

THE DARK SIDE OF WORK ENGAGEMENT: EMOTIONAL LABOR AND EMPLOYEE JEALOUSY*

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Abstract

The present study aimed at investigating the relationships among work engagement, emotional labor, and employee jealousy. For this purpose, research was conducted on employees with a sample consisting of 270 participants and structural equation modeling was performed to investigate the relationships. The sub-dimensions of emotional labor were considered to examine its effects on work engagement. The analysis revealed that faking emotions is negatively associated with work engagement. The deep acting is positively associated with work engagement, and the hiding emotions is not significantly associated with work engagement. It was found that employee jealousy is positively associated with hiding and faking emotions. Employee jealousy has not directly but it has indirectly associated with work engagement. In addition, faking emotions were played a mediator role in the relationship between work engagement and employee jealousy. Overall, these findings can be taken into consideration regarding improve the work engagement of the employees.

Keywords: Emotional Labor, Faking Emotions, Deep Acting, Work Engagement, Employee Jealousy

JEL Codes: J5, C12

* For this study, ethics committee approval was obtained with the decision no. 2025-01 of the meeting held on 01/31/2025 by the Ethics Committee of Bursa Uludağ University.

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INTRODUCTION

A positive and fulfilling work atmosphere where employees show great vigor, commitment, and mental focus is referred to as work engagement. According to the model developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002), work engagement is considered in three basic dimensions: vigor, dedication and absorption. While vigor refers to the employee's high energy and mental endurance during work, dedication reflects the employee's deep sense of purpose, excitement, and pride in their work. Absorption, on the other hand, refers to a situation in which the employee is completely focused on his/her work and does not even notice the passage of time. Research indicates that employees who are highly engaged in their work tend to perform better, are less likely to consider leaving their jobs, and report lower levels of burnout (Christian et al., 2011; Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). Moreover, work engagement is closely related to positive organizational outcomes such as organizational citizenship behaviors, creativity, and customer satisfaction (Rich et al., 2010). In this context, developing strategies to increase employees' levels of work engagement is critical for increasing both individual performance and organizational productivity. One of the key elements influencing employees' engagement is their emotional experiences at work.

Emotions are known as important factors affecting behavior (Lerner et al., 2015; Andiappan and Dufour, 2020). Emotional processes experienced by individuals in business life play a decisive role in employee attitudes and behaviors. In this context, employee jealousy is known as the perception of threat and discontentment that an individual feels towards the success, status, reward or managerial attention that someone else has (Vecchio, 2005; DeSteno et al., 2006). Jealousy is a negative emotional state. Such negative emotions are a source of stress that can directly or indirectly affect employees' attitudes, relationships and organizational outcomes in the work environment. Workplace research shows that jealousy is one of the most prevalent emotions felt by employees. This emotion may have extensive consequences. However, it is known that this emotion is not sufficiently addressed in the literature (Sahadev et al., 2024).

Employees employ diverse emotional labor strategies to manage negative emotional experiences encountered in the workplace. Emotional labor, as defined by Hochschild (1983), involves the efforts employees make to manage and adjust their emotions in professional environments. In other words, emotional labor refers to the processes of controlling and shaping their own emotional states in order to show the required emotional responses in their work (Lam et al., 2022). According to Hochschild, emotional labour includes the processes in which employees are obliged to express certain emotions towards customers, patients or the people they serve, and these emotions become a part of the job. In this framework,

emotional labour is not only an individual strategy, but also one of the control mechanisms of the organisational and economic system over employees.

In the literature, emotional labour is an important concept that is discussed in the context of organisational power relations, class structures and capitalist production processes. For example, Bolton (2005) evaluated emotional labour not only as a form of individual self-regulation but also as a means of normative performance that organisations expect from employees. Researchers such as Leidner (1993) and Korczynski (2003) have argued that emotional labour has become a part of discipline and surveillance in the workplace and that organisational structures determine when and how employees should express which emotions. These studies emphasise that emotional labour should be conceptualised not only as a psychological phenomenon but also as a socio-economic reality. Thus, the emotional labour strategies used by employees are not just individual preferences; they are shaped by organisational culture, professional norms and the broader economic context. This perspective shows that emotional labour has a structural dimension rather than an individual one.

