The Impacts of Frontline Employee Emotional Awareness on Customer Experience: A Multidimensional Perspective

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Abstract- In the evolved and recent service economy, customer experience has become a crucial point of differentiation and an essential lever for organizational success. While many factors contribute to the customer journey, the impact of frontline employees on customer experiences is essential. This paper conducts a multidimensional analysis of the impacts of frontline employee emotional awareness on customer experience. Emotional awareness, a prerequisite of emotional intelligence, represents the ability to effectively recognize and understand one's own emotions and the emotions of others. This framework suggests that emotional awareness is more than a potential attribute or constructive trait, but rather a significant influence on customer perceptions, satisfaction, and loyalty, which occurs directly or indirectly.

By reviewing and synthesizing literature, we examine the key mechanisms influencing emotional awareness, which include authentic emotional expression, emotional contagion, empathetic communication, and service recovery. This analysis finds a relative gap in the literature on this topic by conflating emotional awareness with emotional intelligence broadly or focusing on emotional labor broadly without a fuller exploration of the cognition and affective precursors. In addition, we outline theoretical and practical implications of this work, and suggest that organizations may benefit from a clearer understanding of employee emotional awareness, which could lead to improved, effective approaches to recruitment, training, and organizational culture development. This work contributes to the significant debate in organizations about the potential benefits to organizations from developing emotional awareness of its frontline staff, particularly to provide consistency in quality customer experiences in an increasing competitive environment.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Emotional Awareness, Satisfaction, Frontline Employees, Employee engagement, Customer satisfaction.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary service-driven economies, customer experience has emerged as a central determinant of organizational competitiveness and long-term sustainability. As markets become increasingly saturated and product differentiation diminishes, organizations are compelled to focus on the quality of interactions that occur between customers and service providers. Within this context, frontline employees occupy a strategically significant position, as they represent the primary point of contact between the organization and its customers. The behaviors, attitudes, and emotional expressions of these employees play a crucial role in shaping customer perceptions and evaluations of service quality.

Service encounters are inherently emotional in nature. Customers often approach frontline interactions with varying emotional states, including expectations, stress, satisfaction, or dissatisfaction. Frontline employees must navigate these emotional dynamics while simultaneously fulfilling organizational goals and service standards. Emotional awareness, the capacity to recognize, interpret, and regulate both one's own emotions and those of others has therefore become an essential competency in service roles. Employees who demonstrate high emotional awareness are better equipped to manage interpersonal interactions, respond empathetically to customer needs, and de-escalate potentially negative situations.

Scholarly research increasingly emphasizes the link between emotional awareness and customer experience outcomes. Emotional awareness enables frontline employees to engage in emotionally intelligent behaviors such as active listening, empathy, and adaptive communication. These behaviors contribute to positive emotional exchanges, which are known to influence customer satisfaction, trust, and

loyalty. Conversely, a lack of emotional awareness may result in miscommunication, perceived indifference, and service failures that negatively affect customer experience.

Despite growing recognition of its importance, emotional awareness remains an underdeveloped area in many service organizations, often overshadowed by technical skills and procedural training. This journal seeks to contribute to the existing literature by examining the impacts of frontline employee emotional awareness on customer experience. By exploring the emotional dimension of service interactions, this study highlights the necessity of integrating emotional awareness into employee development strategies in order to enhance service quality and foster meaningful customer relationships.

1.1. Background and Rationale

The current marketplace is filled with intense competition and products and services that are increasingly commoditized. Therefore, organizations are beginning to consider customer experience (CX) a more *strategic differentiator*. Customer experience (CX) captures the totality of a customer's perceptions and feelings about all interactions they have with an organization, brand, products, and services over time (Dzreke, 2025). It is an all-encompassing concept, with consideration of emotional, sensory, and relational considerations, not merely replicated by measures of service quality and transactional satisfaction (Bueno, 2019). Frontline employees (FLE's) represent the majority of customer facing interactions and perceptions. FLE's are considered the "face of the organization," and their "moments of truth" in the moments of delivery create the largest impact on customer perceptions and loyalty over time (Groth, 2019).

An organization focused on customer experience will need to also explore the nature of emotional reaction and response in workplace interactions. Academic and practitioner interest in emotions in the workplace has exploded in the marketplace as it relates to emotional intelligence (EI). Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been defined as the ability to perceive, understand and manage one's own emotions and the emotions of others (Lima, 2022). Studies have confirmed a relationship exists between emotional intelligence (EI), and positive outcomes like job performance,

interpersonal relationships, and effective leaders (Mekhala, 2024) (Dimitrova, 2025).

An important aspect of emotional intelligence (EI) is emotional awareness, or the ability to identify accurately the emotional cues we receive in our social interactions. Frontline employees (FLE's) navigate emotionally complicated interactions that rely on emotional awareness, and not merely a skill that frontline employees (FLE's) use when delivering service, but an important component of effective service delivery. The justification for this study rests on the intersection of two important trends in practice: *the strategic role of customer experience* and *the identification of emotional competencies in the workplace*. We have established the connection between emotions of employees and outcomes for customers, however, we have been focused mostly on emotional intelligence or emotional regulation in a performative context of emotional labor, which requires employees to manage the emotions they express to align with organizational display rules (Yang, 2023). Here, we argue for a closer, more granular focus on emotional awareness. The understanding of how the core ability of an employee to recognize emotions his or her own and the customer's, affects the service encounter is important, or at least a more fundamental level. This will facilitate more focused organizational strategies to enhance customer experience (CX).

1.2. The Problem Statement

Despite the well-known importance of frontline employees (FLEs) and emotions in the service delivery process, there is still a gap in our literature concerning the role of employee emotional awareness in customer experience. Existing research treat emotional intelligence, itself, as a singular construct. This has led to limited exploration of the value of the specific dimensions (Navas, 2022). As a result, the base skill of emotional awareness, that is required for all other emotional competencies including regulation and empathy, is not always made explicit in the literature, or is linked to the greater need for emotional intelligence or emotional labor.

The problem can be summarized in three parts. First, *there is a lack of conceptual clarity in distinguishing emotional awareness from other related constructs, leading to fuzziness in the way it is operationalized and measured in service contexts*. Second, *we have no*

coherent, systematic, and comprehensive understanding of how an employee's emotional awareness ties to an observable customer outcome. We often hear the terms emotional contagion and empathy, but have limited explorative linkage to the fact that both concepts depend on the first observable sense of an emotional perception. Third, *when organizations attempt to enhance customer experience (CX) through their workforce, they often invest in generalized "soft skills" training, with no clear consensus knowledge of which competencies will yield the greatest return on investment.* This can lead to inefficient allocation of resources and missed opportunities to enhance emotional awareness.

