



# Research on the Emotional Labor Mechanism of Ski Instructors

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**Abstract.** The objective of this research is to investigate the emotional labor operational pattern of commercial ski instructors in their daily work. To achieve this, approaches such as field investigations, structured interviews, and participatory observations were adopted. Specifically, interviews were carried out with 13 ski coaches from two ski resorts in Jiangxi Province and Heilongjiang Province, China. After the collection and analysis of data, it was discovered that the emotional labor of skiing coaches encompasses three components: (a) emotional regulations, (b) emotional grooming tactics, and (c) emotional consequences. Based on these findings, this paper establishes an operational model for the emotional labor of ski coaches and discusses the emotional training and salary compensation of ski coaches in combination with the actual situation in China.

**Keywords:** Emotions; psychology; Emotional labor; Ski coach; Emotional Labor Model.

## 1 Introduction

Since the hosting of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, the enthusiasm for skiing among the Chinese people has been continuously rising, and the number of commercial skiing coaches has also increased accordingly. Commercial ski instructors not only need to impart skiing skills but also have to manage interpersonal relationships to enable tourists to feel delighted and truly enjoy skiing<sup>[1]</sup>. Hence, there might be some emotional labor involved in their work. Emotional labor is a third form of labor distinct from "physical" and "mental" labor and has been a crucial topic of discussion in the domain of sports in recent year. In reality, with the advent of the post-industrial era, interpersonal communication in the workplace is escalating day by day, and the theoretical and practical significance of emotional labor research in sports studies will merely become increasingly prominent. Currently, the sports academic community has recognized this and carried out a considerable amount of research, including on provincial team coaches, White-Water Rafting Guides, Athletes, Physical Education Teachers. However, thus far, there has been no investigation on emotional labor within the professional context of skiing instructors.

## 2 Methods

### 2.1 Participants

This study employs a qualitative research method in order to gain explanatory insight into the behavior and meaning of the research subject through direct interaction between the researcher and the subjects. Thirteen ski coaches from two commercial ski resorts in Heilongjiang and Jiangxi provinces were chosen as participants for this study. The basic information of the research subjects is as follows:

### 2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers conducted field investigations at Maoershan Ski Resort in December 2023 and March 2024, as well as at Qixingling Ski Resort in February 2024. Data collection would end once new insights ceased to emerge and theoretical saturation was reached. Each one-on-one interview lasted an average of 57 minutes and was conducted either in person (n=11) with an average duration of 58 minutes or online via WeChat voice call (n=2) with an average duration of 51 minutes. All interviews were recorded and handwritten notes were taken for reference purposes. Following the transcription and organization of the interview recordings, a total of approximately 416 pages and 142501 words of interview text were compiled. Subsequently, the interview text was inputted into NVIVO 11 software, with each research subject's text data being assigned a date number for male and female (F/M) participants. Finally, these three themes were interconnected to form an operational model of emotional labor for skiing instructors.

## 3 Results

This section focuses on three themes of emotional labor for skiing instructors: (a) emotional rules, (b) emotional regulation strategies, and (c) emotional outcomes. In short, these three parts form a whole and together constitute the emotional labor of skiing instructors.

### 3.1 Emotional Rules for Ski Coaches

The specific emotional rules for skiing instructors and their origins were examined in this study. It was found that there are emotional regulations governing ski resort policies, self-imposed requirements, and customer expectations.

**Snow Resort Regulations.** All possessing specific regulatory characteristics. These guidelines outline the expected conduct of skiing instructors, along with corresponding measures for rewards and mechanisms for punishment to influence their behavior. In essence, these rules mandate ski instructors to engage in emotional labor in order to support principals and ski resorts in generating profits. The verbal rules of the 'skiing principal'. Through conducting field research, the author discovered that the head of the

skiing program holds a daily meeting at 8:00 am to emphasize the importance of emotional regulations:

The principal will emphasize to us that the service should be good, which means that you should be friendly to customers. First, you should smile, and then you should say respectful words such as 'hello'. You cannot shout at customers during the service process. If there are complaints, they will be dealt with strictly. In addition, if we have such a negative impact on the Tiktok evaluation, we will be punished, and if there is a positive comment, we will also be rewarded.(20240227—4M)

Our work manual has established service standards, such as welcoming a tourist with a smile at the entrance of the ski resort, guiding them to fetch boards, and finally kneeling down to help them put on shoes, to ensure their satisfaction with our service. (20240227—05F)

In conclusion, the emotional regulations within an organization are obligatory, with the primary objective of involving ski instructors in emotional labor to enhance customer satisfaction and increase profits for the organization.