Emotional labor strategies are deep acting, hiding emotion (also used as suppressed emotions) and faking emotion (also used as surface acting) (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003). Faking emotions is used to express the situation in which employees express their emotions in a fake way and display fake emotions. Employees engage in this behavior when they change or fake their outward expressions, even though their internal feelings do not align (Yang et al, 2023). Faking emotions may lead to burnout and decreased commitment to their jobs. Showing faking emotions in a superficial way damages employees' feelings of inner satisfaction, which may weaken their commitment to work (Yoo, 2016; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002). Hiding emotions is the hiding of emotions that one feels but is considered inappropriate (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003). Hiding emotions can create a constant internal conflict and this can increase the feeling of emotional burnout. Constant emotional suppression can negatively affect employees' commitment to their work. (Bayram et al., 2012; Maxwell and Riley, 2017). Deep acting entails consciously striving to internally generate the emotional state appropriate to the situation at hand (Lee and Madera, 2019). Deep acting is a process in which employees try to adapt emotionally at an internal level. This strategy can often be healthier because employees can internalize their emotional labor more (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003).

These dimensions of emotional labour should be considered not only as a result of individual psychological differences, but also as a result of job structural characteristics and organisational expectations. Especially in contemporary work environments - with the impact of dynamics such as flexible working, customer orientation, performance pressure and digital surveillance - emotional labour strategies

become more complex. In addition, social relations within the organisation also play an important role in shaping emotional labour. Negative emotions such as jealousy between employees can increase the need for emotional regulation. Employee jealousy is an intense emotion that occurs especially in competitive business environments and can have both individual and organisational consequences. Regulation of such emotions is directly related to employees' emotional labour strategies (Grandey, 2003).

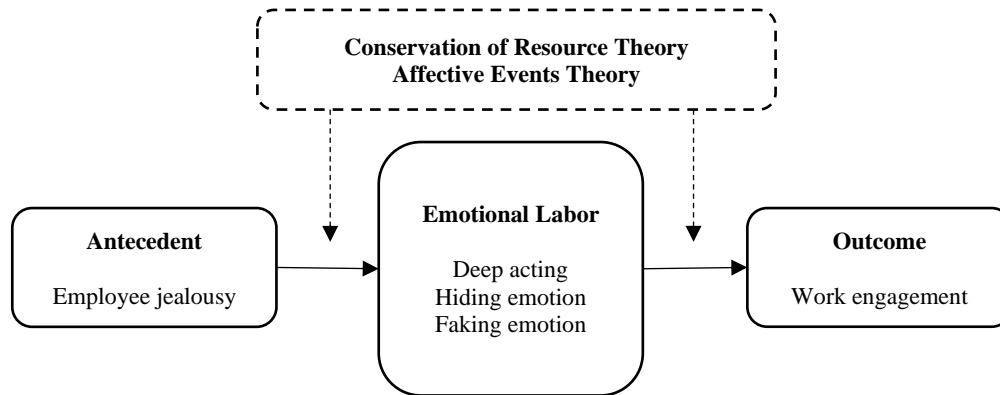
Studies indicate that engagement is strongly influenced by relationships with colleagues (Lee & Madera, 2019; Matta et al., 2015). Employee jealousy can have negative consequences, previous studies have explored the consequences of employee jealousy. It has been found to negatively affect employees' behavior and performance (Wang and Sung, 2016; Sahadev et al., 2024; Zhao and Ma, 2025), and increase burnout (Arli et al. 2019). In this regard, employee jealousy can weaken work engagement. Intense negative emotions such as jealousy may increase the individual's need for emotional regulation and lead to more fake emotions or emotional suppression strategies. These strategies can deplete employees' psychological resources and negatively affect workplace engagement (Grandey, 2003). On the other hand, it has been shown that some employees may prefer the deep action strategy and achieve a more intrinsic alignment with organizational expectations, which may contribute to maintaining their level of commitment (Hülshager and Schewe, 2011).