In short, we have an incomplete understanding of the employee-customer dynamic. We know that employees with higher emotional intelligence obtain better customer experiences, but such knowledge fails to explain *how* the basic skill of recognizing emotions initiates this positive chain of outcomes. So, we can see that this paper takes on the issue of the unexplored or undefined relationship between the specific competency of emotional awareness of the frontline employee and the complex nature of customer experience.

1.3. Research Questions and Objectives

Based on the identified problem, the paper aims to be guided by a single dominating research question: *How does the emotional awareness of frontline employees impact the customer experience in service encounters?* To systematically examine this central question, the study will consider the following specific research questions:

1. What are the core conceptual dimensions of emotional awareness for frontline employees and the customer experience as related, yet distinct, constructs?

2. What are primary mechanisms (i.e., emotional labor, emotional contagion, empathy, service recovery) that influence how a frontline employee's emotional awareness affects customer views and feelings?

3. What are the principal organizational strategies in hiring, training, or culture evolution that can be effectively designed to result in an employee's emotional awareness in an effort to improve the customer experience?

The aims of this paper, responding to our questions, is to provide:

1. Clear, synthesized definitions of emotional awareness and customer experience to establish an authentic theoretical basis for their relationship in the service context.

2. To systematically review the literature that maps the existing empirical studies connecting employee emotions to customer outcomes, thus finding the gaps that focusing on emotional awareness can fill.

3. To propose and discuss a multidimensional model of the mechanisms linking emotional awareness to various dimensions of customer experience.

4. To derive and discuss implications for practice, evidence-based recommendations for managers and organizations to strategically leverage emotional awareness to create a sustainable competitive advantage and superior service.

1.4. Significance of the Research

The significance of this research has theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this research adds to the service management, organizational behaviour, and marketing literatures by decoupling the construct of emotional awareness from the larger category of emotional intelligence and grouping it conceptually as a precursor. By establishing emotional awareness as the basis, the research proposes a more refined and exacting model to understand the emotions in service encounters and complicates the often used, "happy employees make happy customers." The addition of emotional awareness as a construct allows an explanation about the cognitive and affective processes below these relationships. A more nuanced way to understand service employee emotions can potentially spur empirical research for future empirical works of measurement and testing to get the specific impact of awareness for both employee and customer variables.

The practical significance of this research is to inform organizational strategy to improve operations. For human resources managers, it positions comprehension as critical for identifying candidates for customer facing roles, and makes the case for assessments to include emotional awareness. For training and development professionals, this research outlines the characteristics of emotional awareness that are necessary for employees to develop skills of perception to recognize others' emotional cues rather

than relying on scripted behaviors. Senior leadership is implicated for an organizational culture that values and values emotional literacy and enables employees to do the work required in their role which demands emotional labor in service roles.

The importance of emotional literacy is even more relevant in a time where technology continues to replace mundane transactional tasks for employees, and the emotional connection and capacity to empathize with customers will only be more valuable (Chundru, 2025). Through emotional awareness, organizations can position their employees to provide experiences that are not just efficient in delivery, but genuinely empathetic and memorable for the customer. All of this would be uniquely possible, timely for building customer relationships and business growth. And, the merits of this research are especially relevant as businesses contemplate employees working more digitally and with customers and clients, which is often where the need for emotional intelligence remains imperative to business success (Launer, 2025).

1.5. Overview of the Paper

This paper is organized into six separate components that sequentially respond to the objectives of the research. Following this introduction, Section 2 lays out the Theoretical Framework and Literature Review. The function of this section is to define the main constructs of emotional awareness and customer experience. This section will review relevant empirical studies that link employee emotions to customer outcomes and discuss gaps in the literature.

Section 3, The Mechanisms Linking Emotional Awareness to Customer Experience, will touch on the specific mechanisms of influence. For that, it will review four potential mechanisms of emotional labor and authentic display, emotional contagion, empathetic communication, and adaptive service recovery, and it will describe how (or why) each is enabled through an employees' emotional awareness.

Section 4 will review the Practical Implications and Organizational Considerations. This section will provide an opportunity to recast the theoretical implications of the study findings into recommendations for practice, such as for recruiting and selection, training and development, creating an emotional support organizational culture, and finally

the dynamic function of leadership modeling emotional competency.

Section 5, the Discussion, will summarize the main findings of the paper, summarize its theoretical and managerial contributions, and consider the role of emotional awareness in the future forms of digital service.

Lastly, Section 6 presents its Conclusion. The conclusion will synthesize the main points of the argument of the paper and re-emphasize the importance of frontline employee emotional awareness for superior customer experience.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to appreciate the influence that emotional awareness of a frontline employee has on customer experience, we must first establish a theoretical basis to consider. In this chapter, we will establish the principal constructs of the study by first defining emotional intelligence and emotional awareness in the context of organizations, moving on to conceptualize customer experience as a holistic, multidimensional phenomenon that transcends measures of satisfaction. Finally, we will integrate the extant research that examines the relationship between employee emotional states and behaviours with customer outcomes, and in doing so, allude to some of the important gaps in the relevant literature that this paper seeks to address.

2.1. Defining Emotional Awareness and Emotional Intelligence at Work

Emotional awareness and the umbrella concept of emotional intelligence (EI) are essential to the understanding of the psychological processes that drive service behaviours of employees in service interactions. Emotional intelligence is a multi-faceted capability which has increasingly gained interest in the fields of organizational psychology and management and has been shown to significantly impact workplace outcomes and behaviors broadly defined as *the ability to perceive, comprehend, manage, and access emotions in oneself and others*. More narrowly, *the ability to recognize emotional states and behavioral indicators of others is paramount to success in customer-facing positions* (Lima, 2022). To aid the conceptual framing of emotional intelligence in terms

of application to employees at the service frontline, we can view it in terms of the key competencies of emotional intelligence, which are broadly categorized as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

The most foundational component of the above core abilities is emotional awareness, the basis of all other emotional capacities. Emotional awareness consists of two main dimensions: 1) *self-awareness*, or the ability to recognize and understand moods, emotions and drives in either oneself, or how they may be perceived; and 2) *social awareness*, or the ability to pay attention to and accurately interpret other people's emotions, including customers, and other staff. As emotional awareness does not only mean recognizing an emotion (a passive act), but interpreting the intensity of an emotion (intensity), its antecedents (cognitions, behaviors), and potential impact on the service encounter, it is imperative for frontline employees. For frontline employees, emotional awareness means not only being aware of their potential for emotionality arising from stress, frustration, or the like, but also diagnosing a customer's emotional cues suggesting impatience, confusion, or even delight.

