

**Emotion Regulation as Upward Influence: A Multilevel Model of Supervisor-Directed  
Surface and Deep Acting**

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**Supervisor-Directed Emotional Labor as Upward Influence:  
An Emotions-as-Social-Information Perspective**

Abstract

To access organizational resources, subordinates often strive to influence supervisors' impressions. Moreover, subordinates' interactions with supervisors are known to be ripe with emotions. Nevertheless, research on upward impression management has rarely examined how subordinates' emotion regulation in supervisor interactions may shape their tangible outcomes. The present study introduces subordinates' emotional labor toward supervisors as a novel means of upward influence. Building on the emotions-as-social-information model, we propose that supervisor-directed emotional labor indirectly relates with supervisory reward recommendations by shaping supervisors' liking and perceived competence of subordinates. Moreover, we cast supervisors' epistemic motivation as a boundary condition for these indirect relations. We tested these notions using time-lagged data from 377 subordinates and 91 supervisors. When supervisors' epistemic motivation was higher (but not lower), (1) supervisor-directed surface acting related negatively with supervisors' liking and perceived competence of subordinates and (2) supervisor-directed deep acting related positively with supervisors' liking of subordinates. Liking and perceived competence, in turn, related positively with supervisors' willingness to recommend subordinates for organizational rewards. These findings highlight supervisor-directed emotional labor as an upward impression management strategy with both beneficial (deep acting) and detrimental (surface acting) implications, and they illustrate important mechanisms and a key contingency factor for these consequences.

*Keywords:* emotional labor, deep acting, surface acting, impression management, upward influence

Formal supervisors critically shape their subordinates' rewards, benefits, and career outcomes (Allen & Rush, 1998). Hence, the literature on upward impression management has shown that subordinates employ an array of tactics to appear as more likable and competent to their supervisors and, thus, to gain access to key organizational resources (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Wayne & Liden, 1995). Such behaviors include self-promotion (i.e., highlighting one's accomplishments), ingratiation (i.e., doing favors or giving flattery), and exemplification (i.e., depicting one's actions as exemplary; Turnley & Bolino, 2001).

Beyond such traditionally examined tactics, however, subordinates may also use more subtle means of self-regulation as vehicles of upward impression management in their everyday interactions with supervisors (Thoits, 1996). We argue that subordinates' emotion regulation is particularly important in this regard. In fact, it is well-known that individuals strategically use emotion displays to impact relevant others, such that emotions are "expressed *intentionally* to produce the desired appraisal" (Gibson & Schroeder, 2002, p. 197; see also Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Moreover, prior research has shown that supervisor-subordinate encounters are ripe with emotions, and processes of emotion regulation may therefore be particularly relevant in such interactions (e.g., Gooty, Connelly, Griffith, & Gupta, 2010; Humphrey, 2002). Scholars have argued, accordingly, that both supervisors and subordinates hold specific expectations and norms for how subordinates should act towards supervisors (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, West, Patera, & McGregor, 2010)—and these norms entail subordinates' expressions of appropriate emotionality as a key element (Sy, 2010; Xu, Liu, & Guo, 2014). On this basis, systematic consideration of subordinates' deliberate emotion regulation in supervisor interactions (i.e., supervisor-directed emotional labor) seems crucial to adequately understand how subordinates may influence their supervisors to attain desired outcomes.

Nevertheless, the upward impression management literature has not incorporated subordinates' emotion regulation toward their supervisors to date, and research on emotional labor has only started to touch upon this issue (Hu & Shi, 2015; Xu et al., 2014). We therefore believe further research is needed to complement our knowledge, illustrating supervisor-directed emotional labor as a common means of upward influence that may shape relevant outcomes for subordinates, above-and-beyond other, traditionally examined tactics. More specifically, such research may advance theory on upward impression management by highlighting (a) *how* subordinates regulate their emotion expressions toward supervisors, (b) *why* such emotion regulation may promote (or hinder) subordinates' access to tangible organizational resources, and (c) *when* such emotion regulation is particularly relevant as an instrument of upward influence.

We draw from the "emotions as social information" model (EASI; Van Kleef, 2009, 2014) and its extensions toward emotion regulation (Côté, Van Kleef, & Sy, 2013) to address these issues. This conceptual perspective integratively depicts important psychological processes and contingency factors underlying observers' behavioral reactions toward others' (regulated) emotion displays. First, the EASI model suggests that an actor's emotion expressions shape observers' reactions via two distinct pathways (Côté et al., 2013; Van Kleef, 2009, 2014), namely (a) through observers' affective responses (including both general emotions [e.g., positive or negative affect] and interpersonal emotions directed toward the actor [e.g., liking]) and (b) through observers' task-related inferences (e.g., about an actor's competences). And second, the EASI model stipulates that an observer's information processing style may shape the strength of these pathways, altering both observers' attentiveness toward others' emotion displays and the depth of the associated conclusions (Van Kleef, 2009, 2014).

As shown in Figure 1, we therefore propose a dual-pathway contingency framework to explicate the linkage between subordinates' emotional labor in supervisor interactions and an important outcome under direct supervisory control (i.e., reward recommendations; defined as a supervisor's willingness to suggest a subordinate for organizational rewards, bonuses, or benefits; Allen & Rush, 1998). This framework casts a supervisor's liking and perceived competence of a focal subordinate as key psychological mechanisms, and it postulates a supervisor's epistemic motivation (i.e., a personality trait that indicates the extent to which individuals process information with the "desire to develop and maintain a rich and accurate understanding of situations"; Van Kleef et al., 2009, p. 564) as a critical contingency factor. Moreover, it incorporates the common distinction between surface acting and deep acting as separate emotional labor strategies. Building on prior research (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998), we conceptualize supervisor-directed surface acting as a form of response-focused emotion regulation, with subordinates faking appropriate emotion displays when interacting with their supervisor. By contrast, supervisor-directed deep acting represents a form of antecedent-focused emotion regulation, with subordinates altering their actual feelings to display desired emotions toward the supervisor.<sup>1</sup>

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By empirically examining this model, our study addresses scholars' calls for a more comprehensive perspective on upward impression management (Bolino, Kacmar, Turnley, & Gilstrap, 2008), complementing the tactics traditionally considered in this line of inquiry with

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<sup>1</sup> Specifically, surface acting and deep acting represent intrapersonal approaches toward emotion regulation that build on behavioral strategies such as expressive amplification for surface acting and reappraisal for deep acting (Brotheridge & Lee, 1998; Grandey, 2000). Scholars have conceptualized the display of naturally felt emotions as an additional form of emotional labor (Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005). Importantly, however, this type of emotional labor does not contain the element of deliberateness that characterizes surface acting and deep acting, as it reflects the spontaneous, relatively effortless expression of genuine emotionality (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Hence, our theorizing focuses on surface acting and deep acting as more deliberate and strategic vehicles of upward impression management that are employed in an explicit effort to display situationally appropriate emotions. Nevertheless, we considered subordinates' expression of naturally felt emotions in our empirical analyses and included this form of emotional labor as a control variable.

new and important types of influence behavior that may commonly characterize supervisor-subordinate interactions. In doing so, we also contribute to recent efforts toward a broader conceptualization of emotional labor (Grandey & Melloy, 2017). Beyond typical customer service encounters, we demonstrate that hierarchical interactions inside the organization are a salient context for emotional labor processes that deserves greater scholarly attention. Finally, our examination of psychological mechanisms and a key boundary condition opens the black box of emotional labor's consequences (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015), promoting our theoretical understanding of how such behavior may serve as a means of upward influence to shape the tangible outcomes that subordinates receive from their supervisors.

### **Theory and Hypotheses Development**

#### **Background: A Dual-Pathway Contingency Model of Emotional Labor's Consequences**

Researchers have long recognized that emotions do not just affect the individuals who feel them, but also those who observe these emotions in social interactions (Frijda, 1986). As outlined before, the EASI model has specified this notion to posit key psychological mechanisms in this regard, as related to an observer's (direct and interpersonal) affective reactions as well as task-related inferences (Van Kleef, 2009). Empirical research has repeatedly documented the relevance of these distinct pathways in explicating observers' subsequent behavioral responses (Van Kleef, Homan, Beersma, & van Knippenberg, 2010; Wang et al., 2017).

It is important to note, however, that an actor's displayed emotions may not necessarily reflect his or her initial, spontaneous feelings (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Rather, individuals may engage in deliberate emotion regulation efforts to emphasize appropriate emotion expressions in a specific social situation and, thus, to attain favorable outcomes even if their spontaneous feelings did not match situational requirements and expectations (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Gross, 1998). The literature on emotional labor in the

workplace has depicted surface acting and deep acting as particularly relevant strategies in this regard (Diefendorff et al., 2005). Accordingly, recent theorizing has extended the EASI model to account for these emotional labor strategies, arguing that surface acting and deep acting “may have different social consequences because of the differences in the authenticity of the displays they generate” (Côté et al., 2013, p. 84; see also Côté & Hideg, 2011; Van Kleef, 2010). In fact, research has shown that interaction partners (a) perceive others’ affective displays as more authentic to the extent such displays are consistent with an actor’s internal experiences and (b) react more positively, in general, toward authentic rather than inauthentic emotion expressions (Coté, 2005; Grandey, 2003). Moreover, experimental studies have illustrated surface acting and deep acting as prototypical forms of inauthentic and authentic emotion expression, respectively, with surface acting creating discrepancies between an actor’s felt and displayed emotions and deep acting avoiding such discrepancies (Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul, & Gremler, 2006; Wang et al., 2017). On this basis, it is plausible that these emotional labor strategies may distinctly color an observer’s affective reactions and task-relevant inferences and, thus, may shape the observer’s resulting behaviors (Côté et al., 2013).