**Self Demand.** In addition to the aforementioned mandatory emotional rules, there are also self-imposed emotional regulations. This is primarily attributed to their strong identification with the role of skiing instructors, which naturally leads them to adhere to emotional guidelines and partake in emotional labor. For example:

I think the job of this coach mainly manifests in a sense of responsibility, which comes from the individual and requires 100% passion in teaching. Every coach should have a sense of responsibility. (20240227-05F) I am a coach, and even if the client is stupid, they cannot show impatience or anger because this is your personal emotion and cannot be brought into teaching work. (20240205—01M)

In summary, these self-imposed emotional regulations also partially govern the emotional expression of skiing instructors. However, they engage in spontaneous emotional labor rather than being compelled to do so.

**Customer Expectations.** The high social expectations placed on skiing instructors by customers result in a significant amount of emotional labor. In interviews, several coaches expressed that clients have multiple expectations for ski coaches, including the desire for them to ensure safety, provide expert instruction in skiing techniques, and offer patient service. Due to their concern for children, professional ethics, and the need to meet parents' expectations and demands, ski instructors are required to dedicate additional time and energy towards nurturing and caring for children during their teaching practices.

Most beginners hope that you can protect their safety and teach them some skiing knowledge and techniques. I have encountered two situations this year, such as when normal parents take care of their children and tourists specifically choose female coaches. He believes that female coaches are gentler, more responsible, more tolerant of children, and more patient in teaching them. (20240229—10M)

### 3.2 Emotional Management for Skiing Coaches

Field research has revealed that emotional embellishment strategies commonly employed by skiing coaches in a professional context include surface acting to comply with relevant regulations, deep acting to explore underlying reasons, and genuine expression that aligns with public expectations.

**Surface Acting: Comply with Relevant Regulations.** Surface acting refers to the phenomenon in which ski coaches conceal their true emotions and instead display the emotions required by emotional rules, even when their inner feelings are inconsistent with external demands. This situation often arises when ski instructors are not being respected. Overall, surface acting is a common occurrence within the ski coaching profession:

If you encounter someone who doesn't respect you and to be honest, you can't bring up your emotions at all, then there's nothing you can do. You have to serve them well, be a bit thick skinned, even if your emotions are not so high and your smile is forced out. (20240228—07M)

There are customers sliding quickly on the slope, and I feel scared in my heart, but I can't show it. Isn't it nervous if I'm afraid of the customers? (20240229—10M)

In general, ski instructors will adhere to relevant regulations in order to maintain a professional demeanor, even when faced with disrespect or fear from clients. They strive to remain authentic and true to their emotions while on the job.

**Deep Play: Searching for Explanatory Paths.** Deep acting refers to the efforts of ski coaches to manage their inner emotions when they do not align with the external demands, in order to make their emotional labor appear more authentic. During this process, ski instructors will seek explanatory paths to help themselves regulate their inner emotions. For example, they may temporarily adopt a different identity in order to improve how they feel, such as defining themselves as a "waiter" rather than a "coach":

At that time, it was almost time to finish work, and more than ten people came, looking for many coaches. Then there was a gay man who might have just finished drinking and was pointing at me, asking me to help him put on shoes, even giving orders to help me put them on. I didn't have any temper throughout the whole process, I just kept my respectful attitude and helped him put on shoes. What was that for. Because after all, they have paid money and I am just a waiter. If you have negative emotions, you need to be able to control them yourself. (20240207—06M)