The importance of emotional intelligence (EI) in the workplace is well documented, with a growing body of research demonstrating a strong association with increased employee performance, navigation of interpersonal conflict situations, and reduction of occupational hazards including stress and burnout (Navas, 2022). In high-pressure occupations, such as healthcare, emotional intelligence has been shown to relate to providing quality care and/or positive patient outcomes (Ariga, 2020). Additionally, emotional intelligence can serve as a protective factor against the negative effects of work-related stress.

In the allied health professions, for example, the more well-developed an employee's emotional intelligence, the level of reported burnout symptoms would likely decrease, incorporating the notion that understanding and managing emotions contributes to resilience (Santos, 2025). This protective benefit is applicable for employees at the service frontline who are routinely faced with emotionally charged events. For example, conflict management in the workplace is a key application of emotional intelligence, mediating burnout at work (Kasemy, 2023). Thus, even integrating and applying key emotional competencies is a means of supporting employee well-being,

positively influencing service consistency. Thus, emotional awareness represents the entry point to emotional intelligence (EI), and therefore, the fundamental cognitive and affective skill required for employees operating at the service frontline to navigate the emotionally charged nature of their jobs, creating the opportunity for more engaged and sensitive service delivery.

2.2. Customer Experience: Conceptualizing Beyond Satisfaction

The notion of customer experience (CX) has shifted from previous transactional definitions of service quality and customer satisfaction. These constructs are still essential, however, current thinking has shifted toward a broader, and more defined way to think about customer experience (CX). The recent description of customer experience (CX) describes the overall perception and feeling a customer has over time from the journey they have at a company. Every customer journey is different, but is made up of multiple touchpoints that can begin with simple brand awareness, continuing through a purchase, service interactions, and post-service support. Customer experience (CX) is not a single event, but rather a collection of cognitive, emotional, sensory, and behavioral responses that take place over time (Bueno, 2019).

It is important to draw a distinction between customer experience and customer satisfaction. Satisfaction is typically a transaction-specific assessment of whether or not a particular product or service met expectations in that transaction. While positive satisfaction scores are beneficial, they do not necessarily result in customer loyalty or expectations of a positive brand perception. Customer experience, by a broader definition, includes the entire relationship beyond just the rational evaluation of performance quality, but also the feelings encompassed in those interactions (Havíř, 2017). Feelings of excitement, trust, appreciation, or even frustration are operations of the experience, and ultimately drive behavior.

Current frameworks for examining customer experience (CX) have determined that journey management is important when looking at how each touchpoint creates perceived service quality, overall satisfaction, and ultimately customer loyalty (Dzreke, 2025). Considering the overall context of the customer journey, keeps the evaluation point of view from being

solely the frontline service encounter, and turns the interaction point into a "moment of truth" where the brand promise is constructed or infractions occur. Perceived service quality from this interaction will heavily influence the consumer's overall experience. Service design frameworks are now being established to support the intent of creating a positive and holistic customer experience, from the efficiency of the process, to the emotional nature of the service delivery, (Bellos, 2021). The complexity of understanding customer experience (CX) as a concept is then through the multiple dimensions of evaluation from the functional aspects of the service, to the affective and relational levels of the experience that create the working relationship for the duration of the organization and customer interactions. It is at this juncture where the emotional awareness of the frontline employee becomes a crucial aspect of the overall customer experience and memorable and positive.

2.3. Linking Employee Emotions to Customer Outcomes: A Review of Empirical Studies

The theoretical connection between an employee's inner-state to the outward display for a customer has ample empirical evidence. Literature supports this connection by illustrating that the emotional display of frontline employees is a strong predictor of customer outcomes, from satisfaction, loyalty, and overall experience. This connection has primarily been viewed through the lens of emotional labor, which is the employee display of emotions, which are intentional movements that required work to manage feelings and expressions of feelings toward the emotional requirements of the job.

Research on emotional labor indicates that the *way* an employee manages their emotions have effects on customers. Particularly, when employees demonstrate positive emotions during the service encounter, there is a robust link to customer experience satisfaction. This positive display of emotion can be warmth, friendliness, enthusiasm and excitement toward the customer and is consistently reported as a more favorable perception of the service and positive overall experience (Eneizan, 2019). This finding is consistent across service industries, including hospitality, retail, and healthcare. The emotional display serves as a signal of care for the customer from employees and a signal of competency toward the customer to fulfill a

need from the customer for a positive human connection.

A thorough review of the customer service experience literature supports this assertion, concluding that you are in the right place, that is, emotional labor behaviors exhibited by frontline employees influence employee and customer experiences and outcomes (Groth, 2019). The conscious decision to employ organizationally desired emotions (smiling, making eye contact, etc.) typically improves the customer experience. The research also introduces an important caveat surrounding authenticity of emotional expression. The research often distinguishes between "surface acting", which is the act of faking a feeling, and "deep acting", which is the process of modifying one's inner feelings to align with an emotion needed for an interaction. Either approach can lead to a positive display, although deep acting is more likely to be associated with genuine emotional connections and improved experiences for the employee (e.g., less burnout) and the customer (e.g., more authentic relationship).

In addition, the employee's attitudes and emotions impact more than immediate satisfaction, they impact customer perceptions and behaviors. Positive emotional displays will positively impact customer perceptions of service quality, build rapport, and engender trust. This emotional connection is central into converting satisfied customers into devoted advocates for the brand. A customer who is emotionally engaged and valued is more likely to forgive service failures that they otherwise might not have, provide positive word of mouth recommendations, and retain loyal behavior to the brand. Moreover, the emotional tone displayed by the frontline employee while engaging in a service interaction is not a platitude, but a mechanism for sustaining customer relationships. And the collective of these emotional interactions contributes to the customer's holistic and enduring perception of the brand.

2.4. Gaps in the Existing Literature

Though the established relationship between employee emotional labor and customer satisfaction is recognized, the existing literature coverage reveals several issues that need to be researched. Much of the literature has addressed the more abstract idea of emotional intelligence, or behavioral outcomes of

emotional labor (e.g., positive emotional displays), without addressing the foundational cognitive and affective process that are enacted in those behaviors: *emotional awareness*. Therefore, there is a need for a more granular view of how the specific ability of an employee to perceive and understand their affective or cognitive emotions, during a service encounter, can be translated into some specific service behaviors, transforming in turn the multifaceted customer experience.