Beyond explicating the consequences of an actor’s (regulated) emotion expressions, the EASI model posits that the strength of an observer’s reactions is contingent on his or her epistemic motivation (van Kleef, 2014; Van Kleef et al., 2009). Individuals with high epistemic motivation strive to clearly and comprehensively understand social situations (Kruglanski, 1989). Hence, these individuals pay close attention to others’ emotional expressions, deeply process the associated information, and carefully discern the nature and authenticity of the respective displays (Van Kleef, Van Doorn, Heerdink, & Koning, 2011). In contrast, observers are generally “less affected by their interaction partners’ emotional displays if they have little motivation to interpret the meaning of those displays” (Côté &

Hideg, 2011, p. 62). Hence, it seems likely that individuals with higher (rather than lower) epistemic motivation are more reactive toward interaction partners' regulated emotionality (Côté et al., 2013).

We believe these considerations are directly applicable toward subordinates' emotional labor in their interactions with supervisors. Specifically, research has shown that displays of positive emotionality (e.g., enthusiasm, happiness, and excitement) are highly prototypical for subordinates in hierarchical relations and, thus, are typically seen as desirable in subordinate-supervisor interactions (Sy, 2010; Whiteley, Sy, & Johnson, 2012). Moreover, individuals' impression management efforts are generally aimed at creating a favorable image among salient others by emphasizing situation-appropriate traits and behaviors in a given context (Bolino et al., 2008; Johnston & Swanson, 2006). As such, subordinates using supervisor-directed emotional labor as an instrument of upward impression management are likely to emphasize positive emotion expressions toward their supervisor.<sup>2</sup>

Consistent with the previous theorizing, we expect that a subordinate's choice of emotional labor strategies to display such positive emotionality (viz., surface acting vs. deep acting) will distinctly influence a supervisor's behavioral responses through two distinct pathways (Côté et al., 2013; Van Kleef, 2009). Regarding the first, affective pathway, we focus on a supervisor's liking of a subordinate as a key exemplar of the interpersonal, socio-emotional reactions discussed in the EASI model (Van Kleef, 2009). Regarding the second pathway, related to supervisors' task-related inferences, we focus on supervisors' competence perceptions as a particularly important factor in drawing conclusions about a subordinate's task-related functioning and performance potentials (Van Kleef, 2010). Notably, these

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<sup>2</sup> Beyond emphasizing positive emotions, supervisor-directed emotional labor may also entail the suppression of negative emotionality (Hu & Shi, 2015). We focus on subordinates' up-regulation of positive emotion displays in the following, because such efforts may be more readily visible than the down-regulation of negative expressions and, thus, may be more likely to shape observers' impressions and subsequent behavior (Van Kleef, 2009, 2010). We will return to this issue, however, in the Discussion section.

mediating pathways align with the literature on upward impression management, which has shown that subordinates deliberately aim to shape their supervisor's perceptions of likability and competence (Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995). Finally, we build on the EASI model to propose that a supervisor's epistemic motivation will shape the strength of both of these pathways (Côté et al., 2013; Van Kleef, 2009) .

### **Supervisor-directed Emotional Labor and Liking**

When drawing on surface acting, employees fake emotions that are not genuinely felt, with potentially negative consequences for their interpersonal interactions (Côté et al., 2013; Hülshager & Schewe, 2011). Subordinates using this emotional labor strategy toward their supervisor may, for example, pretend to be more enthusiastic about an organizational change initiative than they actually are. Research has shown that individuals can generally recognize such incongruence between others' felt and displayed emotions (Collishaw, Dyer, & Boies, 2008; Frank, Ekman, & Friesen, 1993) and perceive such emotional expressions as inauthentic (Groth, Hennig-Thurau, & Walsh, 2009; Wang & Groth, 2014). For instance, even untrained observers can reliably distinguish between others' authentic vs. inauthentic smiles (Frank et al., 1993). Moreover, scholars have argued that individuals may view others' surface acting as calculating and manipulative, interpreting such behavior as "dishonesty and deceit" (Hülshager, Lang, & Maier, 2010, p. 509). Consistent with this notion, Côté et al. (2013, p. 86) have suggested that inauthentic emotion expressions "may produce a distinct set of affective reactions that is characterized by dislike and frustration," and empirical research has shown surface acting to diminish others' perceptions of a focal employee as friendly, warm, and courteous (Grandey, 2003). On this basis, it seems reasonable to expect that supervisor-directed surface acting will negatively relate with a supervisor's liking toward the respective subordinate.

When using deep acting, by contrast, individuals consciously modify their internal feelings to actually experience (and subsequently express) situationally appropriate emotions, with potentially favorable consequences for their interpersonal interactions (Grandey, 2000; Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005). For example, a subordinate may attempt to view an organizational change initiative from the perspective of the organization as a whole, thus creating more positive feelings and associated expressions when interacting with his or her supervisor. Because experienced and displayed emotions are consistent in this situation, observers are likely to interpret the emotions expressed through such deep acting as sincere and authentic (Grandey et al., 2005; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). In fact, research has shown that observers often react similarly toward an individual's unregulated emotion expressions and emotion expressions regulated through deep acting (Hülshager, Lang, Schewe, & Zijlstra, 2015). When emphasizing positive emotional displays through deep acting, individuals may therefore appear as more honest, friendly, and likable (Côté, 2005; Grandey et al., 2005). Directly extrapolating from these arguments and findings, one could anticipate supervisor-directed deep acting to positively associate with a supervisor's liking of a subordinate.

Together, this reasoning suggests that supervisor-directed surface acting may negatively and supervisor-directed deep acting positively relate with supervisors' liking. As noted earlier, however, we draw from the EASI model (Côté & Hideg, 2011; Côté et al., 2013) to further suggest that a supervisor's epistemic motivation is a crucial moderating factor in this regard.

### **Epistemic motivation as moderator of the emotional labor–liking linkage.**

Depending on their epistemic motivation, individuals' approach toward social information processing may differ markedly (Kruglanski, 1989). As noted before, individuals with relatively low epistemic motivation are less attentive to diagnostic information in their social

environment and tend to process such information in a rather shallow and unsystematic manner (Kruglanski & Maysel, 1988). Moreover, research has shown that observers' ability to discriminate between genuine and faked emotion displays hinges on their attention to others' expressive features (Del Giudice & Colle, 2007) and on the extent to which observers systematically encode others' verbal and nonverbal cues (Scherer & Ceschi, 2000). On this basis, supervisors with lower epistemic motivation are more likely to miss the subtle cues that point toward inauthenticity in a subordinate's positive emotion displays, as regulated through surface acting and, thus, these supervisors may not interpret such emotion expressions as insincere and manipulative. Hence, these supervisors' liking of the respective subordinate is less likely to suffer. Similarly, we anticipate that supervisors with relatively low epistemic motivation may fail to appreciate the authenticity conveyed by subordinates' deep acting and to connect the resulting, genuine positive emotion displays with a subordinate's favorable interpersonal qualities (e.g., warmth and trustworthiness). Therefore, we expect a supervisor's lower epistemic motivation to dampen the potentially beneficial consequences of supervisor-directed deep acting for liking.

By contrast, individuals with higher epistemic motivation pay closer attention to social information and consider such information in greater depth (Kruglanski, 1989; Kruglanski & Maysel, 1988). Hence, we anticipate that supervisors with higher levels of this personality trait will more readily recognize the inauthenticity inherent in a subordinate's surface acting and interpret such displays as signaling insincerity and dishonesty. By consequence, we expect a pronounced negative association between supervisor-directed surface acting and liking in this situation. By the same token, supervisors with relatively high epistemic motivation may recognize and appreciate the authentic positive emotions displayed through supervisor-directed deep acting, with beneficial consequences for their liking. Therefore, we propose the following moderation hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1: A supervisor's epistemic motivation strengthens both the negative relationship between supervisor-directed surface acting and the supervisor's liking of a subordinate (H1a) and the positive relationship between supervisor-directed deep acting and the supervisor's liking of a subordinate (H1b).*

### **Supervisor-directed Emotional Labor and Perceived Competence**

Beyond their potential role for interpersonal liking, (regulated) emotion expressions contain diagnostic information that may lead observers to draw inferences about an individual's task-related functioning (Sy, Côté, & Saavedra, 2005; Van Kleef et al., 2009). In a work team context, for example, research has demonstrated that observers use members' emotional displays to draw performance conclusions (Homan, Van Kleef, & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). We believe such task-related inferences are particularly important in supervisor-subordinate interactions (Van Kleef et al., 2009). Given the professional, hierarchical nature of supervisor-subordinate relationships in organizations, issues of (joint) goal attainment are often central in such interactions (Judge & Ferris, 1993; Yukl, 1989). In fact, guiding subordinates toward effective task accomplishment is typically a key part of supervisors' official job responsibilities (Stogdill, Goode, & Day, 1962). As such, supervisors often view their subordinates in an at least partially instrumental manner, such that subordinates represent important vehicles for supervisory (and/or organizational) goal attainment (cf. Tepper, Moss, & Duffy, 2011). On this basis, it seems likely that task-related aspects will play an important part in supervisors' interpretation of the (regulated) emotional displays subordinates target towards them, and inferences about subordinates' task-related competences may be particularly relevant in this regard.

Considering the role of supervisor-directed surface acting, we anticipate that the inauthenticity of subordinates' associated emotion expressions is likely to backfire (Coté, 2005), diminishing supervisors' competence perceptions. As noted earlier, people are

generally adept at recognizing fake emotion expressions (Grandey et al., 2005; Gross & John, 2003; Groth et al., 2009). Hence, despite their efforts to emphasize prototypical positive emotions through supervisor-directed surface acting (cf. Sy, 2010), subordinates' real feelings are likely to "leak" into their interactions with supervisors. These visible attempts at faking desirable emotions may call into question a subordinate's sincerity, honesty, and motivation (Gunnery & Ruben, 2016; Hülshager et al., 2010). Research has demonstrated, accordingly, that subordinates' faking of positive emotions, when interacting with their supervisor, can trigger perceptions of inadequate information sharing (Hu & Shi, 2015).

