Empirical Paper

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Promoting hotel employees' work engagement and its service outcomes: The critical role of intrinsic motivation

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Abstract: Purpose: The purpose of this article is to investigate the relationship between intrinsic job-related motivators and hotel employees' work engagement and to examine how it may correlate with important employees' outcomes, such as the prescribed-role and extra-role customer service.
Design/methodology/approach: The literature review and empirical research based on a survey method were employed.
Findings: The findings revealed that there is a positive and significant correlation between intrinsic job-related motivators and hotel employees' work engagement. It was also demonstrated that work engagement significantly and positively correlates with both the prescribed-role and extra-role customer service provided by employees.
Originality/value: This study adds to the growing body of research on employees' work motivation, particularly focusing on the intrinsic dimension that it has still not received enough empirical attention in the literature of both hotel management and marketing.

Keywords: hotel customer service, intrinsic motivation, work engagement
JEL Classification: J24, J81, M12, M52, M54

1 Introduction

Working in the hospitality industry is difficult and responsible. It requires not only specific knowledge but also appropriate predispositions and character traits. Customer service provided by hotel employees affects the guests' opinion about the facility, as well as the quality of services provided in it. It creates the brand image of the hotel and atmosphere in it and also builds a relationship with the customer.

The so-called frontline employees, who have direct contact with the customer (including reception, ground floor service, or catering), have a particularly responsible task in this respect. The guests' well-being during their stay at the hotel, positive feedback from customers about the facility after leaving it, and readiness to visit again may depend on employee behavior at work.

Among the requirements for the above-mentioned employees, the following are mentioned:

- presence,
- appropriate personality traits, i.e., kindness, politeness, hospitality, courtesy, composure, understanding, being outgoing, and the manner of speaking,

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- manners,
- knowledge of foreign languages,
- high professional qualifications and a desire for continuous further education,
- a high level of general knowledge of current events, geography, sport, etc.,
- responsibility and honesty at work,
- passion for order and tidiness,
- regularity and good organization of work,
- high resistance to stress and an ability to cope with difficult situations,
- analytical thinking and creativity [Jeznach et al., 2016].

Recruiting and retaining committed staff that meet the above requirements constitutes a significant challenge for the managerial staff in hotels. The success of a modern hotel largely depends on the level of employees' involvement as well as on the quality of provided services. Among others, appropriate motivation of the staff may be a solution to this problem.

Therefore, the aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between intrinsic job-related motivators (IM) and hotel employees' work engagement (W_E) and to examine how it may correlate with customer service provided by those employees both within their prescribed-role (PR_R_SERVICE) and extra-role (EX_R_SERVICE) services.

This study contributes to the research stream focusing on hotel employees' W_E [B.C.P. Kim et al., 2009; H.J. Kim et al., 2009 ; Karatepe, 2013 a,b, 2015; Karatepe et al., 2013, 2018; Chen et al., 2014; Grobelna and Mazurkiewicz, 2014; Jagannathan, 2014; Grobelna, 2019] and addresses a need for further research regarding intrinsic motivation [e.g., Chuang et al., 2009; Karatepe and Aleshinloye, 2009; Domżalska, 2014; Grobelna et al., 2015, 2016; Lazauskaite-Zabielskie et al., 2015] in the current understanding of its vital role as a personal resource of frontline employees who play a pivotal role in ensuring the success of their organizations [Robinson et al., 2016].

2 Literature review

At this point, it is worth defining what motivation is and what actions supervisors can use to motivate their employees to achieve the organization's goals. According to Shank [2007, p. 24], "Motivation is the act or process of providing a motive that causes a person to take some action. In most cases, motivation comes from some need that leads to behavior that results in some type of reward, when the need is fulfilled.

"Motivating staff includes using motivational factors to strengthen or weaken an employee's readiness for a specific action. Properly motivated personnel do their job better. In the literature on the subject, one can find many different criteria for the division of motivational factors, including the type of fulfilled needs, the direction, scope and manner of impact, or the form [Sajkiewicz, 2000].