In the light of this information, studies in the literature have not addressed the relationships between employee jealousy and emotional labor and their effects on work engagement have not been examined together. Based on the researchers' current knowledge, emotional labor has not yet been examined as a mediator between employee jealousy and work engagement. This study aims to explain the impact of employee jealousy on work engagement through emotional labor strategies. Moreover, attention is given to the mediating role of emotional labor dimensions in the association between employee jealousy and work engagement. In this way, it aims to reveal how emotions are produced and managed within the framework of organisational structures and normative expectations, beyond being an individual matter.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Affective Event Theory and The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory are known as the two most commonly used theories in the literature (Lee and Madera, 2019). These theories are used as the explanatory framework in this study. The theoretical background is depicted in Figure 1.

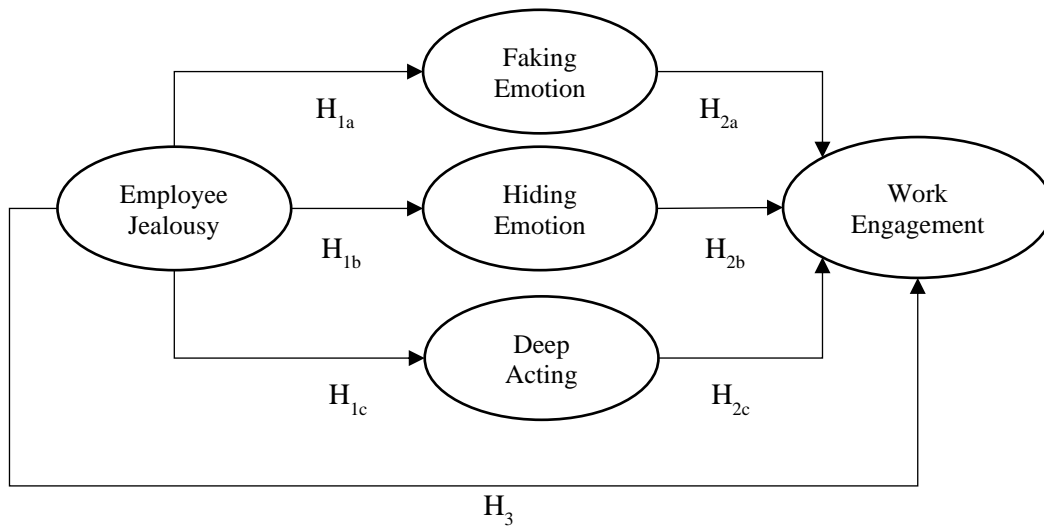
Figure 1. Theoretical background



COR theory provides a framework for understanding individuals' efforts to protect and avoid the loss of psychological, physical and social resources (Hobfoll, 2022). This theory suggests that individuals feel stress when they strive to maintain and improve their resources, or when these resources are at risk or depleted. If employees are jealous of others' achievements, this can lead to a loss of both psychological and social resources, which can lead to burnout, stress or low work motivation. Emotional labor requirements can cause employees to feel depleted of resources. In particular, emotional demands such as jealousy, competitiveness and social stress can reduce an employee's psychological resources, which can negatively affect their commitment to work.

COR theory is founded on the notion that individuals aim to protect their finite psychological and emotional reserves. AET, suggests that emotional events have a significant impact on workplace behavior. Negative emotions, such as jealousy, can affect employees' workplace experiences, which in turn can increase negative outcomes such as reduced workplace engagement or burnout (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Workplace jealousy is an emotional event that triggers emotional processes. Encountering the envied person or witnessing an achievement can force the employee to react negatively emotionally, which can lead to the use of emotional labor strategies. Jealousy can increase emotional labor because if an employee is jealous of someone else's success, they may feel the need to hide negative emotions or fake emotions in the face of that success. Employees may be under a mental burden that makes it difficult to focus. This increases their emotional workload and can harm their performance or engagement at work (Duffy et al., 2012; Kim and Glomb, 2014). In accordance with this information, the developed research model is outlined in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Research model



Employee jealousy is anticipated to have a positive association with all aspects of emotional labor. The following hypotheses outline the relationship between employee jealousy and emotional labor.