With instrumental, task-related aspects featuring prominently in supervisor-subordinate interactions (Judge & Ferris, 1993; Yukl, 1989), it seems likely that supervisors will consider task-relevant aspects as possible explanatory factors when making sense of such subordinate behavior. They may infer, therefore, that a focal subordinate is trying to conceal task-related problems and difficulties, and that the subordinate deliberately displays insincere positive emotionality to create a favorable impression and smooth over possible performance issues and/or negative work outcomes. Consistent with this argumentation, prior research has shown subordinates' surface acting toward other members of the organization to negatively relate with supervisory ratings of subordinate task performance (Ozcelik, 2013). Moreover, in the context of employment interviews, studies have illustrated that an applicant's inauthentic smiling is negatively associated with observer ratings of the applicant's intelligence, competence, and hirability (Woodzicka, 2008; Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2005). On this basis, we hold that supervisor-directed surface acting may evoke negative inferences about a subordinate's functioning on the job, raising a supervisor's doubts about the subordinate's task-related competence.

By contrast, we anticipate supervisor-directed deep acting to positively associate with supervisors' competence perceptions. As noted before, supervisor-directed deep acting

should emphasize expressions of positive emotionality, because positive affective displays are generally seen as normative and prototypical for subordinates in their interactions with supervisors (Sy, 2010; Whiteley et al., 2012). Moreover, supervisors are likely to perceive the positive emotion expressions originating from this emotional labor strategy as genuine, because deep acting deliberately aligns individuals' experienced and expressed emotions (Grandey et al., 2005; Wang et al., 2017). Consequently, we argue that supervisors' competence inferences result from such perceptions of authentic, positive emotionality.

Again, this argument rests on the notion that supervisor-subordinate interactions are instrumental to a large extent (Judge & Ferris, 1993; Yukl, 1989), such that task-related aspects should play a relevant part in supervisors' interpretations of their subordinates' behavior (including emotion expressions). In this regard, research has shown that positive emotions primarily arise when individuals have met their goals or have made progress toward goal attainment (Lazarus, 1991; Martin, Ward, Achee, & Wyer, 1993). Hence, theorists on the EASI model have argued that, when observing an actor's positive emotion displays, individuals are likely to conclude that "things are going well" for the respective actor (Van Kleef, 2009, p. 185). A subordinate's positive emotionality, as expressed through supervisor-directed deep acting, may therefore signal to the supervisor that 'all is well' in terms of the subordinate's task progress and goal attainment, promoting perceptions of the subordinate's task-related competence. Accordingly, supporting the general linkage between positive affective displays and favorable task-related inferences, research has illustrated that observers anticipated superior team performance when team members expressed positive emotions (Homan et al., 2015). Similarly, a longitudinal study by Hülshager et al. (2010) has found that deep acting among trainee teachers predicted subsequent performance evaluations by these trainees' mentors.

Collectively, this argumentation suggests that supervisor-directed surface acting may negatively and deep acting positively relate with supervisors' competence perceptions. Again, however, we follow the EASI model to argue that these linkages should critically hinge on a supervisor's epistemic motivation.

**Epistemic motivation as moderator of the emotional labor-perceived competence linkage.** As explained before, individuals with relatively low epistemic motivation generally pay little attention to their social environment and process situational information in a superficial and unsystematic manner (Kruglanski, 1989; Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004). Hence, a lack of epistemic motivation should decrease the likelihood that a supervisor will identify a subordinate's surface-acted emotion displays as insincere. Moreover, even if the supervisor notices such inauthenticity, he or she is unlikely to consciously deliberate on the underlying reasons and, thus, to arrive at unfavorable conclusions about the respective subordinate's competence. By the same token, we anticipate lower epistemic motivation to diminish the competence inferences associated with supervisor-directed deep acting. Their tendency toward inattentiveness and shallow information processing (Van Kleef et al., 2004) may prevent supervisors with low epistemic motivation from recognizing the authentic positive emotionality expressed through a subordinate's deep acting and from connecting such cues with a subordinate's task progress and goal achievement.

For supervisors with higher epistemic motivation, by contrast, we anticipate pronounced linkages between subordinates' emotional labor and supervisory competence perceptions. Beyond greater attentiveness toward socio-emotional cues (Kruglanski & Maysless, 1988), research has shown that individuals with higher epistemic motivation are more likely to process the task-relevant information inherent in such cues (Van Kleef et al., 2004; Van Kleef et al., 2009). When confronted with a subordinate's surface acting, supervisors with high epistemic motivation may therefore readily recognize and strive to

comprehend the underlying inauthenticity, and the relatively instrumental nature of organizational supervisor-subordinate interactions noted before (i.e., with joint task accomplishment as a defining characteristic; Judge & Ferris, 1993; Yukl, 1989) is likely to make task-related inferences particularly salient. Hence, such supervisors may interpret a subordinate's surface acting as a deliberate attempt to create a positive impression and cover up difficulties in task attainment and/or goal accomplishment. Based on the same logic, supervisors with relatively high epistemic motivation are likely (a) to recognize the authentic positive emotions expressed through supervisor-directed deep acting and (b) to consider task-related reasons for these sincere displays of positivity. By consequence, supervisor-directed deep acting may trigger favorable conclusions about a subordinate's competences among such supervisors. Hence, we hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 2: A supervisor's epistemic motivation strengthens both the negative relationship between supervisor-directed surface acting and the supervisor's perceived competence of a subordinate (H2a) and the positive relationship between supervisor-directed deep acting and the supervisor's perceived competence of a subordinate (H2b).*

### **The Role of Liking and Perceived Competence for Reward Recommendations**

**Liking and reward recommendations.** Consistent with the common finding in leadership research that “a supervisor will allocate more rewards to a liked as opposed to a disliked subordinate” (Podsakoff, 1982, p. 70), we expect a supervisor's liking to positively associate with reward recommendations. Several lines of inquiry support this rationale. Studies have shown, for example, that supervisors may perceive greater compatibility and higher leader-member exchange quality with well-liked subordinates (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Engle & Lord, 1997; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). Moreover, a supervisor's liking of a subordinate may trigger more favorable attributions of the subordinate's performance.

Supervisors may perceive well-liked subordinates' positive outcomes as stemming, for example, from subordinates' superior effort and abilities, whereas negative outcomes may be attributed to task difficulty or bad luck (Wayne & Kacmar, 1991). Disliked subordinates' positive outcomes, by contrast, may be discounted as one-time successes due to luck, whereas their performance problems may be attributed to a lack of ability or motivation (Avison, 1980; Green & Mitchell, 1979). As such, supervisors may view liked (rather than disliked) subordinates as more deserving of organizational rewards. Hence:

*Hypothesis 3: A supervisor's liking of a subordinate relates positively with the supervisor's reward recommendations for the respective subordinate.*

**Perceived competence and reward recommendations.** The relationship between competence perceptions and supervisors' reward recommendations appears rather straightforward. After all, organizational success depends, to a large extent, on employees' skills, experiences, and effectiveness (Lado & Wilson, 1994). As such, rewards for employees' competent task accomplishment are often included both in formal human resources policies (Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009) and in supervisors' leadership styles (e.g., contingent reward; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Moreover, from a subjective perspective, it seems logical that supervisors will perceive competent subordinates as more deserving of rewards and, thus, allocate more resources toward these subordinates (Rusbult, Lowery, Hubbard, Maravankin, & Neises, 1988). Hence, it is not surprising that studies have repeatedly linked employees' perceived competence with the extent to which these individuals receive organizational rewards (Van Scotter, Motowidlo, & Cross, 2000). We therefore hypothesize:

*Hypothesis 4: A supervisor's competence perceptions regarding a subordinate relate positively with the supervisor's reward recommendations toward the respective subordinate.*

#### **A Dual-Pathway Model of Supervisor-Directed Emotional Labor**

Our previous theorizing suggests that both the negative roles of supervisor-directed surface acting (Hypotheses 1a and 2a) and the positive roles of supervisor-directed deep-acting (Hypotheses 1b and 2b) for supervisors' liking and competence perceptions are more pronounced among supervisors with higher (rather than lower) epistemic motivation. Moreover, we anticipate both liking (Hypothesis 3) and competence perceptions (Hypothesis 4) to positively associate with supervisory reward recommendations.

Consistent with the EASI model (Côté et al., 2013; Van Kleef, 2009), this pattern of hypotheses points toward an overarching dual-pathway model. As depicted in Figure 1, supervisor-directed emotional labor may indirectly relate with supervisory reward recommendations through both supervisors' socio-emotional reactions (i.e., liking) and task-related inferences (i.e., competence perceptions), and supervisors' epistemic motivation may represent a key contingency factor for these indirect associations. Formally, we summarize this pattern of conditional indirect associations in the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 5: A supervisor's epistemic motivation strengthens both the negative indirect relationship, through reduced liking, between supervisor-directed surface acting and supervisory reward recommendations (H5a) and the positive indirect relationship, through enhanced liking, between supervisor-directed deep acting and reward recommendations (H5b).*

*Hypothesis 6: A supervisor's epistemic motivation strengthens both the negative indirect relationship, through reduced competence perceptions, between supervisor-directed surface acting and reward recommendations (H6a) and the positive indirect relationship, through enhanced competence perceptions, between supervisor-directed deep acting and reward recommendations (H6b).*

## **Method**

### **Sample and Procedures**

We tested the hypothesized relationships using survey data from a large state-owned car manufacturing company in Beijing, China. Targeted participants were office employees (i.e., subordinates) working in groups of approximately 3 to 9 persons and their direct supervisors. Their responsibilities included a variety of administrative tasks in areas such as finance, human resources, technology, auditing and risk management, and corporate social responsibility. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality assured. To minimize common source/common method concerns, we (a) collected data from two different sources (i.e., subordinates and supervisors) and (b) administered surveys at three time points, with one-month lags (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). We note that previous research has successfully employed similar time lags (i.e., between one and two months) to illustrate linkages between emotional labor and various intrapersonal as well as interpersonal outcomes (e.g., Bechtoldt, Rohmann, De Pater, & Beersma, 2011; Deng, Walter, Lam, & Zhao, 2017; Lam & Chen, 2012).