**Sincere Expression: Emotions are Suitable for the Situation.** Sincere expression in the context of skiing instruction refers to instructors spontaneously and easily revealing emotions that align with public expectations and requirements. This is a common emotional grooming strategy employed by skiing instructors in their teaching practices. For instance, when instructing beginners, skiing instructors genuinely experience feelings of happiness:

At the end of the class, a primary school student learned to ski, and I was genuinely happy for him. He also learned, and I was happy for him. (20240228-07M) The teaching process is so good. When I teach someone, they start from being completely afraid to ski and standing on the slope without moving, and then they can control their speed to slide from the back. During the process, they are happy, and I will be happy too. I enjoy the process of teaching people the most. (20240226—03M)

After successfully teaching skilled players advanced skiing techniques, the ski instructor and the skilled players will both enter a state of excitement:

For example, if you want to teach him Online360, if he really learns this action, both you and he will be very excited. Because he has practiced, he will share this joy with you. As you see him practice, you will gain a sense of identity. Skiing makes you excited too, you know, you're excited too, he's excited too, just the tourist and the coach are both excited. (20240205—01M)

In general, ski coaches can naturally express their genuine emotions when they meet the expectations of the public, without the need to "show off" or "alter their inner feelings".

### 3.3 Emotional Results of Skiing Instructors

The outcomes of emotional labor are typically categorized into negative and positive. However, studies on ski coaches have indicated that emotional labor only yields two positive results: enhancing teaching efficiency and boosting organizational performance. Skiing instructors actively engage in emotional labor, which can strengthen their rapport with students and improve teaching effectiveness. This is commonly demonstrated through:

If you invest emotions in the conversation, the learners will be more likely to accept what you say or tell them how to do it. (20240301—M11)

And employing this method of increasing distance also contributes to the enhancement of the success rate in selling ski lessons, thereby improving organizational performance:

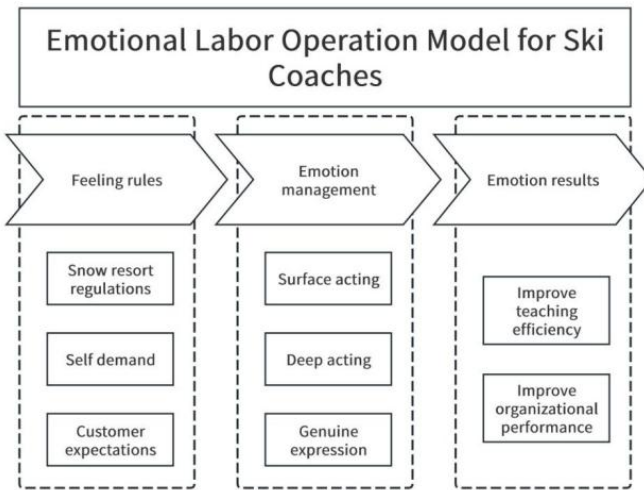
The way to attract more customers is to first bring the two people closer together, and then you must give your emotions. Only after you bring them closer together can your success rate in leading increase. If you invest more emotionally, your customer acquisition rate will definitely be higher. If your service attitude is particularly good during the service process, then your customer rate will be better. For example, sometimes I wear shoes and socks for him, and your service attitude is particularly good. (20240228—07M)

In conclusion, the emotional labor performed by skiing instructors has the potential to enhance teaching effectiveness and overall organizational performance.

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 Operating Model of Emotional Labor for Ski Coaches

The emotional labor of skiing instructors in their daily work is comprised of three themes: (a) emotional rules, (b) emotional grooming strategies, and (c) emotional outcomes. This study focuses on the unique emotional labor experienced by professional ski coaches, and as of now, no research has been conducted on this topic. The findings have both theoretical and practical significance for the growing group of ski coaches.