H1a: Employee jealousy will be positively associated with faking emotions.

H1b: Employee jealousy will be positively associated with hiding emotions.

H1c: Employee jealousy will be positively associated with deep acting.

It is expected that faking and hiding dimensions of emotional labor are negatively related to work engagement and positively related to deep acting. The hypotheses for the relationships between work engagement and emotional labor are as follows.

H2a: Faking emotions will be negatively associated with work engagement.

H2b: Hiding emotions will be negatively associated with work engagement.

H2c: Deep acting will be positively associated with work engagement.

Employee jealousy is expected to be negatively related to work engagement. The hypothesis for the relationship between employee jealousy and work engagement is as follows.

H3: Employee jealousy is negatively related to work engagement.

Finally, in addition to these hypotheses, the hypotheses formed to examine indirect relationships are as follows.

H4a: Faking emotions mediates the relationship between employee jealousy and work engagement.

H4b: Deep acting mediates the relationship between employee jealousy and work engagement.

H4c: Hiding emotions mediates the relationship between employee jealousy and work engagement.

This study develops and tests a conceptual model to investigate the role of employee jealousy and emotional labor on the work engagement. In the literature, employee jealousy is usually associated with variables such as performance, job satisfaction or conflict. In this study, jealousy is considered not only as an individual emotional state but also as a factor that affects how employees regulate their emotions and shapes work engagement. In the study, all dimensions of emotional labor “faking emotions, deep acting, hiding emotions” are also added to the model and evaluated. Thus, this research seeks to reveal how different emotional labor strategies impact work engagement.

METHOD

Participants

The sample of this study consists of volunteer individuals aged 18 and over who work in white-collar positions in enterprises operating in textile, automotive, machinery, food and other sectors in Bursa province. A self-report-based questionnaire was applied to the participants and data were collected from 270 employees in total. The sample was determined by convenience sampling method. 21% of the participants work in the textile sector, 24% in the automotive sector, 6% in the machinery sector, 18% in the food sector and the remaining in other sectors. Since the textile and automotive sectors are among the most important and largest sectors of the Bursa economy, the concentration of the sample in these two areas strengthens the contextual validity of the study. The imbalance in sectoral distribution is considered as a factor that may limit the generalizability of the findings of the study to some sectors. Despite this limitation, the sample obtained allows the observation of general trends. For this study, ethics committee approval was obtained with the decision no. 2025-01 of the meeting held on 01/31/2025 by the Ethics Committee of Bursa Uludağ University.

Measurement Instruments

In this study, data collection process was carried out via questionnaire method. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts: demographic questions concerning participants' age, gender, educational background, and sector, as well as three scales used to measure the key constructs of the research; Utrecht

Work Engagement Scale, Emotional Labor Scale and Employee Jealousy Scale. The scales used in the study were previously validated and demonstrated high reliability in prior research.

Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES): The scale was originally developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002). Validation studies were conducted by Bilgel et al. (2012). High scores obtained from the scale indicate high commitment. The scale is measured with a “7-point Likert scale ranging from 0-never to 6-always”. The scale consists of 17 items in total. A sample item in the scale is as follows. “I find my work meaningful and purposeful.” The scale has 3 sub-dimensions; vigour, dedication and absorption. The Cronbach’s alpha of 0.94 was obtained for the scale.

Emotional Labor Scale: The original scale was developed by Brotheridge and Lee (2003) and later revised by Lee and Brotheridge (2011). Its Turkish adaptation and validity were examined by Dursun et al. (2014). The scale consists of 9 questions and 3 sub-dimensions. Scale is measured with a “five-point Likert” between 1-never and 5-always. The sub-dimensions are named as hiding emotions, faking emotions and deep acting. A sample item in the scale is as follows. “I pretend to feel emotions that I don't really feel.” Cronbach alpha values of the dimensions of the scale vary between .74 and .81. High scores on the scale indicate that emotional labor is high.