At Time 1, we distributed the first round of paper-and-pencil surveys to 500 subordinates, and 440 completed surveys were returned. Besides potential control variables, this initial survey asked the participants to self-report our model's independent variables (i.e., supervisor-directed surface acting and deep acting). One month later (Time 2), we distributed the second round of surveys to 99 supervisors, asking those supervisors to assess the suggested mediators (i.e., their liking and competence perceptions regarding each of their individual subordinates) as well as the proposed moderator (i.e., their own epistemic motivation). We received responses from all 99 supervisors, containing supervisory evaluations of 394 subordinates. Another month later (Time 3), the third round of surveys asked the same 99 supervisors to assess the dependent variable (i.e., their reward recommendations toward each individual subordinate). We received completed surveys from 91 supervisors, referring to 377 subordinates. After matching the data across all three time

points, we retained complete and usable surveys referring to 377 subordinates and 91 supervisors, for an overall subordinate-level response rate of 75% and a supervisor-level response rate of 92%. Each of the sample supervisors rated between 2 and 7 subordinates (average = 4 subordinates). Among the sample subordinates, 52% were male, 93% held an associate degree or above, and 82% were between 21 and 45 years old. Their average organizational tenure was 10 years. Moreover, 68% of the sample supervisors were male, 82% held an associate degree or above, and 82% were between 31 and 50 years old, with an average organizational tenure of 16 years.

### **Measures**

All survey items were originally developed in English. We employed translation and back-translation procedures (Brislin, 1970) to transfer the items into Chinese. Responses were given on a six-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*), unless otherwise stated.

***Supervisor-directed emotional labor (Time 1).*** We captured supervisor-directed emotional labor using measures that are well-established and frequently used in the literature (e.g., Grandey, 2003; Grant, 2013; Judge, Woolf, & Hurst, 2009), and we slightly adapted the respective items to refer to a subordinate's interactions with his or her direct supervisor (for a similar approach, see Hu & Shi, 2015). To assess supervisor-directed surface acting, we used three items from Pugh, Groth, and Hennig-Thurau (2011) that are based on items initially developed by Brotheridge and Lee (1998). Moreover, we used three items from Brotheridge and Lee (2003) to assess supervisor-directed deep acting. We introduced these measures by providing examples of positive emotions (e.g., enthusiasm, happiness, and excitement) that are seen as highly prototypical for subordinates (Sy, 2010). Sample items for supervisor-directed surface acting include, "I put on a show to display these positive emotions when dealing with my supervisor" and "I fake these positive emotions when interacting with my

supervisor.” Sample items for supervisor-directed deep acting include, “I try to actually experience these positive emotions when interacting with my supervisor” and “I really try to feel these positive emotions when interacting with my supervisor.” Cronbach’s alpha was .87 for supervisor-directed surface acting and .89 for deep acting.

***Liking (Time 2).*** We used three items from Wayne and Ferris (1990) to measure supervisors’ liking of their individual subordinates. These items were, “I like this subordinate,” “I get along well with this subordinate,” and “Supervising this subordinate is a pleasure.” An additional item (“I think this subordinate would make a good friend”) was dropped from the analyses because, given the pronounced power distance in the present study’s cultural context (Hofstede, 2001), this item seems inappropriate for hierarchical supervisor-subordinate relations. Cronbach’s alpha was .90.

***Perceived competence (Time 2).*** We used a 3-item scale developed by Douglas and Ammeter (2004) to measure supervisors’ competence perceptions, slightly adapted to allow for supervisory assessments of each individual subordinate. Sample items included, “This subordinate is effective in accomplishing his/her work” and “This subordinate is effective in meeting the needs of the organization.” Cronbach’s alpha was .92.

***Reward recommendations (Time 3).*** We captured reward recommendations with 5 items from Allen and Rush (1998). Supervisors indicated the extent to which they would recommend each of their individual subordinates for five common organizational rewards, namely a salary increase, a promotion, a high-profile project, public recognition in the company, and opportunities for professional development. Responses were given on a 6-point scale from 1 (*would definitely not recommend*) to 6 (*would recommend with confidence and without reservation*). Cronbach’s alpha was .91.

***Epistemic motivation (Time 2).*** Following previous research (e.g., Ten Velden, Beersma, & De Dreu, 2010; Van Kleef et al., 2009), we measured supervisors' epistemic motivation using the 11-item need for structure scale (Neuberg & Newsom, 1993), coding supervisors' responses so that high scores indicated high epistemic motivation. This instrument captures individuals' tendency toward in-depth information processing, "making it a reliable yet parsimonious measure of epistemic motivation" (Van Kleef et al., 2009, p. 567). Sample items include, "I hate to change my plans at the last minute" and, "It upsets me to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it." Cronbach's alpha was .68 for the full measure and, after omitting one item ("I find that a well-ordered life with regular hours makes my life tedious"), this value increased to .76. To avoid potential biases, we repeated all analyses with both the full measure and with a shortened scale that omitted the problematic item. Given that the substantive results and significance levels remained virtually unchanged across these analyses, we decided to retain the full measure.

***Control variables.*** As noted earlier, we controlled for subordinates' *expression of naturally felt emotions* as an alternative form of supervisor-directed emotional labor (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993), in an effort to demonstrate the unique role of regulated emotional displays (i.e., surface acting and deep acting) as deliberate vehicles of upward impression management. We used three items from Diefendorff et al. (2005) to measure this construct, slightly adapted to refer to positive emotion displays in subordinate-supervisor interactions. A sample item was, "The positive emotions I express to my supervisor are genuine." Cronbach's alphas was .92.

To further illustrate the distinct role of supervisor-directed emotional labor, we controlled for three alternative behavioral tactics (i.e., *self-promotion*, *ingratiation*, and *exemplification*) that prior impression management research has frequently examined and that are used to produce a desirable image among others (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw,

2007; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Turnley & Bolino, 2001). We used items from Bolino and Turnley (1999) to measure these tactics, with 5 items capturing self-promotion (e.g., “I make my supervisor aware of my accomplishments”), 4 items capturing ingratiation (e.g., “I do personal favors for my supervisor”), and 4 items capturing exemplification (e.g., “I arrive at work early in order to look dedicated to my supervisor”). The anchors for these scales were 1 (*never*) to 6 (*always*). Cronbach’s alphas were .89, .82, and .88, respectively.

Finally, characteristics of the interpersonal relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate might bias the suggested linkages. With increasing familiarity, for example, people’s perceptions of and behaviors toward others may change (Hansen & Wänke, 2009). Hence, we included *tenure with supervisor* as a covariate, representing the time a subordinate has worked with a supervisor (in years).<sup>3</sup>

### Data Analysis

Our data had a nested structure, with multiple subordinates reporting to the same supervisor. Examining intraclass correlation coefficients for the subordinate-level variables illustrated that this nesting violated independence assumptions.<sup>4</sup> Hence, we used multilevel analyses in Mplus version 8 to examine the proposed relationships (Muthén & Muthén, 2019). In doing so, we integratively tested all of the hypotheses within one combined, overarching model (as depicted in Figure 1), with liking and competence perceptions as parallel mediators that were allowed to correlate with each other.

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<sup>3</sup> To examine the robustness of our findings, we repeated all analyses without control variables. The results and conclusions were virtually identical to those obtained when including the controls, as reported in the remainder of the manuscript. For exploratory reasons, we further re-analyzed our hypotheses controlling for subordinates’ gender and age. Again, including these additional controls did not meaningfully change the results and conclusions.

<sup>4</sup> ICC(1) values were .18 and .21 for surface acting and deep acting, respectively; .40 for liking; .36 for competence perceptions, and .55 for reward recommendations. We note that the relatively high value for reward recommendations is in line with expectations because, aside from feelings and perceptions regarding individual subordinates, a supervisor’s respective behavior is likely to hinge both on personal characteristics and on the availability of organizational resources within his or her team context. This value reiterates the importance of considering the data’s nested structure in our analytical procedures. ICC(1) values were .17, .29, .27, and .32 for the control variables expression of naturally felt emotions, self-promotion, ingratiation, and exemplification, respectively.

We first group-mean centered all Level-1 (i.e., subordinate-level) variables (i.e., supervisor-directed surface acting and deep acting, liking, perceived competence, reward recommendations, and the control variables) to partial out Level-2 (i.e., supervisor-level) variance, and we standardized epistemic motivation as a Level-2 variable around its grand mean (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998; McNeish & Kelley, in press). At Level-1, we then estimated surface acting, deep acting, and the control variables as predictors of both liking and competence perceptions (i.e., the proposed mediators), whereas we modeled surface acting, deep acting, liking, competence perceptions, and the control variables as predictors of reward recommendations (i.e., the dependent variable). Moreover, we tested the cross-level moderation hypotheses by using supervisors' epistemic motivation (at Level-2) to predict the random slopes of the Level-1 relationships of surface acting and deep acting with liking and competence perceptions, respectively (for similar approaches, see e.g., Wang et al., 2013; Zhou et al., 2017). In the corresponding slopes-as-outcomes equations, intercepts represent the "average" effects of supervisor-directed surface acting and deep acting, respectively, and the coefficients for epistemic motivation represent the hypothesized interaction effects (Aguinis, Gottfredson, & Culpepper, 2013). As such, cross-level moderation is supported if there is a significant association between epistemic motivation and the random slope of a specific Level-1 relationship.

