Emotional Labour among Women Leaders within the South African Consulting Industry: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry

Reevasha Pillay
University of South Africa
Industrial and Organisational Psychology

Aden-Paul Flotman (corresponding author)
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5663-7279
University of South Africa
flotma@unisa.ac.za

Jeremy Mitonga-Monga
Johannesburg Business School
College of Business and Economics
Industrial Psychology and People Management
jeremym@uj.ac.za

Abstract

The opinion that the workplace should be viewed as a rational environment is being swiftly dismantled by acknowledging and harnessing the power of emotions in favour of individual and organisational outcomes. This study explored the lived experiences of emotional labour among women leaders in the consulting industry in South Africa. A qualitative study was conducted and informed by the hermeneutic phenomenological perspective. Data were gathered through in-depth, unstructured interviews with eight women leaders resident in the Gauteng Province, South Africa. The data gathered were analysed by applying a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis, and interpreted from a work- and personally related emotional labour stance. The empirical findings suggest that these women leaders enjoy very little work-life balance, which is accepted as common practice in this industry. Role complexity and personal life obligations result in role conflict. Their emotional wellbeing is adversely affected, which manifests in guilt, loneliness, loss of identity, alienation, shame and the emotional exhaustion they experience. Furthermore, it seems that adequate organisational support is not experienced by women leaders in this volatile, highly pressured emotional context. This study contributes to the field of Industrial and Organisational Psychology, the literature on emotional labour, as well as human resource practices such as talent management, retention strategies and the career management of women leaders

in the consulting industry by making suggestions for human resource practices and future research.

Keywords: deep acting; emotion regulation; emotional labour; consulting industry; commercial value; surface acting; women in leadership

Introduction

There is mounting evidence that the workplace is not simply a rational environment and that the power of emotions should be harnessed in the interest of individuals and business performance (Bayram, Aytac and Dursun 2012, 302; Grandey 2000, 96). The display of appropriate emotions is increasingly being seen as having commercial value. An employee's emotional display is no longer regarded as a personal and private experience. Emotions are part of life, at work and outside of work (Payne and Cooper 2001, 97). However, emotions are not easily regulated. At times, affective behaviour needs to be controlled, or displayed in a socially and organisationally appropriate manner (Houben and Wüstner 2014, 60). This regulation of one's emotions, to comply with organisational and occupational norms and expectations, has been referred to as emotional labour (Hochschild 1983, 123). Studies indicate that getting the job done with the right attitude affects customer satisfaction and subsequently the fiscal performance of the business (Steinberg and Figart 1999, 17) and that there is a positive connection between "smiling faces" and increasing revenue (Ash 1984, 140; Rafaeli and Sutton 1989, 250).

The pervasive nature and volatility of emotions, coupled with increasing turbulence and ambivalence in the modern world of work, have made the effective display of affective behaviour by leaders an explicit requirement. Leaders are expected to set the emotional tone, particularly in the human service professions where frequent contact with clientele is a critical dimension of the job (Van Gelderen, Konijn and Bakker 2017, 860). Perhaps there is even an implicit expectation that women leaders, in particular, should have the inherent capacity to manage emotionally-laden situations better compared to their male counterparts (Budworth and Mann, 2010). Almost all empirical research on emotional labour has focused on how service workers use emotional labour. This lack of research, particularly on women leaders' emotional labour experiences, has created an opportunity for leadership researchers (Humphrey 2012, 742). This article is a response to the call to explore the emotional labour experiences of women leaders within a male-dominated industry, who are expected to balance a number of roles at work and at home (Lumsden and Black 2018, 608). Thus, this article addresses this vacuum by exploring the lived emotional labour experiences of women leaders in the consulting industry in South Africa. This research will provide insight into women's experiences that may contribute to effective strategies for human resource management and leadership development (Huang and Dai 2010, 78).

Next, the theoretical perspectives, research design, findings and discussion are presented.

Theoretical Perspectives

In the following section, the theoretical perspectives on the constructs of the study, namely, emotional labour, implications of emotional labour on leadership effectiveness, and women in leadership are discussed, followed by a theoretical integration.