First, while the connection between positive emotional displays and customer satisfaction is outlined (Eneizan, 2019), less is known about what happens during that *awareness*. For example, how does the frontline employee's awareness of subtle frustration cues lead them to modify their communication style or service strategy? We might find this is a more specific approach to empathetic or career modifying, authentic emotional regulation, intermediary processes that have not been clearly articulated from awareness to action. A more nuanced analysis is required to describe *how* awareness is transmutated into action.

Second, most of the literature has defined customer outcomes as ongoing satisfaction. As this work continues towards a more holistic conceptualization of customer experience, or customer experience (CX) from an emotional, cognitive, and relational framework (Dzreke, 2025), will clarify how the emotional competencies of employees fill the gaps in scope. For example, does emotional awareness contribute to longer-term customer loyalty, trust, and emotional memory of the service journey? Studies have not adequately mapped employee emotional awareness across the customer experience spectrum of what we understand today.

Finally, while the role of emotional intelligence in discouraging colleague trauma and burnout has been previously discussed (Santos, 2025)(Kasemy, 2023), the literature gaps this internal, colleague-oriented focus with external, customer-oriented outcomes. A theory exists for an approach to examine this relationship in a holistic way. By focusing on organizational support for emotional awareness, we can evaluate the beneficial feedback loop that occurs when colleagues with emotional awareness experience less burnout which subsequently leads to increasingly higher levels of service quality then enhances the customer experience; this adds to organizational performance. We are not suggesting the role of organization culture and leadership is not critical and perhaps we are not respecting organizational culture and leadership. While it is an important area, we are focusing here on emotional awareness antecedents and how they work through multiple constructs of customer experience.

III. THE MECHANISMS CONNECTING EMOTIONAL AWARENESS TO CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

A frontline employee's emotional awareness and a customer's experience are not simply related. The relationship is a complicated one involving several different but interrelated psychological and behavioral mechanisms. An employee's ability to acknowledge and understand their own emotions and those of the customer begins a chain of events that will influence the essence and result of a service exchange. This section will begin with the four mechanisms that will influence this chain of events; emotional labor and an authentic emotional display, emotional contagion, empathetic communication and rapport, and finally adaptive service recovery and problem solving ability. In identifying these mechanisms, we can have a deeper understanding of how an internal cognitive-affective skill gets developed into an observable and value-creating customer experience.

3.1. Emotional Labor and Authentic Emotional Display

Emotional labor is a construct coined by Arlie Hochschild that involves feeling and expression management to comply with an employer's emotional expectations. In service contexts, organizations establish "display rules" for employees or employers. Display rules are described as expectations to regulated feelings what is the appropriate feelings to show to customers, which often reflects an expectation that the employee should show positivity (e.g., warmth, cheerfulness). The performance of emotional labor is an important mechanism of the relationship between an employee's emotional awareness and a customer's experience. Employees who are emotionally aware are more able to handle the demands of emotional labor in a way that feels authentic and helps to minimize emotional exhaustion and customer cynicism.

There are generally two types of emotional labor tactics: surface acting and deep acting. Surface acting, as it implies, *involves changing outward emotional displays without changing inner feelings a fancy way of saying* "paint on a smile." This strategy requires employees to both suppress real emotions and fake the expected feelings. Surface acting can meet the essential character of display rules, but results in a feeling of inauthenticity that the customer can sense-nature of exchange can feel sterile or disingenuous. Deep acting is fundamentally different because it requires employees to be more cognizant of inner feelings in order to change. For example, employees can take the inner feelings of empathy to experience the emotional exchange when the employee is interacting with visibly frustrated customers (e.g., situation was viewed them, not personally). Research tends to find that deep acting can result in sustainable emotional labor and can improve service performance outcomes (Lam, 2018).

The fulcrum of these strategies character is *emotional awareness*. An employee that is aware of emotions can signal a reasonable level of their own real emotions, for example, at present stress, irritation, or even in a difficult service exchange (Cheng, 2022). This awareness is the first step of a conscious and strategic use of an emotional labor tactic. Rather than defaulting to a surface acting that is psychologically and cognitively drained and transparently obvious to the customer, employees can engage in deep acting.

Emotional awareness can provide employees the strategy to re-appraise the situation; for example, anger customers are responding to an organization failure. Employees may re-frame the situation, and in the process of coming to an understanding of what the situation, they can genuinely feel empathy in the process of emotional labor. Employees may be able to display feelings that is organizationally appropriate as well as authentic for the customer. Authenticity tends to generate positive customers experience, simply because the employee genuinely cared and were concerned about the customer's experience. Employees can also take a simple exchange and progress it to relational state. Through the management of emotional labor competencies developed by employees' emotional awareness, likelihood of positive service interaction is increased.

3.2. Emotional Contagion in Service Encounters

The phenomenon of emotional contagion is a fundamental psychological process whereby a person will automatically mimic and synchronize their displays, vocalizations, postures, and movements with another person and, thereby, converge emotionally (Zablah, 2017). In the context of a dyadic service encounter, emotional contagion is a strong, often unconscious, mechanism by which the emotional state of an employee has a direct impact on a customer's feelings and appraisal of the overall encounter. In this way, helping employees develop emotional awareness is vital for the intentional management and utilization of emotional contagion to enhance a positive experience for customers.

Extensive research on emotional contagion in service settings has investigated it from the employee perspective, the customer perspective, and the dyadic perspective (Delcourt, 2024). The emotional contagion process often starts the initiator being the employee. A worker who meaningfully expresses genuine positive emotions, i.e., a warm smile, will elicit a corresponding positive emotional state from the customer through a process referred to as "primitive emotional contagion" (Hofmann, 2024). In this case, the transfer cannot be described as merely a cognitive assessment of the employee's mood but rather an automatic transfer of emotion. For example, we can envision a hotel front desk agent who displays authentic enthusiasm about a customer's upcoming stay or the local attractions. This enthusiasm can be "caught" by the customer making the check-in experience much more inviting and pleasant as well as without knowing it, possibly impact the guest's satisfaction of the experience (Ustrov, 2016). The cycle can also be reciprocal reinforcing this cycle of emotional contagion where the customers' responses positively energizes the employee, creating (what has been referred to in the literature) as "emotional energy" derived from a share positive mood and shared focus of attention during the interaction (Cayla, 2025).