Employee Jealousy Scale: The scale was developed by Vecchio (2000). The Turkish validity study was conducted by Bayram-Arılı et al. (2019). The Turkish form of the scale consists of a total of 5 questions and measurement is based on “a five-point Likert scale, spanning from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).” A sample item in the scale is as follows. “When I see my supervisor praising someone else, my stomach knots up.” Cronbach's Alpha value of the scale was found to be 0.86. High scores on the scale indicate that jealousy is high.

Analysis

Before conducting hypothesis testing, the reliability of the obtained data was evaluated. In order to assess the internal reliability of the scales, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were computed. Descriptive statistics were conducted to present a general description of the sample's demographic characteristics. Structural Equation Model (SEM) analyses were then performed to test the proposed hypotheses and to examine both direct and indirect effects. SPSS 29 and AMOS 29 program was used to perform the analyses.

FINDINGS

A total of 270 participants voluntarily participated in the study. In Table 1, descriptive statistics collected from the participants information is displayed.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics

Variables	Frequency	%
Gender		
Female	111	41.1
Male	159	58.9
Education		
Primary education	65	24.1
Secondary education	119	44.1
Higher education	86	31.9
Sector		
Textile	58	21.5
Automotive	66	24.4
Machinery	17	6.3
Food	50	18.5
Other	79	29.3

The average age of the 270 employees participating in the study was 35.22 (± 8.95) years, the average daily working hours was 8.89 (± 1.18) hours. The descriptive statistics and reliability values obtained for the scales used in the study are shown in Table 2. The reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha for all scales and sub-dimensions was found to be above 0.70. According to these results, all of the scales used are statistically reliable scales and their internal consistency is high.

Table 2: Mean, standard deviation (sd) and Cronbach alfa

Scales	Dimensions	Items	Mean	sd	C. alfa
UWES	Work Engagement	17	65.28	20.52	0.95
Emotional Labor	Faking Emotions	3	6.06	2.50	0.72
	Deep Acting	3	9.07	3.56	0.91
	Hiding Emotions	3	7.74	2.67	0.70
Employee Jealousy	Employee Jealousy	5	9.36	4.36	0.89

The structural validity of all scales used in the study was tested with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The model fit indices of the scales were obtained as shown in Table 3. According to the CFA results,

the goodness of fit indices of all scales were found to be at acceptable levels. These findings indicate that the scales can make valid measurements in the sample of the study.

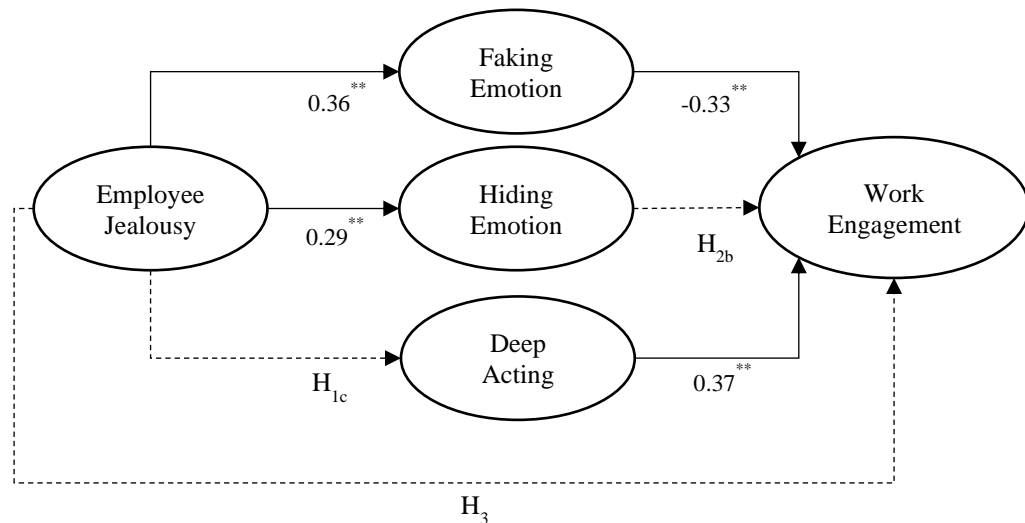
Table 3: Confirmatory factor analysis

Scales	Dimensions	Factor loading	X^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
UWES	Work Engagement	0.61-0.83	3.27	0.92	0.09	0.05
Emotional Labor	Faking Emotions	0.56-0.95	2.189	0.97	0.06	0.05
	Deep Acting					
	Hiding Emotions					
Employee Jealousy	Employee Jealousy	0.71-0.85	2.21	0.94	0.07	0.04