Emotional Labour

Numerous opposing views of the concept of emotional labour exist (Grandey 2000, 98; Holdaway 2017, 502; Lumsden and Black 2018, 610; Winter et al. 2018, 4). However, despite these conflicting voices, a significant thrust of these conceptualisations of emotional labour assume that emotions are managed in organisations that are congruent with the display rules of the organisation and, therefore, results in: 1) personal or organisational outcomes (Ashford and Humphrey 1993, 101; Hochschild 1983, 124; Morris and Feldman 1996, 1007); and 2) a mode of impression management for the organisation (Ashford and Humphrey 1995, 102). Emotional labour has been described as the "management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild 1983, 7). This indicates that emotional labour is regulated by explicit or implicit organisational display rules (Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul and Gremler 2006, 60) that define which emotions employees should express and which they should suppress in their interactions with customers and with colleagues (Rafaeli and Sutton 1987, 30). Organisations thus set standards of emotional display for employees that require them to express certain positive emotions and suppress negative emotions during interactions with customers, irrespective of their actually felt emotions (Lee and Ok 2014, 180). Thus, emotional labour may entail the faking, enhancing or suppressing of emotions to alter one's emotional expression. This modification of emotional expression may result in effective workplace interaction.

According to Scott, Barnes and Wagner (2012, 907), the way in which employees conform to display rules via the management of their affective displays, varies. Hochschild (1983, 125) distinguished between two strategies of what she referred to as emotional labour, surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting entails that individuals modify their affective displays without attempting to alter underlying feelings (Scott et al. 2012, 908). Deep acting entails modifying actual affective states to match desired displays (Grandey 2000, 99; Gross, 1998, 281; Hochschild 1979, 555). Deep acting is concerned with actually feeling or experiencing the emotions that one wishes to display (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993, 94). In deep acting, employees try to change their felt emotions so that they can express genuine, organisationally mandated emotions (Groth, Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2009, 961).

Implications of Emotional Labour on Leadership Effectiveness

Effective leadership entails being in touch with your emotions and being able to express them appropriately in interaction with subordinates (Ashkanasy and Humphrey 2011, 366). Early leadership research has tended to neglect the role of emotion in leadership effectiveness (George 2000, 1037). Conventionally, emotion was usually viewed as the

opposite of rationality, and something unlikely to be associated with effective leadership (Ashforth and Humphrey 1995, 112). Bono and Ilies (2006, 320) argue that transformational leaders, in particular, may energise followers to allocate more attentional resources to their tasks, when they appropriately display their emotions. Leaders' emotions may, therefore, influence followers' motivation through influencing their emotions (Wang 2011, 136). In other words, leaders' positive emotions may be "caught" by followers. When followers are in a positive emotional state, they are likely to have a high expectancy that their effort will lead to enhanced performance and high-level goals (Wang 2011, 138).

Humphrey, Pollack and Hawver (2008, 161) argue that leaders who use emotional labour are emotionally expressive and are likely to be perceived as transformational. It has been suggested that emotional expressiveness is an important attribute of transformational leaders, and emotional labour can help leaders make their communications more inspiring (Groves 2005, 261). The skilled use of emotional labour strategies may help leaders to be more effective in several ways. It may help leaders to establish better leader-member relations, exhibit charismatic and transformational leadership, or perhaps even be more task-oriented and pragmatic, and be better transactional leaders (Humphrey 2012, 742). Performing emotional labour can be difficult and stressful for both leaders and followers. The ability to perform emotional labour in a way that promotes creativity and positive wellbeing, instead of personal alienation and stress, may be a key distinguishing factor between effective and ineffective leaders. Furthermore, leaders who use genuine emotional labour and deep acting may be better at establishing trusting relationships with subordinates. It has also been proposed that leaders with high moral commitment and moral discipline are more likely to use emotional labour methods to achieve ethical goals (Humphrey 2012, 743; Mitonga-Monga and Flotman 2016, 285).

Women in Leadership

According to Evans (2010, 348), when examining basic gender differences in leadership, factors such as collaboration, nurturance and emotional intelligence (Goleman 1995, 85) are currently more important considerations than power and control. Leadership styles, for instance transformational leadership (Burns 1978, 221), which is the ability through natural charisma to inspire and guide the workforce through change and transformation, also emphasise the achievement of goals by gaining employees' trust and respect (Evans 2010, 350). It has been found that female leaders were more likely to engage in transformational leadership behaviours: a form of leadership found to be more effective compared to other leadership styles (Budworth and Mann 2010, 180; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt and Van Engen 2003, 572).