Being emotionally aware allows frontline employees to strategically act more as agents than to be passive participants in this emotional contagion process. An employee's awareness of their emotional state can allow them to ensure they are exhibiting the positive emotions necessary to build a favorable customer experience. Consider an employee who recognizes that they are feeling stressed, they will stop for a

moment to regulate their emotions prior to interacting with the next customer which will ultimately lessen the chances of negatively conveying their emotions to the customer. In addition, social awareness, or the ability to read a customer's emotional state, allows the employee to modify their emotional display as well. For instance, if the employee notices that the customer is stressed or upset, an aware employee may display calmness and reassurance, using emotional contagion to contribute to the customers reduced negative affect. Tactically managing the all of the emotional climate for customers is critical. For example, research shows that the strategic use of nonverbal cues such as a smile combined with a nod will convey higher levels of authenticity and immediacy, which builds rapport between the employee and customer (Woo, 2020). In this way, emotional contagion serves as a literal bridge between the employee's internal feelings and the customer's subjective experience. An employee can strategically manage the emotional contagion process through their emotions awareness, creating shared positive emotions, and an enhanced service encounter (Liu, 2019).

3.3. Empathy Communication and Rapport Building

In addition, emotional awareness can be the cognitive basis for an even more complex emotional mechanism: *Empathic Communication.* Empathic refers to the ability to understand, feel, and share the feelings of another. In a service context, empathic communication not only entails noticing the customer's emotional state but also communicating that understanding back to the customer, which validates the customer's feelings and ultimately strengthens the connection and rapport. No doubt empathy and emotional awareness are essential for moving beyond polite scripted dialogues to sincere empathy that enhances the customer experience. The process begins with the social awareness aspect of emotional intelligence. An employee who is emotionally aware is able to pick up on the small verbal and nonverbal expressions that reveal a customer's feelings and emotional states maybe a slight frown, a wavering tone of voice or words that demonstrate frustration. This accurate perception is the first step you need to display empathetic communication. For example, if an employee noticed a customer was nervous or anxious over a large purchase, that employee could respond with, "I can see

this seems a little overwhelming, so let's walk through this together." This statement does more than just say, "I can help," it acknowledges and validates the customer's emotional state, so that they feel heard and understood. This response serves as a de-escalation tool for negative emotions and creates a collaborative service encounter process.

Empathetic communication, based on emotional awareness, ultimately leads to rapport, which is defined as a relationship which facilitates a connection that is engaging and sympathetic. When customers perceive the employee has an appreciation and understanding of the context of their viewpoint and emotional state, trust is established. This interaction moves beyond the transaction to a positive interpersonal experience. The appraisal-emotive framework notes that customers are continually appraising employee behavior which translates into their emotional reactions (Zhao, 2018). When the employee's behavior is perceived as empathetic, it creates positive customer emotions like gratitude and confidence encouraging the customer's increase in participation and cooperation throughout the service encounter. Research has also shown the significant contribution nonverbal displays of empathy create rapport, specifically a genuine smile and attentive posture, which enhance perceptions of the employee's authenticity and immediacy (Woo, 2020). The cumulative effect of modeling empathy strengthens the customer relationship, enhancing their immediate experience, and cultivating long-term loyalty. Empathetic communication based on emotional awareness serves as an important mechanism for developing the strong relational bonds that are synonymous with exceptional customer service.

3.4. Adaptive Service Recovery and Problem Solving

Service encounters do not always go as planned, and failures, misunderstandings, and unexpected problems will occur. In fact, usually it is the moment of difficulty a moment called "moments of truth" that will present the greatest test of an organization's promise to the customer. The final mechanism through which employee emotional awareness has significant impact on the customer experience is in the arena of adaptive service recovery and problem solving. Employees with high emotional awareness will be significantly more successful in these difficult encounters, turning

what could be a disaster into an opportunity of enhancing customer loyalty.

The first step in successful service recovery is for a service employee to take into consideration the emotional impact of the failure on the customer. A customer dealing with a service failure is likely experiencing a range of negative emotions (i.e., frustration, disappointment, anger, and/or anxiety). An employee with low emotional awareness may focus only on the technical aspects of the problem, providing a mechanical resolution without consideration for the emotional distress the customer is experiencing. Alternatively, an employee with high social awareness is able to quickly and accurately identify and respond to the customer's emotional state. This allows the employee to start the recovery process, with an act of empathy, by saying something like, "I can see how frustrating this must be for you, and I am really sorry about the inconvenience." This statement acknowledges and validates the customer's feelings, immediately de-escalates any tension, and signals to the customer that the employee is an ally, not an adversary in the problem-solving process.

After this initial empathetic connection, emotional self-awareness is paramount. An upset or hostile customer can elicit a negative emotional response from the employee such as defensiveness or stress (Cheng, 2022). Emotional awareness allows the employee to understand and regulate these internal responses so they do not add to the dynamics of conflict. By remaining calm and maintaining a focus on problem solving, the employee can direct their cognitive efforts into finding the best solution. This flexible effort or adjustment is simply to focus on the current customer and situation. An emotionally aware employee can sense whether the customer needs a simple, quick fix, or if they need the employee to provide lengthy details and explanations for proper reassurance. To meet the practical and emotional needs of the customer, their communication style, voice, and suggested remedy would most likely be altered. Customizing service recovery methods or solutions based on a continuous reading and adjusting to the customer's expressed, implied, or observed emotions, is the epitome of service excellence. After delivering service recovery successfully, with empathy and calmness, the employee not only fixed the customer's issue, but also educated and showed a high level of caring and competence; the customer

may actually feel a greater level of satisfaction and loyalty than they would have had the service failure never existed.

IV. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

The conceptual and theoretical rationale that tied frontline employee emotional awareness to enhanced customer experience requires a move from theory to practice. Understanding how emotional labor, emotional contagion, empathy, and adaptive service recovery operate is important, but more importantly, organizations need practical implementation strategies to leverage emotional awareness for competitive advantage. Organizations need to move from simply recognizing "soft skills" to actively creating a culture in which emotional competencies are hired for, cultivated, and reinforced in the workplace. This chapter will provide a multi-faceted approach for organizations to ingrain emotional awareness into their operational DNA, and will emphasize practical implications related to recruitment, training, organizational culture, and organizational leader approaches. By adopting these practices, the service encounter can be transformed from a transaction into an emotional connection that fosters customer relationship loyalty and brand equity.