Multiple normality test was performed with Mardia's multivariate dominance coefficient. The results obtained show that the assumption of multiple normality is violated. Therefore, Bootstrap (2000 sample) method was used in the SEM analyses and the robustness of the results was checked in this way. Bootstrap results show that the estimated coefficients are reliable and the deviations are minimal. This method supports the robustness of the findings despite multiple deviations from normality.

In Figure 2, SEM constructed for testing the research hypotheses is displayed. Each of the arrows in Figure 3 shows the standardized path coefficients for the tested hypotheses. Paths that are not significant are indicated by dashed lines.

Figure 3. Estimated model



There is a statistically significant and positive association between employee jealousy and the sub-dimensions of emotional labor: faking emotions ($\beta=0.36$; $p<0.01$) and hiding emotions ($\beta=0.29$; $p<0.01$). According to these results, hypotheses H1a and H1b are supported. However, hypothesis H1c is not supported.

Based on the estimated model, a statistically significant relationship is observed between faking emotions ($\beta= -0.33$; $p<0.01$) and deep acting ($\beta=0.37$; $p<0.01$), which are sub-dimensions of emotional labor scale, and work engagement. While the relationship between faking emotions and work engagement was found to be negative, the relationship between deep acting and work engagement was found to be positive. According to these results, hypotheses H2a and H2c are also supported. The relationship between hiding emotions, another dimension of emotional labor, and work engagement was not statistically significant. Therefore, hypothesis H2b is not supported.

According to the estimated model, the direct relationship between employee jealousy and employee engagement is not statistically significant. Hypothesis H3 is not supported. The standardized path coefficient here is not significant. However, employee jealousy indirectly affects employee engagement through the sub-dimensions of emotional labor. This supports hypotheses H4a and H4c. According to the estimated structural equation model, 24% of employee engagement is explained by the relevant variables. An examination of the SEM's goodness of fit indices reveals that the $X^2/df=2.02$; $GFI=0.91$; $CFI=0.95$; $RMSEA=0.06$; $SRMR=0.08$ model shows good fit.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

People spend a significant part of their day at work. During this time spent at work, employees experience many events that can affect their work engagement. While some of these events are visible, some of them are experienced in the inner world of employees and are often not understood. In this study, the emotional factors that are thought to be effective in employees' work engagement are discussed. Faking emotions, hiding emotions and deep acting, which are included in the concept of emotional labor, as well as employee jealousy, which is frequently experienced in workplaces and can have significant effects, are examined.

The significance of the relationships between these variables was estimated by structural equation modeling. The results revealed that emotional labor has significant effects on work engagement. Significant effects of faking emotions and deep acting on work engagement were found. Faking emotions is negatively associated with engagement, while deep acting is positively associated with engagement. The negative

relationship between faking emotions and work engagement is supported (Nauman et al., 2019; Yoo and Jeong, 2017). The positive relationship between deep acting and work engagement is supported by Brotheridge and Lee (2003) and Grandey (2000). The findings of the study are consistent with the literature.

Moreover, it has been revealed that there is no direct significant relationship between employee jealousy and work engagement, but work engagement is significantly affected by the sub-dimension of emotional labor, namely faking emotions. This finding indicates that the effect of jealousy on engagement is realized through indirect mechanisms. Emotional labor strategies play a decisive role in work engagement and that negative emotions such as jealousy can affect the level of engagement through these strategies.