Taking into account the scope of influence as a criterion, motivational factors can be divided into internal and external ones. External motivational factors focus on the implementation of instrumental values. They have an immediate impact on the employee's behavior; however, the effects of such an impact are not always long lasting. Their withdrawal causes a rapid decrease in the motivation of employees in a given organization. These may include salary, position in the hierarchy, promotion, or a sense of security. On the other hand, internal factors contribute to the realization of immanent human values whose achievement constitutes a value in itself. They should have a long-lasting and profound impact on employees' actions, causing a sense of satisfaction and achievement of the intended goals. Employees who do their work because they are interested in it, because it allows them to develop their talents and implement new challenges, and because they feel appreciated by the employer perform their tasks more effectively. Another element that makes an employee more involved in work is having power and autonomy. Since internal motivational factors can be a value in itself, the performance of work is then a reward; employees perform work because they want to and not because they are forced to do it [Pierścieniak et al., 2013].

It is worth supplementing considerations on methods of motivating employees with a description of the 3.0 model created by Daniel Pink, which shows the advantage of internal motivational factors over external ones [Pierścieniak et al., 2013]. This model is better suited to workplaces where staff are required to be innovative and creative. The author of the model believes that human behavior (to put it simply) can be divided into two types: type X and type I behavior. Type X persons are motivated mainly by external rewards and punishment; other factors are secondary for them. On the other hand, type I persons are motivated by internal factors, i.e., challenges related to work, autonomy, and the goal to which they aspire. The 3.0 model is based on three key factors: autonomy, mastery, and goal.

2.1 Autonomy

People trusted by the employer and encouraged to take responsibility for their own work and developing skills will work more efficiently, giving more of themselves. For the employee, it is important to feel autonomous in what they do, who they work with, and in what time they work.

2.2 Mastery

It means becoming increasingly better at what one does, including what is important for the employee and the organization. Challenges faced by employees should "push" them out of the comfort zone and allow them to develop their competence. It is important to properly match the requirements with the capabilities of employees and not to set the bar too high so that they do not feel stressed and frustrated.

2.3 Goal

People who believe that their actions are purposeful and who believe that they are doing their job for some higher purpose do it much better than others.

Adequately motivated employees are likely to get involved in their work. The results of many studies, including those conducted among employees in the hospitality industry, show a positive impact of selected motivational factors, among others, on employees' satisfaction, the quality of their work, or other results achieved by them. For example, the results of a study on the motivation of managers and employees from six hotels in the USA confirmed that remuneration, a bonus, or recognition from managers or colleagues were important motivators for employees [Chiang et al., 2008]. Proving that communication in a team is an important tool for motivating employees was an interesting aspect of that study. A team of employees with a high level of satisfaction with communication was ready to work harder to get better results. Employees were confident that they would receive a higher reward if they met performance expectations, and thus, they strived for better work results than the group with low communication satisfaction. Therefore, a group that has a high level of satisfaction with communication and is strongly motivated has a better chance of increasing the productivity and quality of its work.

Research conducted among the so-called frontline employees in a hotel in Ankara, Turkey, showed that thanks to motivators, such as managers' support, awards, empowerment of work, and internal motivation, employees' emotional exhaustion related to work was significantly reduced [Babakus et al., 2008].

The hotel industry faces challenges resulting from changing customer demands and a competitive environment. In this context, hotel employees (especially the frontline ones) are a very important determinant of the broadly understood efficiency of the organization which can be achieved, among others, by involving employees in the performed work. Schaufeli's three-component concept [Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004] is the most popular concept of engagement in work. Engagement is defined in it as a permanent and all-encompassing state of mind that is not focused on any particular object, event, person, or behavior and can be characterized by three dimensions, i.e., vigor, dedication, and absorption.

- Vigor is associated with a high level of energy and concentration on the performed tasks, with mental resilience and the willingness to make additional effort and not to be discouraged by emerging difficulties at work.
- Dedication means a sense of pride and importance associated with the performed activity, treating the entrusted tasks as a challenge; it is also a sense of meaning and purposefulness of what is performed.
- Absorption can be characterized as being engrossed in the work process, as a loss of feeling of the passing time, or even difficulty in breaking away from the performed activities.

Employees' work engagement plays a pivotal role in today's service organizations contributing to their market success. There is wide empirical evidence, also from the hospitality setting, that work engagement may enhance employees' job satisfaction and their organizational behavior [Choo, 2016]; it may also increase hotel employees' affective commitment [Karatepe, 2013a] and their job performance [Li et al., 2012; Karatepe, 2013b, 2015, 2018; Grobelna, 2019], and it may reduce their turnover intentions [Karatepe, 2015; Karatepe et al., 2018].

