (2006), revealing three overarching themes and two subthemes.

The findings revealed that communication professionals encounter a variety of expectations in their profession. For instance, specialist knowledge was rarely sufficient in their current workplaces, and generalist knowledge appeared advantageous because they rarely had time to devote themselves to one area. They were responsible for various work activities such as content production and design, GDPR compliance, employer branding, business acumen and comprehending new technology. They also encountered expectations in developing internal communication practices, serving, and assisting other organisational members, and driving their organisations forward through various communication activities. Because measuring and evaluating communication efforts takes time, their workload and primary roles are frequently perceived as vague by other organisational members, which coincides with Falkheimer et al. (2017), who explained that communication professionals' roles are somewhat ambiguous, and Killingsworth and Flynn (2016), who argued that communication professionals are frequently overwhelmed by their multifaceted work

duties. Additionally, the young age of the profession and societal changes in Sweden (Palm & Sandström, 2013) might have contributed to the ambiguous perception surrounding the profession and the fact that communication professionals from different sectors perform similar tasks.

The findings demonstrated that communication professionals experience a range of internal emotions while projecting a different demeanour externally, mainly due to the high expectations of their occupation and their perception of it as a service profession. Like flight attendants (Hochschild, 1983), service workers (Kim & Wang, 2018), and nurses (Afsar et al., 2017), communication professionals frequently interact face-to-face or voice-to-voice with other organisational members and sometimes must elicit an emotional state in themselves or others, which meets the criteria of occupations involving emotional labour, presented by Hochschild (2012). Furthermore, this aligns with the statement by Grandey and Melloy (2017) that emotional labour is utilised to achieve organisational goals. Because Hochschild (2012) argued that emotional labour is a form of workplace oppression in which employees frequently interact with the public, the concept has mainly been investigated in an external communication context. However, Glikson and Erez (2013) noted that in an internal communication context, employees regularly interact with other organisational members, such as managers and co-workers, which is the occurrence of the current study.

There were various workplace situations that caused communication professionals to use different emotional labour strategies in an internal communication context. Their utilisation of different emotional labour strategies was influenced by their perception of the profession, the overall structure of internal communication, their years of experience and personality differences. More specifically, when the internal communication was described as ad hoc, unstructured, and non-transparent, surface acting was more common among

communication professionals. In contrast, genuine emotions was more common when internal communication was described as permissive, transparent, clearly structured, and included opportunities for constructive feedback.

The first emotional labour strategy used by communication professionals was surface acting to hide feelings of anger, frustration, and irritation to present a positive or neutral demeanour to meet the expectations of their profession. These emotions arose from their experienced workload, and that other organisational members frequently misunderstood what the communication profession entails. They also used surface acting to uphold positive co-worker relationships and maintain a professional image and cooperative work atmosphere. Moreover, the findings revealed that highly sensitive individuals were more often emotionally overwhelmed than their co-workers and used surface acting daily. The workplace situations that caused communication professionals to use surface acting in an internal communication context were interpersonal disagreements, receiving negative feedback during internal meetings and assisting other organisational members with work tasks on short notice.

The second emotional labour strategy used by communication professionals was genuine emotions to exhibit their inner emotional state, which was easier when those emotions were positive, as this was generally more encouraged in the workplace. These emotions arose from completing larger work tasks and receiving positive feedback from other organisational members. The workplace situations that caused communication professionals to use genuine emotions in an internal communication context were interpersonal disagreements, provided that the conversation was constructive, receiving constructive feedback in a one-on-one setting, and social sharing or seeking emotional support from co-workers or managers. In summary, the findings showed that regardless of

which emotional labour strategy communication professionals used, their overall job satisfaction was remarkably high.

Research Implications

The findings revealed that surface acting was used as a maladaptive self-regulation strategy in response to high job strain, resulting in burnout, exhaustion, and stress, i.e., a health impairment on well-being. This is consistent with Bakker and De Vries (2021), who explained that with high job strain, employees tend to use maladaptive self-regulation strategies, such as emotion-focused coping, or in this study, surface acting, which has also been described as a job demand by Lee and Madera (2022). However, the impairing effects of surface acting as a job demand decreased when there was a satisfactory balance of challenging job demands and sufficient job resources.