There are signs that women are finally starting to overcome some traditionally challenging barriers that have previously prevented them from aspiring to senior positions on offer in global corporations (Evans 2010, 351). This could contribute to how women in leadership emotionally experience their organisations. Lips and Keener

(2007, 564) found that the movement of women into positions of leadership in business has been slow, despite anti-discrimination legislation and heightened awareness of the leadership capabilities of women. Gender-stereotypic perceptions of leadership roles continue to be cited as barriers for women in positions of power (Eagly and Johnson 1990, 234; Mullen 2009, 24). These perceptions could make it difficult for women to take up their leadership positions in organisations. Gender-stereotypic perceptions are diminishing, but have not been eradicated, as prejudice and discrimination against women in leadership still occur (Eagly and Carli 2003, 822). Ryan and Haslam (2007, 552) suggest that women also face a "glass cliff" to highlight the increased risk that women face potential failure. Gender inequalities increase the propensity for women to be employed in high-risk leadership positions, where failure reinforces negative gender perceptions on the suitability of women to lead (Dodd 2012, 161). These are the realities that women leaders are being confronted with, which will undoubtedly have an impact on how they experience their work setting.

A notable link between emotional labour and leadership lies in the movement of emotional labour from the service worker to the leader (Burch, Humphrey and Batchelor 2013, 121). Humphrey et al. (2008, 159) were the first to introduce the phrase *"leading with emotional labour"* and to propose a systematic model of how leaders and managers use emotional labour. A key component of leading with emotional labour (Humphrey 2012, 740) is identifying the correct emotion to select and display, depending on the situation and the individuals involved (Burch, Humphrey and Batchelor 2013, 121). Here, the use of emotional labour differs between subordinates and leaders (Humphrey et al. 2008, 155).

Leaders can set realistic display rules and use emotional labour strategies to boost the mood, motivation and performance of their followers. This could improve overall organisational performance. Thus, leaders have to take into account a variety of factors when deciding how to perform emotional labour and have to appreciate that leading with emotional labour remains a complex process (Burch, Humphrey and Batchelor 2013, 120).

Aim and Purpose of the Study

The aim of the research was to explore the lived emotional labour experiences of women leaders in the male-dominated consulting industry in South Africa. The research question was formulated as follows: "What are the lived emotional labour experiences of women leaders in the consulting industry in South Africa from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective?"

Research Methodology

Research Approach

The researchers envisaged an in-depth exploration of the lived emotional labour experiences of women in leadership in the consulting industry, which warranted the use

of a qualitative research design (Snape and Spencer 2003, 18; Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter 2006, 223). A phenomenological approach was utilised since the researchers wanted to gain insight into the nature of the subjective realities and emotional labour, in this case of women in leadership in the consulting industry (Leavy 2014, 10; Snape and Spencer 2003, 15). A qualitative approach is congruent with an interpretivist paradigm as it captures the multiple realities and richness of the social worlds of participants (Creswell 2014, 126; Crowther, Smythe and Spence 2015, 452).

Research Setting and Sampling

The primary purpose of a consulting firm is to provide access to industry-specific specialists/consultants and subject matter. The consulting industry is still a male-dominated environment, characterised by rapid change, fierce competition and recently rocked by accusations of unethical practices (Oosthuizen 2017, 16). A combination of convenient and snowball sampling (Creswell 2014) was used. All the participants in this study were working within the Gauteng region in South Africa. Eight female leaders working within the consulting industry were interviewed. The participants were leaders at senior management level with junior managers reporting to them. They had eight years and more experience within this industry. In-depth interviews were conducted with the participants in a professional manner and at the convenience of the participants. Interviews were conducted in an environment where the participants felt comfortable (either at home or in private boardrooms) with minimal disruptions. The sample group, with their biographical descriptives, are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of participants

Code	Race	Gender	Category	Years in profession	Seniority
WFMC17	White	Female	Management consulting	17	Senior management
IFREC08	Indian	Female	Renewable energy consulting	08	Senior management
IFMC25	Indian	Female	Management consulting	25	Senior management
WFMC19	White	Female	Management consulting	19	Senior management
WFMC17	White	Female	Management consulting	17	Senior management
WFMC10	White	Female	Management consulting	10	Senior management
WFMC09	White	Female	Management consulting	09	Senior management
IFMC10	Indian	Female	Management consulting	10	Senior management

Source: Interview data

Entrée and Establishing Researcher Roles

Participants were approached informally outside their working hours. Potential research participants were contacted either via e-mail or telephonically through snowball sampling (Creswell 2014). The purpose of the study was explained to them and questions pertaining to the research were answered. Written permission from the participants was obtained and individual interviews were set up. Roles, which entailed the management of the research project, the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data, as well as the reporting of the findings, were explained to the participants during each interview.

Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation

In line with the hermeneutic phenomenological research paradigm, unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted (Crowther, Smythe and Spence 2015, 450; Van Manen 2014, 186). This interview strategy allowed for the exploration, understanding and interpretation of the participants' lived work experiences (Appleton 1995, 994; Kvale 1996, 127; Van Manen 2014). In this paradigm, the interview takes the form of an informal conversation about a specific human experience (Kvale 1996, 130; Patton 1980, 98). The participants were asked to describe how they—as women business leaders—experience emotional labour, for example: "Please tell me about your experiences as a woman leader in this organisation." In an attempt not to lead participants in any way, the phrase "emotional labour" was not used in the initial interview question. In the interviews, the researchers probed for emotional labour

experiences in the form of stories, examples, emotions, narratives and so on. Interviews were recorded and the field notes of the researcher and the recorded interviews were transcribed for textual analysis.

To analyse and interpret the data, the process proposed by Lindseth and Norberg (2004, 151), based on Ricoeur's (1976, 87) hermeneutic phenomenological interpretation theory, was used. The steps involved the following: naive reading, structural analysis and comprehensive understanding. Within the naive reading step, the interview transcriptions were read several times to allow full comprehension of the complete data. An open attitude and mind (phenomenological attitude) had to be adopted to allow the text to speak. A thematic structural analysis was subsequently conducted by employing content analysis, which used codes and coding (Lindseth and Norberg 2004, 57). Finally, comprehensive understanding was achieved by formulating an integrated structural analysis of the various interview texts separately as well as the texts as a whole, thus allowing for the articulation of the various meanings of the units and themes as a structural whole to emerge (Wertz 2011, 125). This was done by using the hermeneutic circle (Annells 1996, 710).

Strategies Employed to Ensure Data Quality and Integrity

Trustworthiness was ensured through focusing on authenticity, credibility, dependability, transferability and ethics (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 245; Terre Blanche et al. 2006, 147). Credibility and dependability were ensured by establishing an audit trail of the data (Miles and Huberman 1994, 231), through the authorisation of all parties (Hirschhorn 1997, 87), digital recording and verbatim transcriptions, providing a detailed description of the research process, allowing the reader to confirm the credibility of the study and the application of scientific rigour in the planning and execution of the project. Furthermore, transferability and conformability (Shenton 2004, 12) were ensured through detailed descriptions and in-depth methodological descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation. The researchers were also aware of their own limitations, beliefs and assumptions (Shenton 2004, 12). In terms of ethics, the participants provided their informed consent and the researchers adhered to the Belmont ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence and justice (Bernhofer 2011, 12–13). In addition, data were not collected before permission to commence with the study had been obtained from the University of South Africa's Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) Research Ethics Review Committee (RERC).

Next, the findings are presented according to the themes that emanated from the analysis of the data.

Findings

It was evident that some participants preferred to focus on their actual emotions experienced and not on how they manage their experienced emotions in particular situations. In addition, they indicated emotional experiences in terms of negative

situations and feelings associated with it, more so than they articulated positive situations and feelings associated with it. Most participants almost naturally displayed what would be interpreted as a transformational leadership style; however, in situation-specific instances, they consciously reverted to an almost classical transactional leadership style. These situations were generally associated with fires (major issues) that needed to be extinguished. For most participants, achieving a work-life balance proved a difficult balancing act. Furthermore, as the roles increased in complexity, fulfilling the work and personal life obligations became more challenging. Some participants experienced a great deal of success in the work environment, but were unable to enjoy the rewards as their other roles lessened the pleasure. Women with children found that achieving a work-life balance was especially difficult and they sought assistance from caregivers and extended family in support of their quest to achieve some sort of balance. Three participants in the sample group were able to view negative criticism as a building block for something positive, but the rest of the sample group viewed negative criticism as disappointing, depressing and frustrating, which sometimes resulted in feelings of anguish and resentment. Positive emotions were expressed when their contributions were acknowledged and rewarded. They expressed positive emotions when the processes were consultative, their input valued and when participative decisions were taken.

Three major themes were extracted from the data, namely: 1) the taking up of a predominantly transformational leadership role; 2) work-life balance and the subsequent impact of role demands and role expectations; and 3) emotional labour expressed as an integrated mix of positive and negative experiences.

