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Article

Predicting proactive service performance: The role of employee engagement and positive emotional labor among frontline hospitality employees

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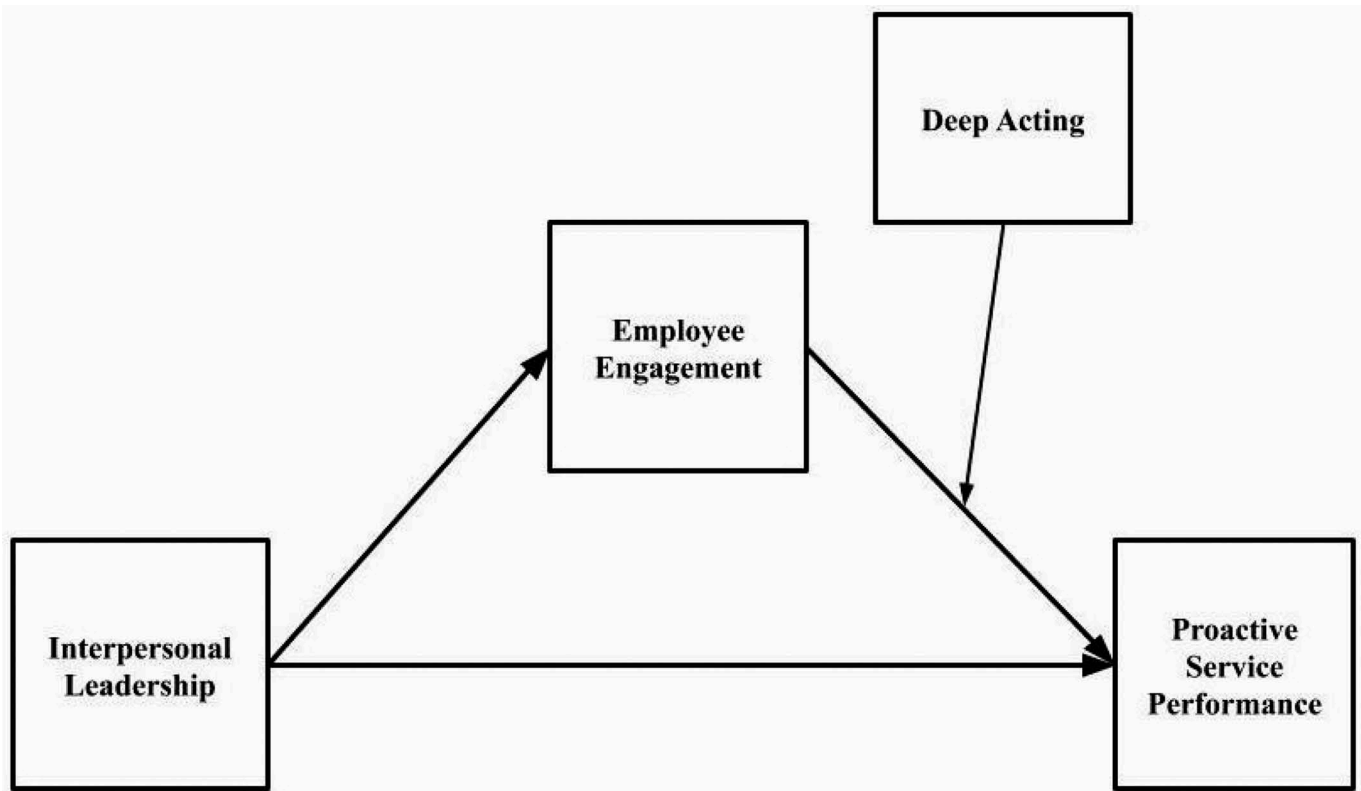
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MANAGEMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Predicting proactive service performance: The role of employee engagement and positive emotional labor among frontline hospitality employees

Muhammad Zia Aslam^{1*}, Mohammad Nazri Mohd Nor¹, Safiah Omar¹ and Hasnun Anip Bustaman²