This study has two theoretical implications that deserve further exploration in the field of organisational communication. First and foremost, genuine emotions were discovered to be an adaptive self-regulation strategy in response to high job strain. The findings demonstrated that communication professionals used genuine emotions as a form of job crafting to actively improve their work environment by setting healthier boundaries at work and take recovery breaks (Bakker & De Vries, 2021), which resulted in higher work engagement and stress reduction. Another theoretical implication of this study is that surface acting was more common among participants before burnout, whereas genuine emotions were the primary strategy after recovery. This suggests that genuine emotions was used to improve employee well-being after suffering from the impairing effects of surface acting. Those who had experienced burnout due to the purposeful suppression

and hiding of emotions due to high job strain subsequently preferred using genuine emotions to minimise the risk of ending up impairing their health again. Therefore, in this study, genuine emotions as an emotional labour strategy in an internal communication context was the most effective strategy for communication professionals' well-being.

Finally, a practical implication of this study is that additional job resources could improve the work environment and well-being of communication professionals in Sweden. For example, on-the-job training related to their multifaceted work tasks, proper and functional technical equipment, management with professional experience in communication practises, an increased number of employees to assist with time management, more tools for structured planning regarding internal communication, better task delegation, and organisations that clearly define the role of the communication professional to ensure that they are valued and understood.

Limitations and Further Research Directions

This thesis was not without limitations. First, the findings are limited to the contributions of participants. Even though the sample included communication professionals of various ages, genders, job titles, years in the industry, and sectors, it cannot represent a grander proportion of the communication profession in Sweden, as would be more likely with a quantitative research design. However, this was not the purpose of this study since it sought in-depth perspectives and experiences of communication professionals. Second, because people behave and express themselves differently in different contexts, what participants disclosed during the interviews might not always be consistent with their actions and expressions in other contexts. Therefore, the researchers

had to make assumptions about issues that otherwise could have been discovered through participant observation. Third, although pilot interviews could have been used to test the quality of the interview guide and identify potential researcher biases, this was not possible for the current study due to time constraints.

Future research contributions could expand the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory by incorporating genuine emotions as an emotional labour strategy. Because previous research has primarily focused on surface acting as a job demand and deep acting as a job resource, the third strategy requires more attention, such as whether it can be considered a potential job resource and what implications this might have on employee well-being. Furthermore, examining emotional labour in the workplace through the lens of social sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for communication professionals could broaden the scope of emotional labour literature. In closing, because the current study was a single case study, future research could conduct a multiple case study in which two or more cases, for example, communication professionals from two different sectors or culturally diverse groups, are examined, allowing for comparison and contrast across cases.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Informed Consent Form

Research project title: Communication Professionals as the Office Factotum:
A Study of Emotional Labour in the Communication Profession

Research investigators: Jordan Thunell Idumwonyi and Evelina Winberg

The interview will last 30 to 45 minutes. The authors do not anticipate any risks associated with your participation; however, a deeper reflection of your workplace may cause you to view your organisation critically. You have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the study at any time.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of this thesis. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken by the University of Gothenburg require interviewees to explicitly agree to be interviewed and how their data will be used. This consent form is required for the researchers to ensure that you understand the purpose of your participation and agree to the conditions of your participation. As a participant, you will be protected by the EU General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 (2016), which ensures that there will be no collection of sensitive data that would allow for recognition. However, there will be questions about age and gender; however, these are not enough for identification. There is no risk for participants to be in danger or part of dangerous research. This does not exclude the risk of discomfort; if this occurs, you have the option to withdraw from the interview, according to the European Commission (2021). Our supervisor and the academic personnel appointed to control the quality of the thesis project will be the only individuals who can require us to gain access to those files for academic research purposes only.

Would you, therefore, read the accompanying information sheet and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- the interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced
- if requested, you will be sent the transcript and allowed to correct any factual errors
- the interview transcript will be analysed by Jordan Thunell Idumwonyi and Evelina Winberg
- access to the interview transcript will be limited to Jordan Thunell Idumwonyi and Evelina Winberg, as well as students and teachers of the Master in Communication programme at the University of Gothenburg
- any summary interview content or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publications or other academic outlets will be anonymised so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify you is not revealed.

- the actual recording will be kept until the thesis has been graded and approved by the examiner
- any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval
- you are 18 or older

I also understand that my words will be quoted directly. With regards to being quoted, please contact the authors if you agree with any of the statements:

- I do not agree to be quoted directly even if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
- I do not agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

By signing this form I agree that;

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I do not have to participate, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I have read the information sheet;
4. I can request a copy of the transcript or other data from my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
5. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

If you have any additional questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

Jordan Thunell Idumwonyi
E-mail: gusjorid@student.gu.se

Evelina Winberg
E-mail: guswinbev@student.gu.se

You can also contact Cristina Miguel our supervisor:
E-mail: cristina.miguel@ait.gu.se

Appendix 2

Table 5

Sociodemographic Information

Sociodemographic Information
What is your age?
What pronouns do you use?
What is your nationality?
In what country do you live?
What is your professional work title?
What is your educational background?