The taking up of a Predominantly Transformational Leadership Role

Based on the findings from the empirical study, six out of the eight participants displayed an almost natural inclination towards a transformational leadership style. They described their leadership style in terms of being collaborative, mentoring of colleagues, nurturing, displaying creativity, and an understanding of the individual and collective team needs. For example, participant WFMC17 described her experience of her leadership style as: "I allow and encourage participation and also specifically for people who report to me to take initiative, to take responsibility, to show up … be creative …" Participant IFMC25 described her leadership as:

> Nurturing, caring and understanding the needs of my employees and where they are going, and what they want to achieve, I feel I have forged a stronger relationship and lasting relationship with my team.

All six of these participants believed that the transformational leadership style motivates their team players to maximise performance and capabilities. For example, participant IFMC25 stated: "I found that once you have a more nurturing and caring approach to helping people, you get maximum value out of them, your team or your employees."

Of the six participants who displayed this inclination towards transformational leadership, three adopted this style naturally, irrespective of the emotional work demands placed on them. One of the participants—while naturally inclined towards transformational leadership when faced with a work situation that required a transactional leadership style—had to make a conscious decision to adapt her natural leadership style. This resulted in her sometimes becoming overbearing to others in her demands and her approach. Participant WFMC09 stated that when she adopted a transactional approach: "I have to really focus on taking on that role and also not … become overbearing because it is not my natural style, I can easily overdo it." One of the participants managed to learn, adapt and execute this leadership style throughout her career, to the extent that this is now her "natural" leadership style. One participant displayed an inclination towards the transformational leadership style within non-pressurised work situations. However, when placed in highly pressurised work situations, she adapted her natural leadership style to that of transactional leadership and became more prescriptive rather than collaborative. This participant described the situations in which she adapted her leadership style as follows:

> Transformational approach is usually associated where urgencies and timelines are not as important and also perhaps not as critical to meet, where it allows the freedom of movement and choice and decision-making and participating in that space. A more transactional or authoritative approach would usually be when there are urgent matters to attend to or fires that need to be killed or dealt with; so fire-fighting or when there are … quick fixes that need to be thought through and implemented, then people who report to me usually do not have the option to think for themselves, they must do what I tell them to do.

Of the eight participants, two displayed a natural inclination towards a transactional leadership style. While they displayed the transactional leadership style in that they were prescriptive in their demands, dictated what needed to be done in the work situation, were controlling and enforced strict rules and regulations, they were able to adapt their leadership style to a more transformational style when this related to softer people issues and had a minimal impact on bottom-line results. In these situations, they became more relaxed and flexible and allowed for more creativity and initiative from the team's members. Participant WFMC17 described the situations in which she displayed transactional and transformational leadership styles as follows:

> … if we had to revamp our website, let us say we want to redo the website, I will ask the team for ideas … I will ask them what they like about the old website, what they have seen about other websites that we could incorporate … having a young team, it helps because they are more technologically advanced and savvy than what I am, so that will be an example of when a consultative approach would work … More transactional approach would be where we need to implement a marketing strategy for one of our service divisions. We are not meeting the target and we are not on track and I would advise as to how we would go about getting more clients …

Participant WFMC10 described the situations in which she displayed a transactional and transformational leadership styles as follows:

> In corporate, it is about results, it is about delivery, about making sure your team has the right skills and … frankly you are only as good as your last deal, effectively it is very much … what do we do to achieve … do we have the right people, how are we going to get there, and … that when you need to take control if it is not happening … in my own business now, it is a different way, so I can be far more relaxed, more creative, more flexible … and do what works for me rather than what works for the organisation.

Work-life Balance and the Subsequent Impact of Role Demands and Role Expectations

Based on the findings from the data, six out of the eight participants believed that they did not have an acceptable work-life balance. Of these six participants, two were of the opinion that this was common practice within the consulting industry, and that irrespective of the situation at hand, work will always take priority. Four of the six participants were not satisfied with not having an adequate work-life balance and were making a conscious effort towards obtaining this balance. Participant WFMC09 explained that in her effort to obtain work-life balance, "I had to make a real conscious effort to make different choices, so now the choices I make, which may or may not be a good balance, I always find I am not balanced, but I do not work at night anymore and he does not either and that is the time we spend together." Participant IFMC25 said that in her effort to obtain a work-life balance, she decided to adopt a transformational leadership style across all areas of her life. She shared her story:

> I realised that if you apply this transformational leadership style across everything and manage it, it will work in every scenario in every environment with everyone, and it seems to work fine, I think it is part of your value system, if you have your value system right, you want to make a difference in people's life, you want to transform people, whether it is your son or your family or your friends.