Finally, we assessed the moderated mediation hypotheses using Selig and Preacher's (2008) Monte Carlo method, deriving 95% confidence intervals for the respective conditional indirect relationships at relatively high and low moderator values ( $\pm 1 SD$ ), based on the parameter estimates from the previous analyses. Although not formally hypothesized, we also examined possible main effects between supervisor-directed emotional labor and the mediating variables by estimating an otherwise equivalent Level-1 model that did not include epistemic motivation as a moderator.

## Results

### Correlations and Confirmatory Factor Analyses

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations for all variables at the individual subordinate level. For completeness, we also included supervisors' epistemic motivation in this table, although the respective correlations should be regarded with caution because they were obtained by disaggregating this supervisor-level variable to the individual subordinates' level for presentational purposes.

We note that the relatively high correlations between some of our study variables (e.g., liking and competence perceptions, as well as the traditional upward influence tactics included as control variables) may be a source of concern. Hence, we conducted confirmatory factor analyses in MPlus to evaluate the factor structure of the subordinate-level variables and assess their discriminant validity, using the MLR estimator because it is robust to normality and independence violations and incorporates a scaling correction based on the degree of nonnormality (Muthén & Muthén, 2019). The hypothesized nine-factor model (i.e., surface acting, deep acting, expression of natural emotions, liking, competence perceptions, reward recommendations, self-promotion, ingratiation, and exemplification) yielded acceptable fit ( $\chi^2 = 934.10$ ,  $df = 459$ ,  $CFI = .94$ ,  $TLI = .93$ ;  $SRMR = .05$ ). This model fit the data significantly better than an eight-factor model combining supervisor-directed surface acting and deep acting ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 397.57$ ,  $\Delta df = 8$ ,  $p < .01$ ), a seven-factor model combining supervisor-directed surface acting, deep acting, and expression of natural emotions ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 819.05$ ,  $\Delta df = 15$ ,  $p < .01$ ), an eight-factor model combining liking and competence perceptions ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 87.08$ ,  $\Delta df = 8$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and a seven-factor model combining self-promotion, ingratiation, and exemplification ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 255.36$ ,  $\Delta df = 15$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Based on these findings, we conclude that our measures' expected factor structure and discriminant validity were supported.

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Insert Table 1 about here  
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### **Hypotheses Testing**

Without considering the role of supervisors' epistemic motivation, the middle column of Table 2 shows non-significant main effects on liking for both supervisor-directed surface acting ( $\gamma = -.08, p < .10$ ) and deep acting ( $\gamma = .05, ns$ ). Further, the main effect on perceived competence was negative for surface acting ( $\gamma = -.13, p < .01$ ) but non-significant for deep acting ( $\gamma = .06, ns$ ). Given the hypothesized interaction patterns, we note that these preliminary findings do not contradict our expectations.

The middle column of Table 2 presents the results for the hypotheses tests, including supervisors' epistemic motivation as a cross-level moderator. Considering Hypothesis 1, epistemic motivation was negatively related to the random slope of the linkage between supervisor-directed surface acting and liking ( $\gamma = -.10, p < .01$ ). Moreover, epistemic motivation was positively related to the random slope of the linkage between supervisor-directed deep acting and liking ( $\gamma = .08, p < .01$ ). These findings indicate that epistemic motivation moderated both of these Level-1 relationships. We followed the procedures illustrated by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003) to depict these interactions. As shown in Figure 2, the relationship between surface acting and liking was negative when supervisors' epistemic motivation was relatively high (+1 SD: simple slope =  $-.19, p < .01$ ), whereas this relationship was not significant when supervisors' epistemic motivation was relatively low (-1 SD: simple slope =  $.02, ns$ ). Hence, Hypothesis 1a was supported. In addition, as shown in Figure 3, the relationship between deep acting and liking was positive when supervisors' epistemic motivation was relatively high (+1 SD: simple slope =  $.14, p < .01$ ) but not significant when epistemic motivation was lower (-1 SD: simple slope =  $-.03, ns$ ). Hence, Hypothesis 1b was supported as well.

Considering competence perceptions as dependent variable (i.e., Hypothesis 2), Table 2 shows that supervisors' epistemic motivation significantly predicted the random slope of the relationship between supervisor-directed surface acting and competence perceptions ( $\gamma = -.08, p < .05$ ). Figure 4 illustrates this significant cross-level interaction. As shown, surface acting was negatively related with competence perceptions among supervisors with relatively high epistemic motivation (+1 SD: simple slope =  $-.21, p < .01$ ), but not among supervisors with lower epistemic motivation (-1 SD: simple slope =  $-.05, ns$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 2a was supported. By contrast, epistemic motivation did not predict the random slope of the relationship between supervisor-directed deep acting and competence perceptions ( $\gamma = .02, ns$ ), such that Hypothesis 2b was rejected.<sup>5</sup>

As further depicted in Table 2, we observed a positive association of liking with supervisory reward recommendations ( $\gamma = .24, p = .01$ ), supporting Hypotheses 3. The positive association between competence perceptions and supervisory reward recommendations was also significant ( $\gamma = .33, p < .01$ ), supporting Hypothesis 4.

Tests of the conditional indirect effects mediated by liking (i.e., Hypothesis 5) revealed a negative indirect relationship between supervisor-directed surface acting and supervisory reward recommendations, through liking, when supervisors' epistemic motivation was relatively high (+1 SD: estimate =  $-.05$ ; 95% CI =  $[-.09, -.01]$ ), but not when epistemic motivation was lower (-1 SD: estimate =  $.004$ ; 95% CI =  $[-.02, .03]$ ). Hence, Hypothesis 5a was supported. Similarly, the positive indirect relationship between supervisor-directed deep acting and supervisory reward recommendations, through liking,

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<sup>5</sup> To further examine the significant interaction patterns, we used MPlus to test the differences of the respective simple slopes at high vs. low moderator values (i.e.,  $\pm 1$  SD). These differences were statistically significant in all cases. Moreover, to explore the role of different supervisor-directed emotional labor strategies, we examined a model in which subordinates' expression of naturally felt emotions toward their supervisor served as independent variable (controlling for surface acting and deep acting). We did not find significant main effects between subordinates' expression of naturally felt emotions and supervisors' liking ( $\gamma = -.02, ns$ ) or perceived competence ( $\gamma = -.07, ns$ ). Similarly, supervisors' epistemic motivation did not moderate the relationships between this alternative emotional labor strategy and liking ( $\gamma = .01, ns$ ) or perceived competence ( $\gamma = .03, ns$ ).

was significant when supervisors' epistemic motivation was relatively high (+1 SD: estimate = .03; 95% CI = [.004, .08]) but not when epistemic motivation was lower (-1 SD: estimate = .01; 95% CI = [-.03, .02]), supporting Hypothesis 5b.

Finally, as predicted in Hypothesis 6a, the negative indirect relationship between supervisor-directed surface acting and reward recommendations, through competence perceptions, was significant for supervisors with relatively high epistemic motivation (+1 SD: estimate = -.07; 95% CI = [-.13, -.02]), but not with lower epistemic motivation (-1 SD: estimate = -.02; 95% CI = [-.05, .01]). Because the interaction between supervisor-directed deep acting and epistemic motivation was not significant (see Hypothesis 4b), by contrast, the conditional indirect relationship predicted in Hypothesis 6b (i.e., with epistemic motivation moderating the indirect linkage between deep acting and reward recommendations, through competence perceptions) was not supported.

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## Discussion

### Theoretical Implications

The present findings make several contributions to theory advancement. First, our study expands the literature on impression management and upward influence. Although this line of inquiry has accumulated important insights about the consequences associated with different behavioral tactics (e.g., ingratiation, self-promotion, exemplification, and others; Bolino et al., 2008), it has largely neglected the potential role of actors' deliberate emotion regulation. This omission is noteworthy, given that emotion scholars have long pointed to the relevance of strategic emotion displays when influencing others (e.g., Kopelman, Rosette, & Thompson, 2006; Thoits, 1996). Hence, the current study introduces supervisor-directed emotional labor as a possible means of upward influence that may positively (deep acting) or

negatively (surface acting) shape supervisors' impressions of a subordinate (over-and-above other, more traditionally examined influence tactics) and, thus, may influence important work-related outcomes for the respective subordinate.

Importantly, our findings also illustrate that the consequences associated with supervisor-directed emotional labor largely remain limited to targets (i.e., supervisors) with relatively high epistemic motivation. As such, we shed light on a relevant class of boundary conditions that has received little attention in the impression management literature to date. Previous studies on this issue have typically focused on actors' characteristics, such as actors' self-monitoring (Turnley & Bolino, 2001) and political skills (Harris et al., 2007). Nevertheless, scholars have argued that "there is value in examining target-specific moderators" as well (Bolino et al., 2008, p. 1089; Gordon, 1996). Hence, the present results (a) advance emotional labor as an important, yet heretofore overlooked, vehicle of upward impression management and (b) introduce epistemic motivation as a critical, target-specific contingency factor that indicates *when* subordinates' respective impression management efforts are most likely to be relevant.

Second, this investigation contributes to the literature on emotional labor in various ways. In particular, our study advances this line of inquiry toward a new contextual domain. Emotional labor research has initially been developed in customer service settings (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1983), illustrating the instrumental benefits of deep acting, and the potential problems associated with surface acting, among service employees (Bujisic, Wu, Mattila, & Bilgihan, 2014; Medler-Liraz, 2014). Consistent with recent theorizing and research that has cast emotional labor as a common occurrence across diverse interpersonal situations (e.g., Côté et al., 2013; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015), this study extends these instrumentality considerations toward subordinate-supervisor interactions (see also Hu & Shi, 2015; Xu et al., 2014). By shaping supervisors' liking and competence perceptions (at least

among supervisors with relatively high epistemic motivation), supervisor-directed surface acting and deep acting are shown to elicit tangible consequences for subordinates (i.e., reward recommendations). It is perhaps not surprising that service providers' emotional labor is tied to customers' perceptions and reactions because emotional expressions are often seen as an integral part of service performance (Grandey, 2015; Hochschild, 1983). Interestingly, however, our findings illustrate that similar effects may materialize even in a non-service context where emotional displays are not related to an employee's core tasks. This suggests that emotional labor may constitute "smiling for a wage" (Grandey, 2015, p. 54) in a much broader sense than previously assumed.