Appendix 3

Interview Guide

This student project is part of the course TIA069 Communication: Degree Project, which is part of the Master in Communication programme at the University of Gothenburg. First and foremost, the researchers would like to thank you for participating in this interview and contributing to this dissertation. The purpose is to investigate the concept of emotional labour concerning well-being in an internal communication context for communication professionals in Sweden. The interview will be audio recorded for general research purposes (e.g., transcribing and analysing the data). The interview will be semi-structured, meaning that some questions are prepared, and others will be spontaneous follow-up questions. If you have any questions, you are welcome to ask the researchers for clarification at any time during or after the interview. All data handling is anonymous and confidential. The interview will last 30-45 minutes and occur on a single occasion. Before the interview begins, you have read and approved the consent form and have had your rights as a participant in this study explained to you by the researchers.

Q1: Please tell us a little about yourself: What inspired you to become a communication professional?

Q2: What are the qualifications for becoming a communication professional at your current workplace?

Q3: What is your most preferred aspect of working as a communication professional?

Q4: What are the challenges of working as a communication professional?

Q5: What is an average day like for you as a communication professional?

Q6: How do you think emotions might manifest in your role as a communication professional?

Q7: How would you describe the internal communication at your workplace?

Q8: How often do you receive feedback on your work from management?

Q9: How involved is your management in the internal communication?

Q10: What emotions are allowed to exhibit in your workplace?

Q11: In what situations do you feel emotionally overwhelmed at work?

Q12: In what ways does your management support you if an emotionally difficult situation arises?

Q13: In what ways do your co-workers support you if an emotionally difficult situation arises?

Q14: What makes your workplace unique?

Q15: What do you associate with being a professional?

Q16: How does your organisation support you in managing work-related tasks?

Q17: What are the workplace resources at your job?

Q18: How do you think organisations can help communication professionals manage their work tasks more effectively?

Q19: Finally, is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix 4

List of Quotations

“Well, I suppose it varies quite a bit depending on what role you have and in which organisation, which company, and where you work. Perhaps it is the challenge that it can be so incredibly broad that it can demand so much of you. You should be a TikTok expert, but you should also be able to write long communication plans, lead meetings or be very creative in workshops. So, you should handle a lot of administrative work maybe, as well as having opinions about internal and external communication”. (Tim)

“I would say that one needs to be a multi-artist today to work as a communication professional. If one works alone as I do, one has to wear 45 different hats: one is an image expert, one should write good texts, one should know social media, one should ideally be web-savvy within different web production programmes and understand the whole picture, you must be a strategist, and you must be operational, you must know events, you must try to work strategically internally, you must work with both internal and external communication, and these are just a few of the things that fall on the communication professional today”. (Olivia)

“I believe that you can have more emotions than you show at work, that you still hold back, and that it’s probably for your own safety that you don’t want to show too much, that you’re afraid of showing too many emotions, so, of course, you hold back anger maybe. You might be so annoyed at someone who doesn’t listen or that you don’t get along that you try to swallow it, so it’s more likely that you try to hold it in and then talk about it with a friend or a family member after work”. (Naomi)

“You have to hide a little joy too. You can’t keep cheering just because you’ve managed to publish something. It goes up and down, so you know it might be a messy and noisy week, but it usually works out. I can say that it is clear that you hold back emotions or frustration or something like that every day basically”. (Priscilla)

“I’m probably quite open about my feelings in general, I have a fantastic workplace, so it’s almost only positive here”. (Mia)

“I believe I have managed to regulate my emotions well so far. I tend to hold back and not show too much emotion. If I disagree with something, I try to express it directly but constructively, so it doesn’t come across as just negativity”. (Veronica)

“I believe that the overall stress level for communication professionals is probably quite high, and there was a report about that from DIK not so long ago, that communication professionals were the profession with the highest rate of burnout, which I can completely understand. I believe that if you're a little younger and willing to do a lot of things where you don't have the courage to say no I don't have time for this but you just no it's fine and then you continue to work and then burnout comes like a letter in the mail”. (Sonja)

Appendix 5

Statement of Division of Work

This thesis has been co-authored by Evelina Winberg and Jordan Thunell Idumwonyi. The two authors participated in all stages of the process, both theoretical and practical. Each chapter of the thesis, as well as the data collection and analysis process, has received equal attention. Therefore, the workload has been fairly distributed among the researchers.