A significant and positive effect of employee jealousy on faking emotions and hiding emotions, which are emotional labor dimensions in the model, was found. This situation reveals that individuals who experience jealousy provide emotional regulation by either suppressing or externalizing the emotions they feel without internalizing them. Intense emotions such as jealousy also push individuals to the need for emotional regulation, which may result in faking or hiding emotions. The positive relationship between jealousy and faking and hiding emotions is consistent with the results in Zhao and Ma (2025) study.

These results suggest that employee jealousy, rather than affecting work engagement on its own, is effective through the emotional reactions that employees develop in the face of this emotion. Emotional labor strategies play a critical mediating role at this point. In particular, the increase in faking emotions and hiding emotions depletes employees' emotional resources and weakens their engagement; on the other hand, deep action can increase engagement through a healthier adaptation process. The findings of the study suggest that beyond explaining emotional reactions at the individual level, it is also necessary to consider the organisational and social context in which these reactions occur. Under market orientated working systems, workplaces are becoming increasingly competitive, performance-oriented and individualised structures. This situation increases the pressure for comparison, visibility and achievement among employees and paves the way for the systemic production of emotions such as jealousy. At the same time, expectations such as customer satisfaction, emotional positivity and service quality make it an organisational obligation for employees to control their emotions. In this context, emotional labour is not only an individual skill but also a normative control mechanism applied by organisations on employees. Therefore, the exhaustion of employees' emotional resources or the suppression of emotions such as jealousy are not only related to individual incompetence, but also to structural conditions and organisational culture.

Today's work environments have become dynamic structures with intense interactions and social comparisons among employees. Although these interactions have the potential to increase workplace

performance and productivity, they can also trigger negative emotions such as jealousy. This study addresses this issue, as a result of SEM, the fact that the direct effect of employee jealousy on work engagement is not significant indicates that this relationship operates indirectly through emotional labor strategies. This finding draws attention to the importance of the indirect effects of negative emotional reactions such as jealousy in the organizational context.

In terms of practice, this study suggests that instead of directly suppressing the feelings of jealousy that arise among employees, it may be a more effective approach for managers to provide employees with emotional awareness, deep action capacity and emotional expression skills to address these emotions. In this respect, the study emphasizes that interventions to increase work engagement should focus not only on external factors but also on employees' internal emotion management processes. Training and development processes should equip employees with constructive emotional regulation strategies such as emotional intelligence, emotional awareness and deep acting. Such interventions can play a critical role in maintaining employee engagement and improving the workplace atmosphere. In this framework, the proposed interventions should not be limited to emotional awareness training at the individual level. Structural arrangements such as clearly defining emotional labour expectations in workplaces, establishing reward systems that reduce comparisons between employees, and adopting fairer and more participatory organisational policies may offer more sustainable solutions to increase employee engagement. Moreover, the construction of organisational cultures that balance the demands of emotional labour and recognise employee subjectivity can support not only performance but also emotional well-being. Such systemic approaches can holistically improve the workplace atmosphere by complementing individual-level strategies.

This research has some limitations. First of all, the data was collected only by questionnaire method brings the risk of response bias since it is based on the subjective evaluations of the participants. Especially in the measurement of sensitive emotions such as jealousy, there is a possibility that the participants may not fully reflect their true feelings in line with their social favorability tendencies. In addition, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the exact causal relationships between the variables. Since the data were collected over a certain period of time, changes in mood or long-term effects could not be assessed. The other limitation is related to the theories. Affective Event Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory used in this study provide a powerful theoretical framework to explain employees' emotional reactions and resource-based stress processes at the individual level. However, both theories are limited in explaining how emotional labour is shaped by organisational norms, power relations and economic context. Therefore, the findings should be considered and interpreted not only at the individual level but also within the framework

of structural dynamics such as working conditions, workplace competition and performance pressure. Finally, as the study sample was limited to a specific geographical region, caution should be exercised in generalizing the findings to the entire workforce or to different cultural contexts. Future studies are recommended to obtain more comprehensive results by using longitudinal data collection methods and expanding the research with different samples. In addition, causal relationships between variables can be tested more robustly through experimental or quasi-experimental studies.

AUTHOR STATEMENT

Researcher declared that all contributions to the article were his own. Researcher have not declared any conflict of interest.

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