Moreover, our results attest to the validity of the EASI model, as applied to the realm of emotional labor (Côté et al., 2013), and they provide important new insights into key mechanisms and boundary conditions in this regard. Scholars have noted, in particular, that "relatively little is known about the social consequences of emotion regulation" (Van Kleef, 2010, p. 339), and the present study addresses this issue. Corroborating core theoretical notions from the EASI model, our findings are among the first to empirically demonstrate that the tangible social consequences (in our case, supervisory reward recommendations) of surface acting and deep acting unfold through two distinct routes, including both a socio-emotional (i.e., by shaping observers' liking) and a task-related inferential pathway (i.e., by shaping observers' competence perceptions).

Similarly, our results confirm observers' epistemic motivation as a key contingency factor for both of these pathways. Despite featuring prominently in associated theorizing (Côte & Hideg, 2011; Côté et al., 2013; Van Kleef, 2010), the moderating role of epistemic motivation has rarely been empirically examined in the context of emotion regulation or emotional labor (for an exception, see Wang et al., 2017). In this regard, we note that the present study's findings deviate from previous theory and research on the EASI model to

some extent. On the one hand, our results are consistent with research that has suggested epistemic motivation to strengthen the task-related inferences pathway (Van Kleef, Anastasopoulou, & Nijstad, 2010). On the other hand, we have found epistemic motivation to also strengthen supervisors' interpersonal affective reactions toward subordinates' emotional labor, whereas previous research suggests that observers' epistemic motivation may diminish the EASI model's affective pathway (Van Kleef et al., 2009). Unlike this prior work, the present study did not examine specific emotion expressions as independent variables (e.g., displays of anger or happiness), but it examined different emotional labor strategies used to emphasize positive emotionality toward one's supervisor (i.e., surface acting and deep acting). Hence, we argue that supervisors' interpersonal affective reactions rest, to a large extent, on the differing degrees of authenticity conveyed through these strategies (Côté, 2005; Côté et al., 2013), rather than on the mechanisms of direct emotion transfer discussed in much prior EASI research (e.g., Van Kleef & De Dreu, 2010; Van Kleef, van den Berg, & Heerdink, 2015). As outlined in our theorizing, uncovering such (in)authenticity may require close attention and careful processing of subtle cues, and epistemic motivation is likely to facilitate such mechanisms (Côté & Hideg, 2011). Hence, our findings shed new light on the contingencies of the EASI model in emotional labor contexts, advancing a more detailed understanding of the moderating role of observers' epistemic motivation.

In this regard, we also note that although most of our hypotheses were supported, we did not find supervisor-directed deep acting to relate with competence perceptions, irrespective of a supervisor's epistemic motivation. Possibly, this unexpected finding might reflect a "bad is stronger than good" effect (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). On the one hand, the inauthenticity conveyed through surface acting may be sufficient to trigger supervisors' suspicion and task-related concerns (at least when their epistemic motivation is high) and, thus, to negatively color their competence assessments. On the other

hand, although the relatively authentic positive emotionality conveyed through supervisor-directed deep acting may benefit supervisors' socio-emotional responses (i.e., liking), these subtle cues may not be salient enough to influence more premeditated, cognitive reactions, such as supervisors' task-related competence inferences. Clearly, this explanation is speculative, and additional research is needed to more fully understand the role of supervisor-directed deep acting for supervisors' assessments of a subordinate.

### **Practical Implications**

From individual subordinates' perspective, our findings illustrate supervisor-directed emotional labor as a possible instrument of upward influence. Importantly, subordinates aiming to use this instrument to shape their supervisors' impressions and to gain access to desired rewards should be aware of crucial caveats. First, subordinates may experience pronounced backlash effects if they draw on surface acting to influence their supervisors, potentially diminishing supervisors' liking and competence perceptions and subsequent reward recommendations. Hence, subordinates are well-advised to emphasize deep acting rather than surface acting when interacting with their supervisor. In other words, for supervisor-directed emotional labor to have its intended effects, subordinates should avoid "putting on a show" but, rather, use techniques of antecedent-focused emotion regulation, such as attention deployment and/or cognitive reappraisal (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998). Second, it is important to note that the individual risks and benefits associated with supervisor-directed emotional labor only apply if such efforts are targeted toward supervisors with relatively high epistemic motivation who are attentive to subordinates' regulated emotion expressions and willing to thoroughly process such information. When facing a supervisor with lower epistemic motivation, by contrast, subordinates should not expect pronounced effects of supervisor-directed emotional labor. In these situations, it may be

fruitful to consider alternative approaches toward upward impression management (Harris et al., 2007; Turnley & Bolino, 2001).

Moreover, from an organizational perspective, the present study points toward a tangible risk of misallocating rewards. Research suggests that some individuals are more adept at emotion regulation and, thus, may be able to more effectively draw on deep acting rather than surface acting than others (e.g., based on individual differences in personality characteristics and emotional abilities; Austin, Dore, & O'Donovan, 2008; Diefendorff et al., 2005). Hence, such subordinates may find it easier than others to garner supervisors' positive impressions and reward recommendations. Importantly, however, a subordinate's aptitude at (supervisor-directed) emotional labor may be largely unrelated to his or her actual job performance, particularly in positions that require little emotion regulation for core task accomplishment. Therefore, supervisors' reward decisions may be misguided if they are heavily influenced by a subordinate's emotional labor efforts. Also, somewhat ironically, supervisors with high epistemic motivation may be particularly susceptible to such biases, although prior research in other areas of inquiry has generally demonstrated instrumental benefits associated with a strong desire to develop a rich understanding of relevant situations (e.g., higher innovativeness and better academic performance; Bors, Vigneau, & Lalande, 2006; Wu, Parker, & De Jong, 2014). Hence, supervisors should recognize this risk and, especially when they exhibit high epistemic motivation, they should exercise considerable caution when contemplating reward recommendations, to ensure that their allocation of rewards reflects employees' actual contributions to the organization.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Despite some notable strengths (e.g., multisource data collected across three time points), this research also has several limitations. Although our theorizing implies causal relations, the correlational nature of the data does not allow causal inference. Beyond the

control variables considered in our investigation, for example, unmeasured third variables (such as subordinates' actual competence and the overall quality of a supervisor-subordinate relationship) might have confounded the observed relationships. Moreover, reverse causality might be an alternative explanation. Subordinates who feel that their supervisor likes them and perceives them as competent, for example, may be more likely to engage in deep acting rather than surface acting. We note that our hypothesized linkages are predicated on a strong conceptual foundation (i.e., the EASI model; Côté et al., 2013; Van Kleef, 2009, 2014), and exploratory analyses (available from the first author) yielded non-significant findings for a possible reverse-causality model in which supervisors' liking and perceived competence interacted with epistemic motivation to influence subordinates' emotional labor. Ultimately, however, true longitudinal designs (with all focal variables measured at multiple time points) and/or experimental studies are required to convincingly illustrate the direction of causality between the study variables. Although not conducted in a typical supervisor-subordinate context, Hülshager et al.'s (2010) longitudinal study provides initial evidence in this regard, illustrating a linkage between trainee teacher's emotional labor and their mentor's subsequent performance evaluations, but not vice versa.

Moreover, the data for the current research came from a single organization within one country, China, such that organizational/industry characteristics or cultural aspects might have influenced the results. The theoretical rationale underlying the present hypotheses is not tied to a specific culture, however, and previous research has repeatedly illustrated the applicability of emotion regulation and emotional labor theories in a Chinese context (Deng et al., 2017; Lam, Walter, & Ouyang, 2014). Still, future research that constructively replicates our findings in other organizational/industry settings or cultures may strengthen confidence in the generalizability of our conclusions. Similarly, future scholars could benefit from considering the possible role of individuals' specific job types (maybe moving beyond

the context of administrative office jobs, as examined in the present investigation) because emotional display rules and, thus, processes of emotional labor may differ across different jobs and functional areas (Diefendorff, Richard, & Croyle, 2006).

Finally, although our conceptual rationale, as drawn from the EASI model, is based on the (in)authenticity conveyed through supervisor-directed emotional labor, we did not directly measure this proposed mechanism. We note, however, that prior emotional labor research has established close linkages between surface acting and deep acting, on the one hand, and the authenticity of the resulting emotion expressions, on the other (Grandey et al., 2005; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006; Wang et al., 2017). As such, we believe our theoretical reasoning is well-founded in the existing literature. Nevertheless, it would be a logical direction for further research to directly measure this mediating mechanism and, thus, to examine our model's underlying theorizing in a finer-grained manner. And finally, we assessed the outcome variable by measuring supervisors' willingness to reward a specific subordinate, rather than actual reward distributions. Although this is consistent with prior research on supervisors' reward recommendations (e.g., Allen & Rush, 1998; Shi, Johnson, Liu, & Wang, 2013), behavioral measurement approaches could be employed to corroborate our findings' practical relevance.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Beyond addressing limitations, our investigation offers a number of interesting directions for future research. The present study illustrated the moderating role of supervisors' epistemic motivation, and research could extend our model by examining additional boundary conditions. We have found, in particular, that supervisors (with high epistemic motivation) reacted negatively to individual subordinates' surface acting, most likely due to the inauthenticity of the resulting emotion expressions (Coté, 2005). In some instances, however, supervisors might interpret subordinates' surface acting as legitimate

(Wong, Tschan, Messerli, & Semmer, 2013) – depending, for example, on a supervisor’s own preferences for specific emotion regulation strategies (Gabriel, Daniels, Diefendorff, & Greguras, 2015) or on the importance of authentic displays to his or her identity (Pugh et al., 2011). Also, the EASI model suggests that the interpersonal consequences of others’ emotion expressions hinge on observers’ “ability to process the information represented in these expressions” (Van Kleef, 2009, p. 186). Hence, supervisors’ emotional abilities/emotional intelligence (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008) may alter the proposed relationships. Supervisors with higher emotion recognition capability (Elfenbein & Ambady, 2002), for example, may be more likely to decipher the (in)authenticity inherent in subordinates’ regulated emotion expressions and, thus, might more strongly react toward subordinates’ surface acting and deep acting. Moreover, the EASI model proposes social-relational factors as important moderating variables, including the nature of the actor-observer relationship (e.g., their relative power positions) as well as relevant norms and display rules (Côté et al., 2013; Van Kleef, 2009, 2014). By examining such contingency factors, research may contribute to a more nuanced picture of supervisor-directed emotional labor as a means of upward influence.