Although these women were aware that this would be difficult due to the demands of the consulting industry, they were determined to balance the other aspects of their family lives to achieve this work-life balance. One of the four participants had to experience a traumatic personal event for her to realise that she did not have any work-life balance. Two of the eight participants were happy with their current work-life balance and did not feel the need to enhance this in any way, as they believed that they had the work-family balance at an acceptable level. Participant IFREC08 described her understanding of work-life balance and stated the reason why she was able to obtain such an acceptable work-life balance: "It is all up to a person … my success is being able to provide for my family, it is not being rich, or having all the money in the world, it is about sharing love, light and happiness, that means success to me, so that is balance." All eight participants acknowledged and accepted the fact that their role demands vary, based on the specific nature of the consulting industry as well as being women leaders in the consulting industry. Six of the eight participants accepted the multiple demanding roles that are

placed on them; however, all of these role demands are skewed towards the work environment. Two of the six participants were unhappy with the role demands placed upon them within their personal lives, which resulted in frustration, irritation and anger, and detracted from their work role. For example, participant WFMC17 explained:

> My children were still very young and that was draining me, which made me irritable and frustrated, so the more I had to work the happier I became because then I did not have to deal with the responsibilities of being a mother, especially if I could travel because then I had my own time, even if it meant that I had to work and had to work at night because I did not have to deal with other things too … there was focused time for me …

Four of the six participants acknowledged that their role demands are not balanced, which leads to feelings of frustration and has resulted in them continually striving towards balancing these role demands. Two of the eight participants believed that the role demands placed on them within their work and personal lives are balanced and they, therefore, do not believe that they are neglecting any of the role demands that are placed on them. Participant WFMC19 explained why she is able to generally secure a work-life balance:

> I think that my private life and my work life is not necessarily that far apart, so I do not tend to live different lives, I think that for me it is about fundamentals, about trying to make a difference, so in my work life I want to be successful and I want to make sure that whatever we do here makes people feel like they have achieved something and I basically apply those same rules to my private life.

Of the eight participants, seven acknowledged and accepted the expectations placed on them by others. Three of the seven participants believed that they were not excelling in the role expectations placed on them within their personal lives, while one of the eight participants believed that expectations placed on her by others are not as important as those placed on her by herself.

Emotional Labour Expressed as Positive and Negative Experiences

Based on the findings from the data, six of the eight participants—when given the opportunity to discuss their emotions experienced—predominantly chose to speak about the positive emotions they experienced. Two of the eight participants—when given the opportunity to discuss their emotions experienced—chose to speak about experiencing negative emotions. All eight participants linked positive emotions to their success in the workplace, which led to emotions of happiness, recognition, excitement, satisfaction, appreciation and validation of their competency levels. The positive emotions experienced were related to winning tenders, meeting clients' expectations and managing relationships effectively between clients, team members and senior managers. Participant IFMC10 described her positive emotions related to a work situation:

We won a massive contract with one of the biggest banks in Africa and to know that you have played a huge part in that and you have contributed, to know that your hard work was acknowledged and did not go unappreciated; it made me feel very re-energised, very excited about the future, positive, it validates your own competence level; very confident, yes, you think you can take on the world.

Another participant (IFMC25) described her positive emotions related to a similar work situation:

So recently I won a R25 million proposal; I did not realise the impact of that on the whole organisation, I thought it is just another project and the overwhelming positive response and feedback I got back from the CEO and COO, the chairperson, the staff, it was just amazing; the recognition people give you for closing these huge exceptional deals and the impact it has on everybody. I think that was a very nice feeling, a good feeling. Finally, people see you and appreciate what you have done; it is a nice thing despite all the roles I had to balance.

Six of the eight participants also linked negative emotions experienced to the workplace, which were expressed through anger, helplessness, hopelessness, rejection, grief, disappointment, disconnectedness, anxiety, frustration, resentment and irritation. Participant IFMC10 described her negative emotions:

Irritation, annoyance, there is an element of resentment and doubt to say somebody is doubting your ability because you probably have more experience running companies and setting up companies than them; disconnecting, there is a point where you literally withdraw from the conversation because nothing you say is being heard … so withdrawal as well.

Participant WFMC17 expressed her negative emotions associated with a different work experience:

The biggest irritation, which is a great uncomfortable aspect of being an employee of my organisation, is the fact that there was a certain dream that you bought into—because I was headhunted—and what I am experiencing and what is the reality is not the sales pitch that was offered to me. This caused much frustration around the inability to be a true leader, an inability to be regarded as a leader, an inability to make decisions as a leader and an inability to act in a credible way in front of my peers [all this] is because of the context in this organisation, which makes me feel angry, sad … disappointed … frustrated and despairing.