Studies of employees of exclusive hotels in Lithuania showed that their low involvement in work and their low level of empowerment in the organization resulted in high turnover and, consequently, probably in a deterioration of the quality of services offered by these facilities [Kazlauskaite et al., 2006]. In turn, the authors of a study conducted among 180 employees of hotels in Quebec showed a significant relationship between employee engagement in work and their civic behavior in the organization, which was associated with a greater willingness to help others, as well as positive civic attitudes [Dagenais-Cooper and Paillé, 2012]. Similarly, a quantitative survey of 152 employees from 12 hotels belonging to four international and national hotel chains in Romania clearly indicated that employees involved in work face difficulties in the performance of their duties more easily and use their knowledge for that purpose [Arustei, 2013]. In addition, they are happy to help their co-workers and superiors.

To sum up, the results of the research conducted among hospitality employees clearly indicate that thanks to their high involvement in their duties, the organization benefits in many areas of its activity, i.e., in team work, guest service, or a creative approach to solving problems in the organization.

3 Material and methods

3.1 Research concept

Based on the relevant literature review and the findings of previous studies, this study develops and tests a research concept (Figure 1) that investigates the relationship between intrinsic job-related motivators and hotel employees' work engagement (H1), which in turn may have beneficial consequences resulting

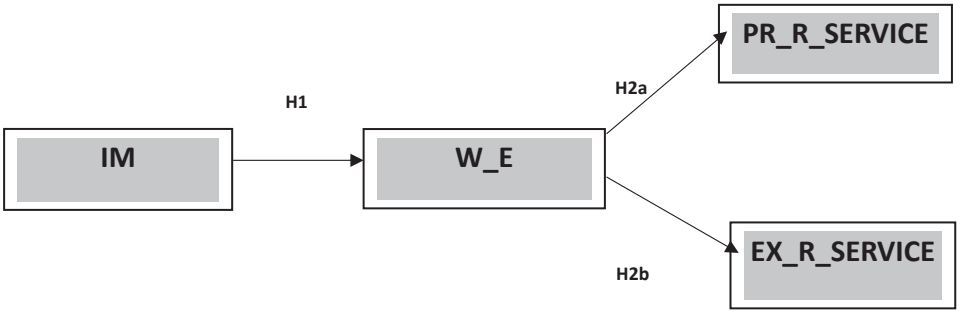


Figure 1. Research concept. EX_R_SERVICE, extra-role customer service; IM, intrinsic job-related motivators; PR_R_SERVICE, prescribed-role service; W_E, work engagement.
Source: own study.

in employees' better customer service, both the prescribed-role (H2a) and the extra-role customer service (H2b). Hotel employees who have a direct contact (face-to-face and voice-to-voice contact) with customers constitute the study setting.

3.2 Data collection procedure

The research hypotheses were tested among contact hotel employees working in hotels located in Pomeranian Voivodeship, which is an attractive tourist destination of northern Poland [Tourism in, 2020; Gospodarka turystyczna regionu pomorskiego 2018]. Hotels in this study were selected based on convenience sampling. Six hotels were identified as the target group due to their availability, previous cooperation, and/or familiarity between the researcher and management of these hotels [Kim, 2008; Lam and Chen, 2012]. The studied hotels represent full-service establishments with various functional departments providing a comprehensive range of services (restaurants, banquets, fitness/spa and conference facilities, etc.). Thus, a wide range of contact employees could be reached. Furthermore, since data were collected in different departments, a single-department bias may be reduced, and thus, external validity of the study might be better supported [Chang and Teng, 2017].

The data were collected using a questionnaire survey. Employees were informed about their voluntary participation. Moreover, all questionnaires included information that anonymity and confidentiality were assured. It is worth noting that self-administered questionnaires are considered to be some of the most popular tools in social research with many advantages, such as relatively low cost, no pressure on the respondents to reply immediately by giving them as much time as needed to complete the survey carefully, reduced embarrassment, and obtaining honest responses regarding sensitive questions of the discussed topics [Gray et al., 2007]. A total of 108 usable surveys were obtained and analyzed in this study.