Further, this investigation has focused on subordinates’ deliberate displays of prototypical positive emotionality through surface acting and deep acting (Sy, 2010; Whiteley et al., 2012). EASI theorists have suggested, however, that the social consequences of emotional labor may differ depending on the type of emotion that is regulated (e.g., positive vs. negative) and on the direction of such regulation (i.e., up- vs. down-regulation; Côté et al., 2013). Hence, future research could widen the scope of our study by examining such alternative emotional labor aspects and relating them to additional mechanisms and outcomes, beyond supervisors’ liking, competence perceptions, and reward recommendations. For example, subordinates may down-regulate negative emotion

expressions through supervisor-directed surface acting and/or deep acting (Hu & Shi, 2005), in an effort to conceal unfavorable outcomes and avoid repercussions. Furthermore, there may be specific (albeit possibly rarer) occasions when subordinates up-regulate negative emotion expressions through supervisor-directed emotional labor. When a supervisor shares negative news, for example, subordinates might emphasize negative emotion displays (e.g., anger or sadness) to evoke perceptions of involvement or compassion and, thus, create positive impressions (Van Kleef et al., 2008).

Moreover, our study focused on surface acting and deep acting as intrapersonal forms of emotion regulation (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). Scholars have also described interpersonal forms of emotion regulation (e.g., Niven, 2016; Zaki & Williams, 2013), and it would be interesting to examine the consequences associated with subordinates' use of such strategies in their supervisor interactions. For example, subordinates may deliberately share affective experiences with supervisors to shape supervisors' affective reactions (e.g., by eliciting empathy) or manage their own emotions (e.g., by garnering supervisory support). Extending the present theorizing, such behavior may trigger specific (intended or unintended) supervisory responses, with potentially tangible implications for subordinates.

Along the same lines, scholars could further examine subordinates' expression of naturally felt emotions toward supervisors. This alternative emotional labor strategy exhibits important similarities and differences with deep acting and surface acting. Observers may perceive both natural emotion expressions and deep acting as authentic, for example, because both of these strategies avoid discrepancies between experienced and expressed emotions (Diefendorff et al., 2005). At the same time, natural emotion expressions do not include a deliberate effort to align one's emotional displays with situational requirements, as is the case for deep acting and surface acting (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). As noted before, the present data did not support a model in which subordinates' natural emotion expressions

interacted with supervisors' epistemic motivation to predict either liking or competence perceptions. Given the exploratory nature of these analyses, further research that investigates the role of subordinates' natural emotion expressions in a more systematic manner could advance a more comprehensive picture of supervisor-directed emotional labor.

Finally, we focused on supervisors' liking as a socio-emotional facet of the EASI model's affective pathway because (a) liking is a target-specific, rather than undirected, type of emotional reaction (Côté et al., 2013) and (b) scholars have emphasized supervisors' liking as a key goal of subordinates' upward impression management (Turnley & Bolino, 2001). The EASI model also specifies an additional facet of its affective pathway, however, such that "emotions may spread directly from expresser to observer via emotional-contagion processes" (Van Kleef, 2009, p. 186). Moreover, prior research suggest that positive emotions expressed through surface acting are less likely to trigger similarly positive observer emotions (due to their lack of authenticity) than positive emotions expressed through deep acting (Coté, 2005; Côté et al., 2013). With numerous studies linking supervisors' moods and emotions to their leadership behaviors and outcomes (Griffith, Connelly, Thiel, & Johnson, 2015; Walter & Bruch, 2009), it therefore appears fruitful to further examine processes of direct emotion transfer as additional mechanisms between supervisor-directed emotional labor and supervisors' behavioral reactions.

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, this study has illustrated supervisor-directed surface acting and deep acting as novel means of upward influence through which subordinates can manage their supervisors' impressions and, thus, attain relevant work outcomes. Moreover, we have uncovered supervisors' epistemic motivation as a key contingency factor for these relationships. Hence, we believe our conceptual model and findings offer new perspectives on emotional labor and upward impression management and point towards relevant areas of

inquiry that may further expand and sharpen our understanding of these important phenomena.

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Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate Correlations

<i>Variables</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Subordinate-level measures</i>													
1. Supervisor-directed surface acting	2.51	1.13	-										
2. Supervisor-directed deep acting	3.45	1.16	.43**	-									
3. Expression of naturally felt emotions	4.40	1.09	-.06	.37**	-								
4. Liking	4.70	0.84	-.02	.19**	.20**	-							
5. Competence perceptions	4.68	0.79	-.05	.17**	.16**	.82**	-						
6. Reward recommendations	4.63	0.92	.05	.27**	.13*	.57**	.54**	-					
7. Self-promotion	3.13	1.02	.34**	.52**	.22**	.08	.08	.24**	-				
8. Ingratiation	3.25	1.04	.31**	.55**	.28**	.11*	.06	.22**	.74**	-			
9. Exemplification	2.58	1.16	.40**	.47**	.10 <sup>†</sup>	.10 <sup>†</sup>	.10*	.21**	.71**	.66**	-		
10. Tenure with supervisor	4.79	5.00	-.02	-.12*	-.06	-.00	.06	-.18**	-.15**	-.21**	-.07	-	
<i>Supervisor-level measure</i>													
11. Supervisor's epistemic motivation	2.88	0.57	-.03	-.10 <sup>†</sup>	-.18*	-.09	-.06	-.02	-.14**	-.10 <sup>†</sup>	-.05	-.06	-

Note. <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .  $N_{\text{Level-1}} = 377$  subordinates;  $N_{\text{Level-2}} = 91$  supervisors.

Table 2. Multilevel Analyses Results

	No moderator	Overall hypothesized model	
	Coefficient(se)	Coefficient(se)	Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>
<i>Random slopes</i>			
<i>Surface acting → Liking</i>			
Intercept	-.08(.05) <sup>†</sup>	-.09(.05) <sup>†</sup>	17%
Epistemic motivation		<b>-.10(.03)**</b>	
<i>Deep acting → Liking</i>			
Intercept	.05(.05)	.06(.05)	22%
Epistemic motivation		<b>.08(.03)**</b>	
<i>Surface acting → Competence perceptions</i>			
Intercept	-.13(.04)**	-.13(.04)**	47%
Epistemic motivation		<b>-.08(.04)*</b>	
<i>Deep acting → Competence perceptions</i>			
Intercept	.06(.04)	.07(.04)	10%
Epistemic motivation		<b>.02(.04)</b>	
<i>Fixed slopes</i>			
<i>Reward recommendation predicted</i>			
Liking → Reward recommendation	.24(.09)*	<b>.24(.09)*</b>	32%
Competence → Reward recommendation	.33(.09)**	<b>.33(.09)**</b>	
Surface acting → Reward recommendation	-.01(.03)	-.01(.03)	
Deep acting → Reward recommendation	-.00(.03)	-.00(.03)	
Naturally felt emotions → Reward recommendation	.00(.03)	.00(.03)	
Self-promotion → Reward recommendation	.01(.05)	.01(.05)	
Ingratiation → Reward recommendation	-.01(.04)	-.01(.04)	
Exemplification → Reward recommendation	.01(.04)	.01(.04)	
Tenure with supervisor → Reward recommendation	-.01(.01)*	-.01(.01)*	
<i>Liking predicted</i>			
Naturally felt emotions → Liking	-.02(.04)	-.02(.04)	17%
Self-promotion → Liking	-.20(.08)*	-.20(.08)*	
Ingratiation → Liking	-.01(.08)	-.01(.08)	
Exemplification → Liking	.13(.06) <sup>†</sup>	.13(.06) <sup>†</sup>	
Tenure with supervisor → Liking	.00(.01)	.00(.01)	
<i>Competence perceptions predicted</i>			
Naturally felt emotions → Competence perceptions	-.07(.04)	-.07(.04)	11%
Self-promotion → Competence perceptions	-.02(.07)	-.02(.07)	
Ingratiation → Competence perceptions	-.08(.07)	-.08(.07)	
Exemplification → Competence perceptions	.11(.06) <sup>†</sup>	.11(.06) <sup>†</sup>	
Tenure with supervisor → Competence perceptions	.01(.01)	.01(.01)	

Notes. Unstandardized coefficients are shown. Results for hypotheses tests are bold.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ . N<sub>Level-1</sub> = 377 subordinates; N<sub>Level-2</sub> = 91 supervisors.