Two of the eight participants related negative emotions experienced to personal situations, which were expressed through devastation, anger, sadness, anxiety and harsh tones spoken. All eight participants were fully cognisant of the emotions they displayed and the impact that these emotions had on themselves and others within the workplace and their personal lives.

Discussion

The majority of the participants displayed a natural inclination towards a transformational leadership as their preferred leadership style, as they believed that this style was the best way to motivate team players to maximise performance and capabilities. This is supported in literature as Evans (2010, 348–349) states that transformational leadership inspires employees to have trust in and respect for their employers. The Emerald Publishing Group (2008, 27), who states that transformational leaders adopt a mentoring role with their followers, encouraging self-development and increased responsibility within the organisation, further supports this. All the participants who experienced transformational leadership described it in terms of being collaborative, mentoring of colleagues, nurturing, displaying creativity, and an understanding of individual and collective team needs (Budworth and Mann 2010, 178). Transformational leaders are role models to employees and they use innovative problem-solving methods to confront and resolve any challenges that are faced in the workplace, which gives them direction to confront problems timeously (Emerald Publishing Group, 2008, 28). The minority of participants displayed a transactional leadership style, as they believed that this style was the best way to achieve positive bottom-line results. These participants were prescriptive in their demands, dictated what needed to be done in the work situation, were controlling and enforced strict rules and regulations. The literature indicates (Bass 1985, 125) that transactional leaders generally reflect on how to improve and maintain the company's performance, how to replace one goal with another, how to decrease resistance to particular actions and execute decisions. In turn, transformational leadership allows followers to fulfil their own self-interest, minimise workplace anxiety, and concentrate on clear organisational objectives such as increased quality, customer service, reduced costs and increased production (Sadeghi and Pihie 2012, 187).

The majority of participants also found it difficult to maintain a positive work-life balance, since their leadership roles were so demanding that they required their sole attention for the role of being a woman in leadership in the consulting industry. Literature supports the fact that it is extremely difficult for women to create a positive work-life balance within any corporate industry (Hochschild 1997, 102). For example, Southworth (2014, 98) advocates that the barriers in the corporate ladder force women wishing for career advancement to prove "their masculinity" by excelling in the workplace at the expense of raising a family. Participants are multi-tasked with a number of different societal roles in a way that they predominantly find it a challenge to balance work and home lives adequately or successfully. Moreover, Whitehead and Kotze (2003, 80) suggest that the dual role women have to play makes it difficult for them to meet these higher organisational expectations (Hochschild 1997, 103–104). Thus, they are faced with a unique challenge to balance the competing expectations of work and home, along with all their other roles. This sentiment is supported by Schueller-Weidekamm and Kautzky-Willer (2012, 248) who proposes that women still

face a trade-off between career positions that are associated with power and influence, and emotional responsibilities and family life.

Some of the participants were making a conscious, determined effort to try to strive for this balance; however, they were aware that this would be difficult due to the demands of the consulting industry. Furthermore, Delina and Raya (2013, 275–276) state that the attempt of working women to integrate, organise and balance the various problems and activities in their different roles simultaneously, puts them under tremendous pressure. As a result, the family becomes an organisational stakeholder, and this powerful social trend marks the beginning of the work-life balance paradigm shift. Only a few of the participants were satisfied that they did not have a work-life balance as they accepted that this lack of work-life balance was part of being a women leader within the consulting industry. Since the participants had varied roles and expectations of them, ranging from being mothers and nurturers to their children to sole carers and providers to aged family members, they may not afford their children and aged family members with sufficient quality time, which caused strain on their marriage and relationships with children and family members. This led to frustration, irritation and annoyance in trying to manage role demands and expectations better, as in many instances the participants could not fully enjoy family holidays as work required deadlines to be met over the weekend or over the holidays. They managed their emotions by containing the negative emotions of others, through compliance, prioritising their work role and by taking on additional responsibilities in the hope that they would receive the recognition they think they deserve.