Analyzing the respondents' profile, there were 27.8% male and 72.2% female participants in this study. The majority of them (73.2%) were aged 21–40 years, 13.9% were 41–50 years, and the remaining ones were either younger, up to 20 years (4.6%), or older (above 50 years – 8.3%). The largest group of the respondents (47.2%) had upper secondary education followed by those declaring a higher education level (44.4%). The remaining ones claimed to have primary education (4.6%) or basic vocational education (3.7%). The majority of the respondents (84.3%) had full-time positions in the hotels, while 15.7% were part-time employees.

3.3 Measures

The study constructs were operationalized using items from the previous empirical studies in the relevant literature. To measure hotel employees' intrinsic motivation with respect to work, six (6) Kovach's job-related motivators have been applied [Kovach, 1987]. In the original survey, there are factors that are perceived as important for motivating employees in their jobs [Kovach, 1987; Wong and Ladkin, 2008]. They are classified as intrinsic (six items) and extrinsic (four items) ones, similarly to those identified in Herzberg's two-factor theory as motivational and hygiene factors, respectively [Wong and Ladkin, 2008]. In this study, respondents have been asked to assess the importance of the intrinsic job-related motivators (IM). It is worth noting that Kovach's job-related motivating factors have also been adopted in numerous previous studies investigating employees' motivation, also in the hospitality setting [Simons and Enz, 1995; Siu et al., 1997; Wong and Ladkin, 2008; Grobelna and Mazurkiewicz, 2014].

EX_R_SERVICE and PR_R_SERVICE were assessed using five items, adequately from Bettencourt and Brown [1997]. These measures have also gained considerable attention in previous studies in the hospitality context [e.g., Tsaur and Lin, 2004; Kim and Brymer, 2011; Karatepe, 2013b, 2015; Grobelna, 2018]. To operationalize W_E, a shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (nine items) was used. As with the above scales, its cross-national validity has also been confirmed [Schaufeli et al., 2006]. Moreover, this scale has been broadly adopted in a number of previous studies conducted among hotel employees [e.g., Lee and Ok, 2015; Grobelna, 2019]. Responses to all items were scored on five-point scales, ranking from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree," except the IM, where respondents gave answers to each statement on a 5-point scale, where (1) means "definitely not important" and (5) means "definitely important.

"The survey instrument was originally prepared in English and then translated into Polish through the back-translation method. A pilot test confirmed a good and adequate understanding of the scale items. The scale reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha (α). It is emphasized that high-reliability scales should have a value of α >0.7 [Nunnally, 1978; Choi, 2006; Choi et al., 2014]. In this research, the alpha coefficient reached the following values: 0. 897 for the IM, 0. 899 for the W_E scale, and 0.929 and 0.917 for the EX_R_SERVICE and PR_R_SERVICE scales, respectively, which demonstrates internal reliability of the study measures.

Finally, descriptive statistics were applied, and the Pearson correlation coefficient (Pearson's *r*) was used to test the study hypotheses. The data were collected using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

4 Results

When analyzing the means and standard deviations of the study variables (Table 1), it should be noted that the overall mean of the IM dimension was 4.39. Specifically, the items "Full appreciation of work done," "Loyalty to employees," and "Opportunities for advancement and development" together with "Interesting work" scored the highest mean in the IM dimension (Figure 2), providing support that those motivators are particularly valued by hotel employees participating in this study.

Table 1. Mean values and standard deviations

Characteristics	IM	W_E	PR_R SERVICE	EX_R SERVICE
Mean	4.39	3.85	4.37	4.00
St. Dev.	0.66	0.56	0.51	0.76

EX_R_SERVICE, extra-role customer service; IM, intrinsic job-related motivators; PR_R_SERVICE, prescribed-role customer service; W_E, work engagement.
Source: own study.



Figure 2. Mean values of intrinsic job-related motivators.
Source: own study.

The level of the current study participants' (mean) work engagement was 3.85; they also manifested their extra-role and prescribed-role customer service levels at 4.00 and 4.37, respectively. Thus, it can be stated that they perceive themselves as rather engaged in their work, which is reflected both in discretionary behaviors that extend beyond their formal role requirements and behaviors that are expected of them while serving hotel guests. However, it is worth noting that they perceive themselves a little higher in the latter one.