4.1 The Importance of Recruitment and Selection

The first step to establishing an emotionally aware frontline employee workforce is to hire the right people. Historically, technical skill and experience have been the most important factors organizations seek in their frontline employees, but they are finding that innate emotional among social aptitudes can be even more predictive of success in customer-facing positions. Therefore, fitting emotional awareness and competencies into recruiting and selection is a strategic imperative for building service-focused team of employees who can navigate complex emotional landscapes.

Recruitment historically has and likely will continue to focus on "hard" skills and competencies that are listed within the resume. However, in order to ensure a workforce with high emotional awareness and emotional competencies, human resource management practices will need to change towards more sophisticated methods of evaluation. For

example, the most effective tool that addresses emotional labor, emotional contagion, service recovery, behavioral events interviews (BEI). Instead of asking hypothetical questions that ask what the candidate would do in a scenario (often weaving around the point and making assumptions), a BEI allow the candidate to relay their personal experience and tell a detailed story. For example, instead of asking how would you handle an angry customer, ask what was the most aggressive and upset customer you ever dealt with, and what was your response? Not only will it allow the candidate to demonstrate their empathy and emotional regulation, but it will also allow the interviewer to learn about the candidate under pressure and how they managed their emotions to positively resolve the situation. The candidate's narrative will reveal their capacity to perceive the distressed customer's emotional state, manage their own emotional reactions and adapt their communication style to match.

In addition to interviews, situational judgement tests (SJTs), can be adapted into service contexts. SJTs present the candidate with plausible work scenarios in which customer emotions are relevant, and they are required to select the most appropriate approach from a list of 4-5 options. The choices the candidate selects could represent their level of emotional awareness, understanding of social cues, and problem-solving orientation. For example, when presented with a distressed or irate customer, the choice that is purely procedural to respond could differ greatly than discovery of the candidate's response with a procedural choice, such as, I am sorry that you are upset, but there is not much I can do to resolve this today.

Finally, validated arrays of quantitative psychometric assessments can provide precise data that could supplement interview and situational test data to the same end as SJTs. Validated instruments that are designed to consider components of emotional intelligence (e.g., Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test [MSCEIT]), can sample an individual's capacity to perceive emotions, use emotions, understand emotions, and manage emotions. Again, these instruments would not be an exclusive starting point for a hiring decision, but rather the assessed variables can inform the interview and situational event assessments based on performance in those areas that aligned with the MSCEIT

establishment of emotively intelligent professionals. Therefore, increased organizational use of recruited employees with those who have some emotional intelligence skill sets have gains related to improved outcomes for the organization (i.e., better emotional skill in working with co-workers and customer service skills, and more resilient to the many challenges of working) (Desti, 2015). By integrating these battery of assessment methods into the selection process, organizations can greatly increase the odds of selecting frontline employees who possess emotional awareness that can be supported with training, which is key to delivering customer experiences that are superior.

4.2 Training and developing emotional competencies
Although hiring can help identify individuals who display a natural inclination for emotional awareness, these competencies do not have to be fixed features. Rather, they are skills which can be developed and enhanced through structure and intentional practice. Organizations that are invested in the emotional competencies of their frontline staff are at a significant advantage to consistently develop high quality service interactions. A well-rounded training program needs to go beyond a customer service script and help build the core parts of emotional awareness and emotional intelligence.

The best training programs are experiential and interactive, including role-play, case studies, and group discussions. These types of training engage employees in practice of navigating an emotional context, all while in a safe and supportive space. In role-play scenarios, for example, employees could simulate scenarios for dealing with difficult customer situations that include complaining, or delivering bad news, and practice empathetic communication, and de-escalation techniques. Feedback from trainers and peers is needed at these points of practice to support learning and growth. The ability to manage difficult customers is directly related to the ability to manage one's own emotions, which can be developed with practice (Caruso, 2013).

Effective training content should also be delivered in a way where competencies build upon each other. Initial modules might expand on self-awareness, where employees learn how to identify their own emotional triggers and habitual responses to highly stressful situations. This could transition into social

awareness modules where employees learn how to accurately gauge and interpret customers' verbal and non-verbal emotion signals. This makes logical sense since gauging and understanding emotions can occur if employees learn to gauge emotions first (Karimi, 2020). Other more advanced modules might address acting with empathy, active listening, or adaptive problem-solving or a toolkit of skills in building rapport and de-escalating potentially dangerous situations. Research posits and points out that specific staff training can improve emotional intelligence and employee-client interactions (Zijlmans, 2015).

Importantly, the impact of training is not only theoretical. A systematic review and meta-analysis recently produced conceptual evidence indicating that the positive, long-lasting impact of workplace-based emotional competency training has real applications, which can exist beyond months after the end of the training program (Mehler, 2024). Therefore, training employees to develop their emotional skills will result in a quantifiable and sustainable return. Training should not be a single time event, but rather an ongoing process of reinforcement and coaching. This could include workshops, peer-mentoring programs, and performance feedback in order to include an evaluation of emotional competencies. By creating the comprehensive trainings, organizational agents can work toward building emotional awareness for the entire service workforce (Khoury, 2023).

4.3. Creating a Supporting Organizational Culture
Recruitment and training are critical interventions, however, they need to be valued and supported through an organizational culture. A supportive organizational structure and climate provides the context for employees to display emotional competencies authentically without consequence. As an organization encourages and supports the organizational climate of empathy and emotional intelligence, employees will be reinforced to consider the emotional needs of customers, which positively affects the overall customer service experience.

The concept of psychological safety is foundational to being a culturally supportive organization enacts. Employees in frontline positions have to feel safe enough to express their own emotions (within the etiquette of being professional) and to make decisions based on their empathetic connection to customers'

needs. This requires an organization to foster a powerful, encouraging, and learning environment where mistakes are treated as learning opportunities, and not a punishable offense. For example, suppose an employee bends a minor rule during service recovery when resolving a customer's issue (because they were using their emotional judgement to make the best call in an improvised incident). A culture that supports emotional awareness would honor the person's genuine intent and positive outcome of service recovery, rather than just blame the employee for failing to follow the procedure. This supports autonomy and motivates employees to use their emotional judgement to solve for custom solutions.

In addition, organizations also must acknowledge and strive to manage the emotional labor of the job. Constantly monitoring and modifying behavior is a key part of frontline roles, and it can be exhausting and leads to stress, fatigue, and deterioration of quality service. A supportive culture will provide resources that help employees manage this strain. For example, organizations could offer an employee a confidential counseling service, or provide designated area for employees to take stress break during shifts, or provide each employee with a peer support buddy to share feelings and stories, and coping strategies. When employees feel the organization is made aware of the emotional demand of the job and provides tangible support, it conveys that the organization cares about employees, which in turn makes employees care for their customers effectively.