**Fig. 1.** Operating Model of Emotional Labor for Ski Coaches  
(Self-made by the author)

Firstly, the first part of this article explores the emotional regulations that ski instructors are subject to. These regulations include the triple rules of ski resort regulations, self demands, and customer expectations, all of which contribute to the theoretical engagement in emotional labor by ski instructors. Ski resort regulations represent mandatory emotional rules with associated reward and punishment measures, aligning with previous research findings<sup>[2]</sup>. Self demand represents a non-mandatory emotional rule, stemming from one's identification with the role of a ski coach and feeling obligated to invest emotions and maintain patience in teaching, similar to research on physical education teachers. Customer expectations serve as implicit emotional rules, as customers anticipate ski coaches to fulfill roles such as safe protectors, skillful instructors, and patient service providers<sup>[5]</sup>. The multitude of expectations places significant strain on the emotions of ski coaches. This study is innovative in its discovery of the diverse public expectations placed upon coaches in practice.

Secondly, the second part of this article delves into emotional grooming strategies. Skiing instructors, in accordance with emotional regulations, employ three distinct

methods of emotional labor: surface performances that adhere to relevant rules, deep role-playing that seeks explanatory paths, and genuine expression of emotions appropriate to the situation. When coaches are not respected by tourists or encounter risks, they follow the corresponding rules to perform surface acting without altering their true emotions, which is consistent with previous research<sup>[3]</sup>. Finally, the third section of this article identifies two positive outcomes: emotional labor can enhance teaching efficiency and organizational performance. By bridging the gap between individuals' emotions, emotional labor contributes to improved teaching and customer service, ultimately leading to enhanced organizational performance, which aligns with previous research<sup>[4]</sup>.

In conclusion, this article is grounded in the professional context of skiing coaches and incorporates research on emotional regulations, strategies for managing emotions, and emotional outcomes to develop a model for emotional labor operations among skiing coaches, as depicted in Figure 1. This framework validates the substantial amount of emotional labor involved in the work of skiing instructors and has been theoretically conceptualized. Importantly, this framework can offer valuable insights for the practical application of emotional labor by skiing coaches.

## 4.2 Practical Application

Based on the emotional labor operation framework of skiing coaches and combined with the actual situation of Chinese skiing coaches, corresponding inspirations for emotional labor practice are proposed. Firstly, ski coaches can receive emotional professional training to enhance the quality of their training. Many Chinese ski coaches still lack an understanding of how to effectively utilize emotional labor. Utilizing emotional labor can improve teaching effectiveness and organizational performance, so providing emotional training can help Chinese ski coaches learn the skills necessary for using emotional labor. Secondly, ski resort managers should consider increasing the salaries of ski instructors.

## 5 Conclusion

In the realm of theoretical exploration, I have systematically dissected the intrinsic mechanisms of emotional labor among ski instructors through meticulous fieldwork research, creatively distilling three core elements: the emotional rules of emotional labor, the dynamic process of emotional labor, and the spillover effects of emotional labor. This theoretical contribution not only fills the gap in existing literature by presenting a comprehensive framework specific to ski instructors' emotional labor but also constructs an integrated conceptual framework encompassing antecedents, processes, and consequences, standing out for its uniqueness and innovativeness within the academic community.

Specifically, the emotional rules proposed in this study delve into the normative and strategic expressions of emotions that ski instructors ought to adhere to in their professional practices, revealing how they adapt their emotions to align with professional

expectations across diverse contexts. The emotional labor process, meanwhile, elaborates on a series of dynamic transformations from emotional perception to regulation and finally to expression, showcasing the intricate complexity and dynamism inherent in emotional labor. Additionally, the spillover effects of emotional labor delve into its profound implications on instructors' personal psychological states, job satisfaction, and the overall organizational performance, underscoring the multidimensional consequences of emotional labor.

The construction of this conceptual framework not only fortifies the theoretical foundation for understanding the essence and operational mechanisms of ski instructors' emotional labor but also offers invaluable guidance for practical applications. It empowers ski instructors to optimize their emotional labor strategies, enhancing the emotional dimension of service quality, thereby boosting customer satisfaction, loyalty, and personal career advancement. Furthermore, for ski training institutions, this framework serves as a pivotal reference for enhancing organizational effectiveness, fostering a harmonious work environment, and ultimately facilitating the achievement of sustainable development goals. Thus, this research manifests significant value and implications at both theoretical and practical levels.

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