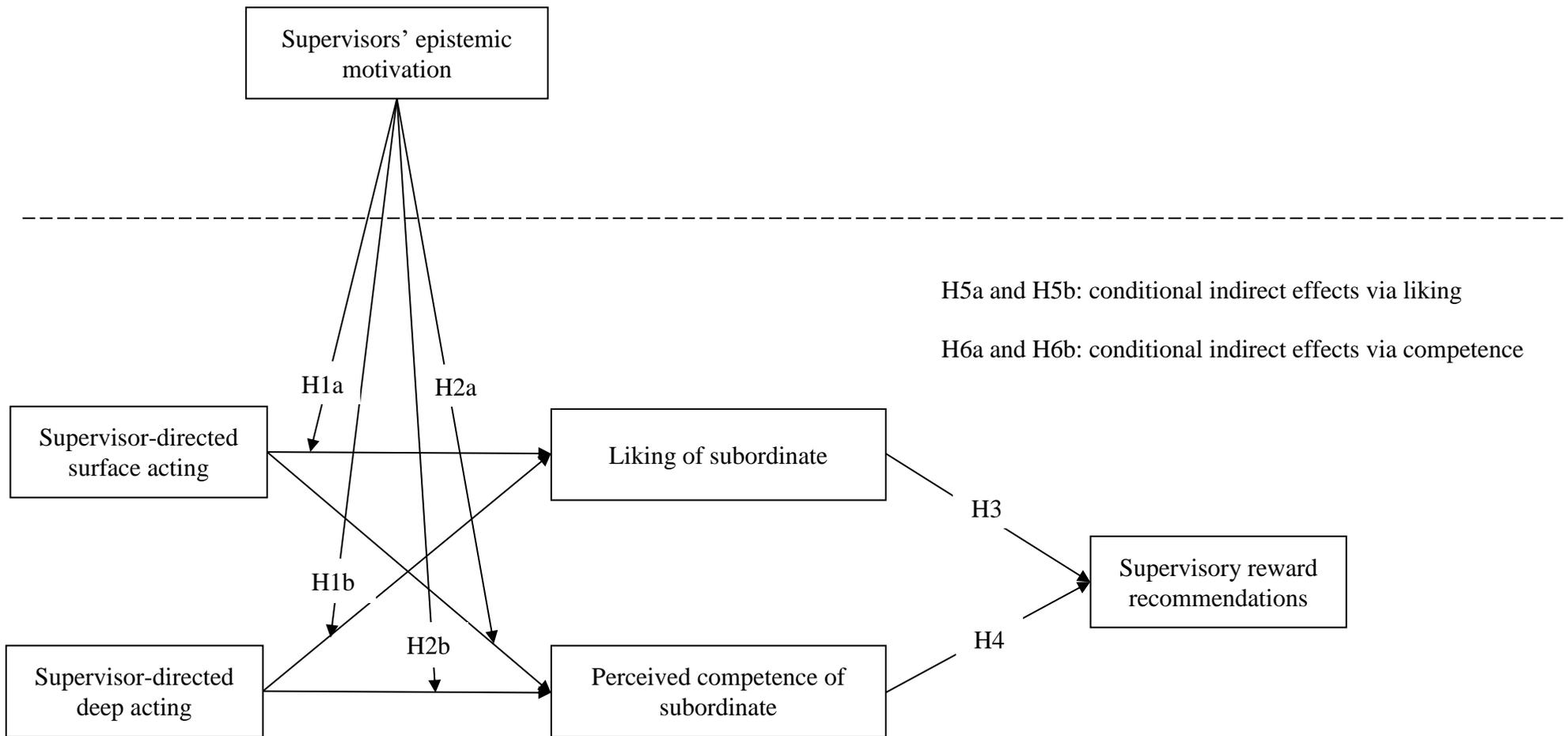


Figure 1. Overall Research Model (Note: All variables below the dashed line are at the individual subordinates' level.)

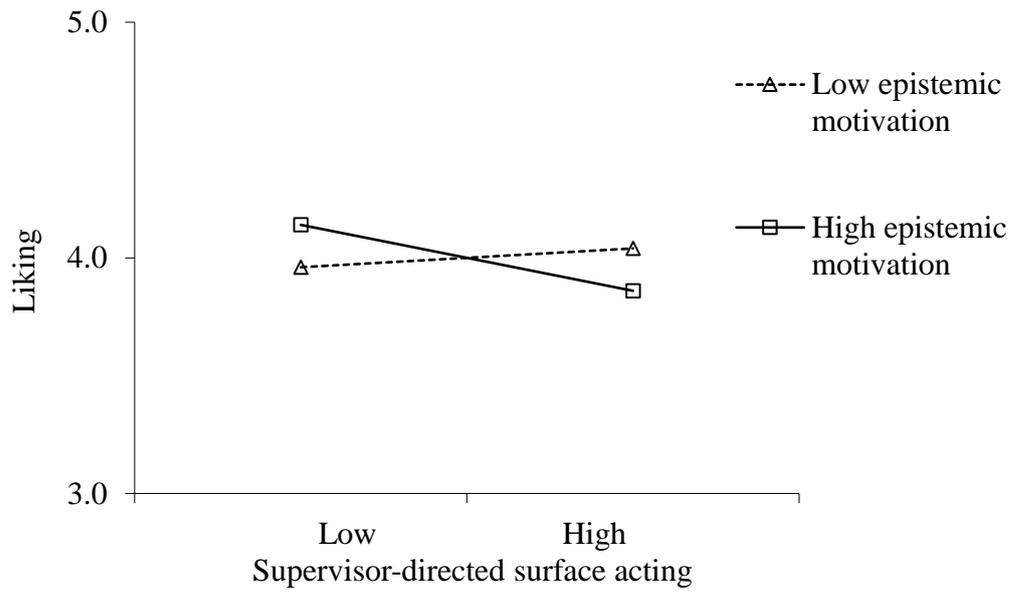


Figure 2. Epistemic motivation moderates the role of supervisor-directed surface acting for liking.

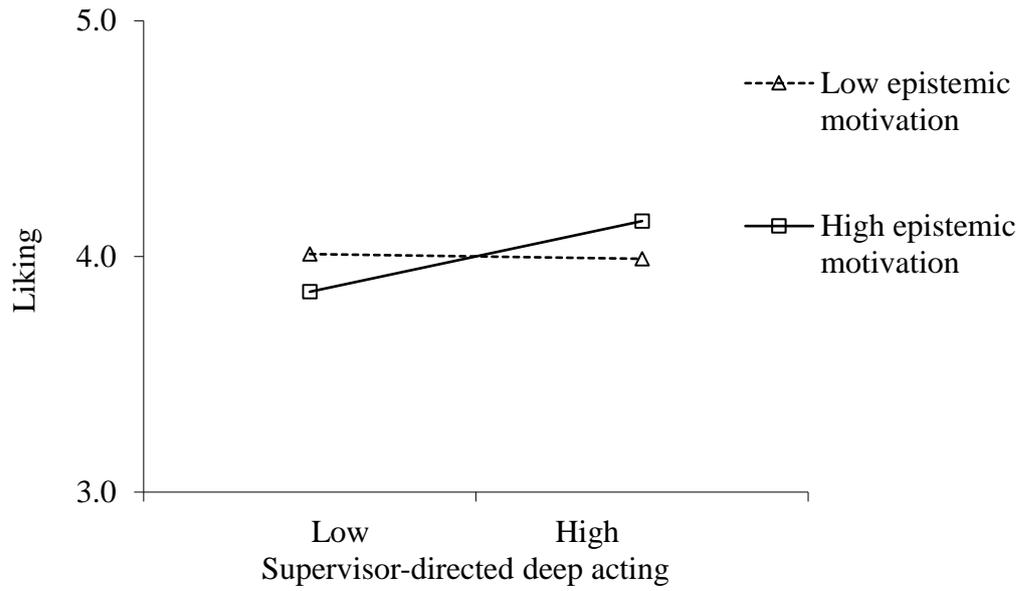


Figure 3. Epistemic motivation moderates the role of supervisor-directed deep acting for liking.

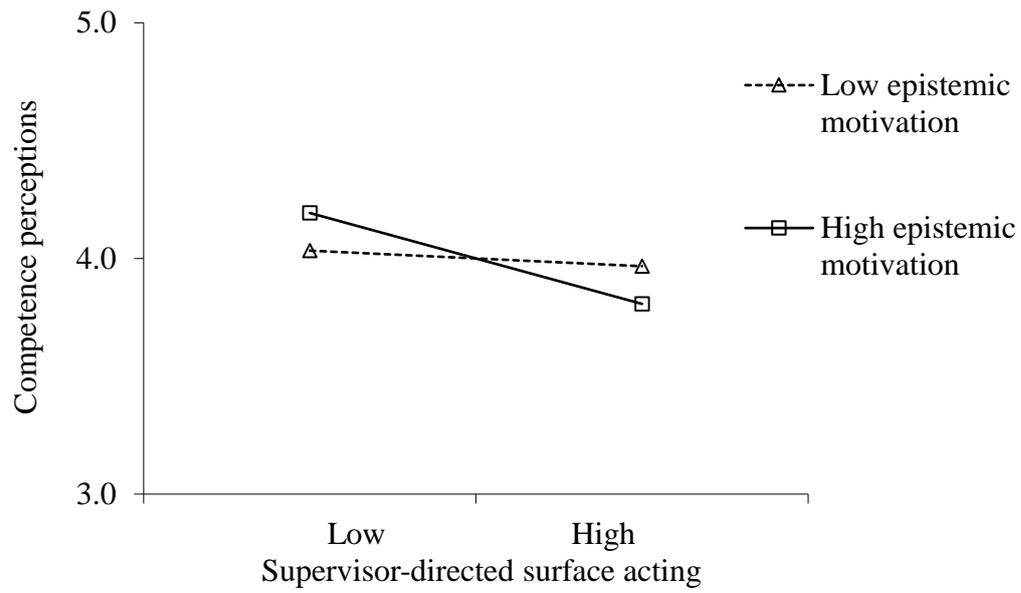


Figure 4. Epistemic motivation moderates the role of supervisor-directed surface acting for competence perceptions.