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the IM dimension and employees' work engagement and its outcomes for both extra-role and prescribed-role customer services. The research findings positively verify the research hypotheses formulated in the study (Figure 3).

Specifically, Hypothesis 1 suggested a positive relationship between the intrinsic motivation dimension and hotel employees' work engagement. The results of Pearson correlation suggested a fairly strong relationship between these two variables. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 stated that there is a positive relationship between work engagement and both employees' prescribed-role (2a) and extra-role (2b) customer services. The positive and significant Pearson correlation was consistent with this prediction; therefore, hypotheses 2a and 2b were confirmed.

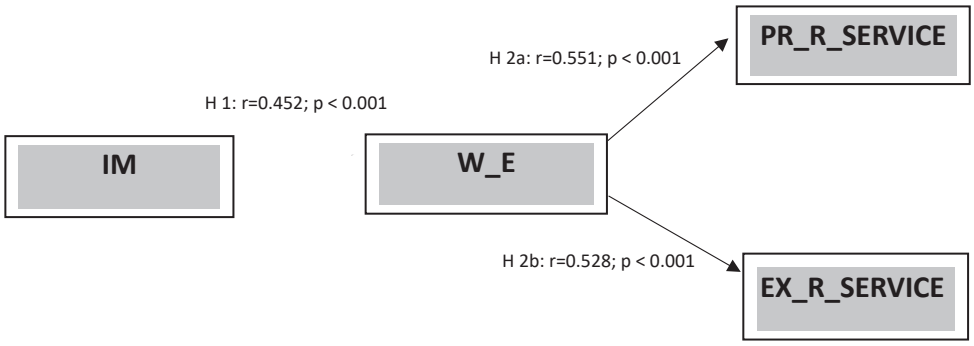


Figure 3. Verified research concept. EX_R_SERVICE, extra-role customer service; IM, intrinsic job-related motivators; PR_R_SERVICE, Prescribed-role customer service; W_E, work engagement.
Source: own study.

5 Discussion and conclusions

This study developed and tested a research concept that investigated the relationship between intrinsic job-related motivators and hotel employees' work engagement, examining its correlates with customer service, both prescribed-role and extra-role one. All hypothesized relationships received support from the empirical data. Specifically, it was found that the more employees are internally driven toward their work being guided by interest, passion, appreciation of work well done, etc., the higher work engagement they may reflect. Additionally, these study results also revealed that the more hotel employees are engaged in their work, feeling true vigor, absorption, and dedication, the more likely they are to meet formal requirements of providing service according to the job description and the more likely they are to go beyond what is expected of them to provide an exceptional service and achieve guest satisfaction and positive emotional responses.

This study of results also echoed the findings of previous works in various industries (not only hospitality) where the so-called human factor is of key importance in the service process and which clearly show the above-mentioned relationship. This may be exemplified by a study conducted among 884 employees of Lithuanian public sector organizations whose aim was, among others, to show the impact of internal and pro-social motivation on civic behaviors in the organization (organizational citizenship behavior [OCB], a kind of personal attitude and behavior toward co-workers and applicants of the office) [Lazauskaite-Zabielske et al., 2015]. The results of that study showed a significant relationship between a high level of employees' internal motivation and their involvement in the performed work and a high level of civic behavior in the organization.

In turn, a study conducted among middle- and low-level managers in small organizations showed that the working environment – the atmosphere at work and interpersonal relations – were the most important motivators influencing employees' involvement in the performed tasks [Jagannathan, 2014].

With respect to the broadly understood hospitality industry, it was proved in previous studies that intrinsic motivation can play an important role for hotel employees' outcomes. It can be one of the significant predictors of hotel employees' job satisfaction [Grobelna et al., 2016] and can positively relate to their creativity [Grobelna and Mazurkiewicz, 2014]. Specifically, the results of a study by Domżalska [2014] conducted among 102 hotel employees in a five-star hotel in Warsaw (Poland) revealed that what motivates employees and translates into engagement in work is primarily a good atmosphere and communication in the team and friendly interpersonal relations. Factors of a material nature – both pecuniary and non-pecuniary ones – were much less important [Domżalska, 2014].