Also, structured "Venting" Sessions: Formalize daily "overlap" or "ventilation" periods where teams can decompress, share successes, and process frustrations before going home. This prevents emotional residue from spilling into personal life. Psychological Safety via Leadership is a vital concept to consider. Managers should use Socratic questioning (e.g., "What would success look like here?") rather than giving direct commands. This builds autonomy and encourages employees to take ownership of their emotional responses.

Task Rotation can be leveraged as well to mitigate burnout by allowing employees to rotate away from highly demanding clients or tasks when they feel their emotional resources are depleted.

Finally, the organizational values, reward system, and internal messages must coexist to reinforce emotional awareness. For example, performance metrics should

include qualitative assessments of interactions, in addition to transactional metrics (number of calls, sales). A system that recognizes and rewards employees for using emotional intelligence, in the form of an "empathy champion" award, or in the highlight of success stories in a company newsletter reinforces what the organization values. A cultural reinforcement of the principles taught in the training will demonstrate to employees that they aren't just words, but actions in every customer interaction.

4.4. Leadership Modeling of Emotional Awareness
Without a doubt, leadership behavior is the single most impactful aspect to culture in an organization. Frontline employees look to always their direct supervisors and managers, and their senior leaders, for cues around what is important and how to behave. Therefore, for an organization to credibly and cohesively approach becoming an emotionally aware organization, it is fundamentally important for all leaders to model the competencies that are expected of their employees. This "leader by example" is critical to help implement emotional intelligence into the fabric of an organization.

Managers and supervisors of frontline teams play a special role. Their daily interactions with employees often set the emotional tone for the entire department. A manager who shows empathy, actively listens, and maintains calmness in the moment will provide intentional modeling for an entire team in real time. When employees feel understood and supported by their manager, they are likely to pass along that same empathy and support to customers. To the contrary, if a manager is dismissive, range, emotionally out of control, or unapproachable; they are undermining formal training approaches or creating a culture of fear and suppression of emotions. Therefore, leadership development is just as important as front employee training, and leadership development programs should be designed to build on the emotional competencies required to effectively lead service team.

Senior leadership also has a role to play in enabling emotional awareness from the highest levels of the organization. When senior executives, such as the CEO, openly discuss how a focus on empathy is important in business, share their own emotional struggles publicly, and emphasize decisions that prioritize customers for the long haul over making a few dollars today, they send the message that emotional intelligence is now a strategic value of the organization. Having a leader use the firm's resources to incorporate emotional skills as an organizational focal point provides legitimacy, and will make it easier for management to initiate a company-wide initiative. Underlying theories of emotional intelligence underscore the issue as a structural factor unique to the organization, and that message needs to come from leadership (Khalili, 2012).

Leadership is also responsible for making institutional policies and systems that support an emotionally aware workforce. They are not only responsible for openly supporting investment in recruiting tools and training programs, but also developing performance management systems that can potentially reward an empathetic way of work of the employee toward the organization and customer. Leadership creates psychologically safe environments which take the "fear" out of unlocking the emotional part of a workforce's behavior. Leadership needs to take down any policies that cause the employee undue stress, and/or hinder their ability to serve the customer. Ultimately, there is a role for leadership to play to not only support the social-emotional awareness of employees, but to actually "demonstrate" it, thereby creating a cascading effect throughout the organization that ultimately intersects with the customer.

V. DISCUSSION

This research has systematically examined the multifaceted influence of emotional awareness of frontline employees on the customer experience. Through a synthesis of existing research and exploration of the wheels at play, it has argued that emotional awareness is not just a desirable soft skill, but a foundational competence that shapes the service encounter and its resultant outcomes. The discussion will now move on to synthesizing the findings, outlining both theoretical and managerial contributions, and discussing the role of emotional awareness in an increasingly digital service context.

5.1. Synthesis of Findings
The key theme of this paper is that emotional awareness of frontline employees is an important precursor to a better customer experience. The analysis has shown that this influence operates through four key mechanisms: *emotional labor, emotional*

contagion, empathetic communication and adaptive service recovery.

Firstly, emotional awareness allows employees to cope with the challenges of emotional labor in a more effective fashion. Instead of relying on surface acting, which is readily recognized by customers to be inauthentic, employees who are emotionally aware can engage in deep acting and align felt emotions with the enacted behavior. This authenticity develops real relationships while decreasing negative customer behaviours that arise when emotional labor is detected (Gong, 2020). Positive service relationships, developed through this authenticity, will likely lessen the emotional labor required over time (Medler-Liraz, 2016).

Second, emotional contagion is a powerful, unconscious mechanism that exists throughout service encounters. For example, an emotionally aware employee will be more likely to display positive emotions, such as warmth and enthusiasm and thus, affect the moods of the customer experience, and subsequent evaluation of the service encounter (Delcourt, 2017).

Again, this is not a one-way street; awareness is important to read customer's emotional display to respond to them accordingly; customers often regulate their emotional behaviors as well, to positively redirect the exchange (Lee, 2020). An employee's awareness of their own mood is necessary to avoid negative emotional contagion, as well as appropriately interpret the customer-emotion exchange, particularly in high emotion exchanges (Zhan, 2016).

Third, empathetic communication, and building rapport between employees and customers, are positively related to emotional awareness. By accurately perceiving and understanding the customer's emotional state, employees can tailor their communication to genuinely express empathy. This empathy is a major step towards validating the customer's feeling, which is a major factor in the development of trust and rapport, and moves a service encounter from a transactional to a relational scenario. Finally, in the case of service failure, emotional awareness is essential to effective service recovery. Emotional awareness will help the employee look beyond the transactional service problem to address the emotional distress of the customer. Empathy in problem solving during failures will de-escalate the tension and restore trust and in some cases, strengthen

the customer's loyalty beyond the pre-service failure (Khoury, 2023). The emotional high of the encounter is a differentiating factor of service quality.

These four mechanisms highlight that emotional awareness is the cognitive and affective basis of high quality service engagement. It permits employees to be more authentic, positive, empathetic and adaptive, to create a full and improved customer experience.

5.2. Theoretical Contributions

This research offers contributions to both service management literature and organizational behavior literature in a number of ways. Most notably, the research provides a synthesis that intentionally connects the foundational construct of emotional awareness (a component of emotional intelligence) to the complex, multifaceted notion of customer experience. Much of the literature has investigated broader emotional intelligence, or specific emotional behaviors (e.g., emotional labor). This research focuses on emotional awareness and affirms it as a launchpad for further action; without the ability to accurately perceive your own emotions and that of others, any subsequent attempts at emotional regulation and management are likely irrelevant or ineffective.