This challenge was supported by Whitehead and Kotze (2003, 83) who suggests that professional women in the 21st century seem to have the exceptional challenge of balancing the multiple roles and expectations associated with their homemaker and work roles, namely fulfilling the responsibilities of mother, caregiver to older relatives, spouse and employee/leader simultaneously. It is also clear that women's ability to balance these roles has a direct bearing on their physical and mental wellbeing, as well as their career performance and success (Burke 2001, 352; Burke and Mc Keen 1996, 50; Facione 1992, 164; Sharma 1999, 21). Certain participants, who were sole proprietors, conceded that they could never rest because their clients expect them always to attend to their demands, matters and wishes. This implies that they always have to manage their clients' needs and expectations and cannot explain to their clients that they are away on holiday and will not be able to attend to their company's needs. It seems as if consulting is characterised by impossible deadlines that never seem to end and that working all the time is a normal occurrence that seems to be accepted if one wants to be successful. Certain participants established open communication with their families to achieve a balance in their work and personal life. Some participants viewed personal and family matters to be draining on their energies and abilities to be more successful at work and viewed these aspects as a severe hindrance, which in turn caused frustration, irritation or anger.

The way in which employees and leaders manage their feelings in the workplace varies from person to person (Scott, Barnes and Wagner 2012, 920). All the participants were of the view that there is no organisational support to assist one to manage these emotions. This led to the participants being faced with situations where they had to manage these emotions according to the way the situation demanded it, which, given their leadership role in the consulting industry, meant that they predominantly masked these emotions. The two strategies of dealing with emotional labour were therefore also alluded to, namely surface acting (real emotions are not illustrated, also referred to as fake acting) and deep acting (real issues are illustrated and true feelings are shown) (Hochschild 1983, 127; Judge, Woolf and Hurst 2009, 80–81). Sometimes, a frustrated employee may fake act to comply with the organisational policies, that is, the employee may be unhappy at work but will still force a smile to customers to hide the unhappiness to comply with the organisational policies (Ashkanasy and Humphrey 2011, 374). In deep acting, one is genuine and alters what one feels to express genuine mandated emotions within the organisational policies (Groth, Hennig-Thurau and Walsh 2009, 970). Given the opportunity to discuss their emotions, the majority chose to speak about positive emotions rather than negative ones, while the minority chose to speak about negative emotions experienced overall. All the participants linked positive emotions experienced to success within the workplace, which led to emotions of happiness, satisfaction at closing deals, recognition, appreciation, and validation of contributing to company success. The majority of the participants also linked negative emotions to the workplace, and these were expressed through anger, hopelessness, rejection, disappointment, sadness, anxiety, shame and the loss of identity.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings

The main objective of the study was to gain insight into how women leaders within the consulting industry experience emotional labour from a hermeneutic phenomenological stance. Employees' emotional disposition is often influenced by the emotional content of the working environment. This is obviously also true for women, particularly those who find themselves in leadership positions. The literature did not reflect any significant difference between emotional labour experiences and gender (Ashkanasy and Humphrey 2011, 370). This is noteworthy, given the increasing expectation that women should be able to manage and regulate the emotional component of the workplace better compared to males. The literature also reflects a positive relationship between surface acting, emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation. This perhaps points to the potentially harmful effect of emotional labour through alienation, exhaustion, shame, guilt and the loss of identity, which could have a negative impact on the career aspirations of women. The emotions that women leaders experienced ranged from feelings of happiness and contentment—when they exceeded their job expectations— but then they also experienced feelings of frustrations when their teams let them down in a manner that disappointed them because they expected more. The opposite could also be true. A positive emotional connection (relationship) with the "other" could also

enhance psychological wellbeing, nurture relationships and lead to a positive impact on the bottom line (Van Gelderen, Konijn and Bakker 2011, 873).

Managerial and Business Implications

Managers should nurture a more conscious awareness of the emotional content in the workplace and its potential impact on employees in general and how leaders take up their leadership role in organisations. Managers or leaders must be aware that one of their primary tasks is to serve as good-enough-containers of particularly the negative emotions in the workplace, in order for employees (or followers) to deal with their emotional labour situations in a more mature way. By doing this, employees will not be seduced into resorting to immature defences in the form of denial, projection splitting and projective identification. Women leaders should also reflect on what is projected onto them because of perceptions, or what they represent (as objects) to others. Organisations could also become more supportive of women in general, including of their careers, in light of the variety of roles that they need to balance in our modern world of work.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The sample was biased in terms of white females, the management consulting industry and all participants came from the Gauteng region. It would be interesting to see what the phenomenological experiences are if future research could focus on other population groups, different consulting industries and other regions. Women leaders' emotional labour experiences could also be explored from other theoretical perspectives, for example, a systems psychodynamic description of how emotional labour manifests among women leaders.

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