A similar study on internal and external factors influencing the level of job satisfaction of chefs working in casino hotels was conducted in 25 hotels in Las Vegas [Chuang et al., 2009]. The results of that research showed that the most important motivator for the respondents was work in itself – they simply liked it. Opportunities to develop their own skills, self-improvement, autonomy, as well as good relationships in the team were also important for them. Cash rewards were less important.

On the other hand, a survey conducted among employees in 11 hotels (from 3 to 5 stars) in two provinces in northern Poland proved that the sense of autonomy at work positively influenced the employees' use of their skills and talents and further resulted in high quality of hotel guest service [Grobelna et al., 2015]. Results of this study also correspond with previous works from the hospitality setting which confirm that employees' work engagement may positively relate with the level of employees' job performance [e.g., Li et al., 2012; Karatepe, 2013b, 2015; Karatepe et al., 2013; Grobelna, 2019], in-role performance [e.g., Karatepe et al., 2018], and extra-role customer service [e.g., Karatepe, 2013b, 2015; Karatepe et al., 2013].

Based on the above, it can be said that intrinsically motivated employees, being fully engaged in their work, successfully deal with customer service, both prescribed-role and extra-role one that go beyond guests' expectations, which may play an especially pivotal role in enhancing guests' satisfaction and a providing a feeling of exceptional service experience.

5.1 Implications

The concept of this research reflected an integrated approach with a view to helping better understand the factors that shape hotel employees' work engagement and its possible relationship with customer service provided by employees working in frontline hotel job positions. This study also adds to the growing body of research on employees' work motivation, particularly focusing on the intrinsic dimension which has still not received enough empirical attention in both management and marketing literature in the hotel industry [e.g., Grobelna et al., 2016]. Finally, as far as the authors know, this is also one of the first studies that focus on identifying intrinsic job-related motivating factors related to work engagement and its service outcomes in a single research concept that has been verified by using data of hotel employees in Poland.

As to practical implications, it would be worth pointing out here what actions can be recommended to managers so that they can effectively strengthen internal motivation and hence involvement in work of their subordinates and their customer service.

Analyzing the research on the above-mentioned issue, it is possible to propose, among others, the following activities [Condly and DiPietro, 2004; Chuang et al., 2009; Domżalska, 2014; Grobelna and Mazurkiewicz, 2014; Jagannathan, 2014; Lazauskaite-Zabielske et al., 2015]:

- enriching work by increasing the empowerment and responsibility of employees,
- creating a good climate at work and positive interpersonal relations,
- caring for the good of colleagues and customers,
- ensuring good communication in the team of employees,
- introducing to professional tasks and supporting new employees by mentors,
- giving employees more autonomy and more responsible tasks to perform,

- creating systems of incentives that will differ depending on the type of organizational unit and the scope of employee's duties,
- expressing appreciation for the employee's achievements,
- offering stable working conditions, e.g., full-time work,
- creating opportunities for employee development, e.g., through additional trainings,
- being open to employees' ideas and suggestions,
- listening to employees and responding to their requests, suggestions, and comments,
- providing support to employees in the event of difficulties,
- involving managers themselves in the work and setting a good example by them, which can translate into the results of the entire organization,
- conducting systematic surveys among employees on motivating and demotivating factors at work, using methods developed by social sciences, e.g., the Commitment and Necessary Effort (CANE) model,
- exchanging experience between managers working in the hospitality industry on employees' motivation and involvement in the tasks entrusted to them.

5.2 Limitations

This study also has some limitations that may open up an opportunity for future research [B.C.P. Kim et al., 2009]. As this study was conducted on a small sample of employees from only six hotel establishments, its results cannot be generalized. Thus, the future research in a broader hospitality setting with a larger sample is suggested. Moreover, because the data were collected through a cross-sectional survey, using longitudinal data in future work is recommended. Finally, as in this study, data were collected through a self-administrated questionnaire, the common method bias might potentially have threatened the obtained results [Karatepe and Uludag, 2008; Chen et al., 2014; Lee and Ok, 2015]. Therefore, applying more objective measures and multiple data sources (e.g., supervisory or customer assessments of frontline employees' in-role and extra-role service) is advised for future studies.

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