Additionally, through this examination of the roles of emotional labor, emotional contagion, empathetic communication, and service recovery into an integrated framework, this paper allows for a deeper exploration of *how* employee awareness of their own emotions translates into customer emotional outcomes. It moves beyond a mere correlational relationship to elucidating potential causal mechanisms going on in the midst of a service encounter. This framework also offers a way to lessen the disconnect between two previously disparate research streams - the theories of emotions in the workplace and marketing theoretical perspectives on customer experience and relationship management.

Finally, this discussion also builds on these theoretical considerations to the new frontier of practice in areas of digital service encounters. By advancing the idea of emotional awareness in tech-mediated environments, this paper addresses a significant gap in service literature, but also raises new research questions on how digital empathy and emotional intelligence are demonstrated even when non-verbal cues are limited or absent. This future-driven consideration

acknowledges whether theories of emotional intelligence will still hold relevance during this time of digital transformation.

5.3. Managerial Contributions

The practical implications of this analysis for managers and organizations are practical and actionable. The findings suggest that improving the customer experience is not only about improving processes or scripts but is about ensuring the emotional intelligences of your workforce on the front-line.

First, the analysis implies that organizations should strategically consider emotional awareness as part of their human resource management practices. Human resource managers should use behavioral interviews and psychometric assessments (i.e., in-basket assignments) to identify candidates that have a natural disposition toward self-awareness and empathy while going through the recruitment and selection processes making a shift to hire for attributes (emotional intelligence) that are foundational to the success of an employee in a service facing role instead of hiring based on technical skills alone.

Second, the findings point to the importance of training and development. Organizations should be willing to devote time and money to training and develop programs designed to increase emotional education (emotional intelligence). Those training programs can go beyond simply teaching customer service scripts, to including modules on mindfulness, active listening, perspective taking, and emotional regulation techniques. While much of the findings show self-awareness of employees can lead to sustainable improvements in behaviors on the job after completion of emotional intelligence training (Thory, 2016), it appears that learners can apply their learnings from emotional intelligence training to their organizational context.

Third, fostering a supportive and encouraging organizational culture is an important aspect of the framework. Fostering a culture of psychological safety, encourages open communication about emotional challenges that employees may encounter, as well as legitimizes the process of emotional labor can reduce employee stress and burnout. When employees feel believed in and supported, they a better place to spend emotional energy and exert empathy towards their customers.

Finally, all of these contributions are dependent on the belief and role of the leader. Leaders communication, modeling, and emotional awareness in their own interactions, and provide empathy for their team, while making emotional intelligence a priority provides emotional tone for the organization. Leaders legitimize and organization emotional skills, therefore creating an environment where such skills will flourish.

5.4. Telecommunication: Emotional awareness in tech-assisted encounters

Another thing this paper raises is the role emotional awareness will take in further digital transformation of customer service contact. The digital transformation of customer service contacts and use of digital channels (i.e., chat, email, video calls) compared to face-to-face encounter changes the entire framework of emotional expression, and how employees feel and perceive emotions. Just as this paper considered emotional awareness in marketing as a new venture at the intersection with service literature, it will be important to re-conceptualize emotional awareness in our digital age - perhaps referred to as digital empathy.

In text exchanges, the absence of non-verbal cues (tone of voice, facial expressions, etc.) necessitate that employees have increased sense-making ability over the semantics (i.e., word choice, use of punctuation, response latency) eliciting the customers emotional state. The challenge with video questioning is that while visual cues are always present in the interactions, the distance created from tech-mediated contact still require an emotional intelligent approach to create the same connection remotely and digitally (Rajpurohit, 2025)(Subramani, 2025). The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) certainly complicates the picture. AI tools can identify sentiment in customer text and provide employees with real-time emotional information about the customer. AI tools cannot replace real human emotional awareness. The effectiveness of AI tools will rely on how well employees use technology that may augment their ability to develop an emotional connection to the customer. Many organizations are beginning to use emotional intelligence in collaboration at the IT level and on online care with customers, and the need will extend to the employees who combine digital skills and emotional intelligence (Tritami, 2025)(Lalitha, 2025).

Emotional intelligence is important in increasing engagement in the digital structured environment (Sharma, 2025). Organizations that move into this space will recognize that while technology can support and improve work process, the emotional awareness of a human connection is the main contributor to customer loyalty and experience. Need for emotional intelligence is growing for digital and remote workers and will be a major factor for organizational adaptability and success in the customer service domain (Launer, 2025) (Chundru, 2025) (Mishra, 2025).

VI. CONCLUSION

The quality of customer experience is highly valued as the defining competitive advantage in the current economy. The lack of human service differentiation in the world we live in today argues that at the nucleus of excellent service is the emotional awareness of the front-line employee. While the customer experience models of "good service" may appear visible, this discourse has correspondingly fragmented and unraveled the processes and behaviors that exist to know and manage, to perceive and understand emotions and how it is further shaped and supported through a customer's perception, satisfaction and commitment behavior.

The outcome of this research determined that emotional awareness is not an independent skill, nor is it an isolated foundation skill, but rather the glue that binds the emulative processes that represent many behaviors required for good service. It allows an employee to perform emotional labor, share positive emotional contagion, demonstrate authentic empathetic communication, and ultimately react and recover in a human-centered service recovery. These processes present a clear finding that employees have developed their competency in fine-tuning service responses to a transactional customer, but to meeting the human need to be heard, understood and valued.

The expected theoretical contribution from this research is that, while the premise is basic emotional awareness, so-called soft skill, the next level contribution is the integration of the process framework with dimensions of customer experience. The managerial implications are straight forward - a customer centric organization takes time and strategy toward hiring, training, and supporting an emotionally competent workforce. This means embedding emotional awareness into the employee cycle, requiring an emotional awareness strategic focus from recruitment through leader development and imbuing the organizational culture to value empathy as a core organizational premise.

As we enter the era of service mediums increasingly driven by technology, the principles of emotional awareness remain imperative. The future of this challenge will be if we can continue to anchor emotional understanding, with the newly developed term of "digital empathy" and use technology to not take away the emotional connection, but rather support and fulfil the uniquely human capability to understand other's emotions, gain emotional knowledge and build understanding. In conclusion, processes can be copied and products can be replicated but the fallacy of emotionally aware employees who care is a truly unique, powerful and sustainable value to selfish customer and organization.

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