Abstract: While previous research has improved our knowledge of how leadership influences employee behavior, the role of potential processes and contingencies in this relationship remains relatively unexplored. In the current study, based on the Self-determination Theory (SDT), we intend to contribute to this research by investigating whether employee engagement significantly plays the role of an intervening mechanism between employees' perceived interpersonal leadership of their supervisor and proactive service performance. Moreover, positive emotional labor (i.e., deep acting) is tested as a moderator to understand whether or not the strength of the relationship between employee engagement and employee proactivity is more for those who show more deep acting. Results of an online survey study among 438 frontline hospitality employees in Malaysia revealed that while employee engagement is a significant mediator in the relationship between interpersonal leadership and proactive service performance, positive emotional labor moderates the relationship between employee engagement and proactive service performance. Therefore, the findings of the current study provide initial evidence about how and for whom positive interpersonal leadership employee perceptions

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Proactivity is a dynamic employee behavior that promotes superior work performance, workplace creativity, and personal as well as organizational well-being. Therefore, finding evidence about how to develop a proactive workforce is a topic of significant importance for organizational scholars. Leadership, in this regard, has been found as a potent organizational resource for employees' proactive motivation and behavior. Hence, the findings of the current study provide initial evidence on the importance of interpersonal leadership in promoting employee engagement and proactive work behavior, especially for those who show higher positive emotion regulation or deep acting emotional labor strategy. These results are particularly important for the services industry, where frontline employees' (pro)active service behavior is one of the most critical factors of competitive advantage and success.

promote employee proactivity of frontline hospitality employees. Implications of the findings for the practice and research are discussed.

Subjects: Asian Business; South East Asian Business; Human Resource Management; Hospitality; Hospitality Management; Work & Organizational Psychology; Personnel Selection, Assessment, and Human Resource Management; Business, Management and Accounting; Human Resource Management

Keywords: proactive service performance; leadership; engagement; positive emotional labor; hospitality employees; Malaysia

1. Introduction and the motivation of the study

In today's highly competitive world, working adults spend most of their awake time at the job (Michaelson et al., 2014). Therefore, their overall well-being and satisfaction with life are strongly linked to work-related experiences and behaviors (Allan et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2019; Unanue et al., 2017). According to the United Nations General Assembly's sustainable development goals (SDGs), decent work for all and good health and well-being are two of the seventeen global goals set to achieve a better world by 2030. So, it is crucial to develop healthy workplaces and positive employee behaviors for a prosperous future of the world. The nature of work, however, has been continuously changing with time, and a slow and steady takeover of the services industry is proceeding in the global economy (Pugh & Subramony, 2016). However, the services sector is comprised of multiple subsectors, such as travel and tourism services, health services, and education services. Among these, the travel and tourism services industry, nonetheless, has emerged as a significant economic, social, and environmental factor in the last forty years (Scott & Gössling, 2015). Furthermore, it has the potential to reduce poverty, foster employment, and involve local communities for a sustainable future (Almuhri & Al-Azri, 2019).

In fact, during the recent past, tourism has opened up the road to prosperity for many underdeveloped nations worldwide. Malaysia, for instance, is one such splendid example of success where it played a vital role in the prosperity of the people and economic progress of the country. As Malaysia is the study site of the current research, it is pertinent to provide the state of the economic statistics. According to the Malaysian Department of Statistics, the overall services sector share in the total GDP was recorded at about 58% in the third quarter of 2019. Similarly, the services sector held about 52% share in the Malaysian job market as of the second quarter of 2019. The most significant statistic concerning this study, however, is the overwhelming share of tourism services in total services revenue of Malaysia. In the third quarter of 2019, tourism services revenue (MYR 358.6 billion) was recorded almost 80% of the total services revenue (MYR 449.7 billion) in Malaysia.

Employees, however, remain at the very center of the services economy. Bolton (2014), in this context, very rightly said, "what remains to create a differentiating strategy is that it must be elevated to a 'uniquely human' approach" (p. 264). Therefore, in the times of global paradigm shift to experience economy (Van Soest & Vogt, 2019), the importance of frontline service employees for excellent customer experience (Ramirez, 2019) as well as customer loyalty (Smith, 2018) is an open secret of success for the services centered businesses. It is so because customer service is an intangible product, and the quality of this product significantly predicts customer satisfaction and, in turn, engagement in value creation for the organization (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2014). Besides, the significance of the active role of service employees in achieving customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and long-term relationship with customers is a supported fact in extant hospitality literature (e.g., Kim, 2008; Liao & Chuang, 2004, 2007; Maria Stock et al., 2017; Masberg et al., 2004; Raub & Liao, 2012).

Proactivity is one such dynamic employee behavior that promotes superior work performance (Lee & Lee, 2018), creative work behavior (Bakker et al., 2019; Op den Kamp et al., 2018), and

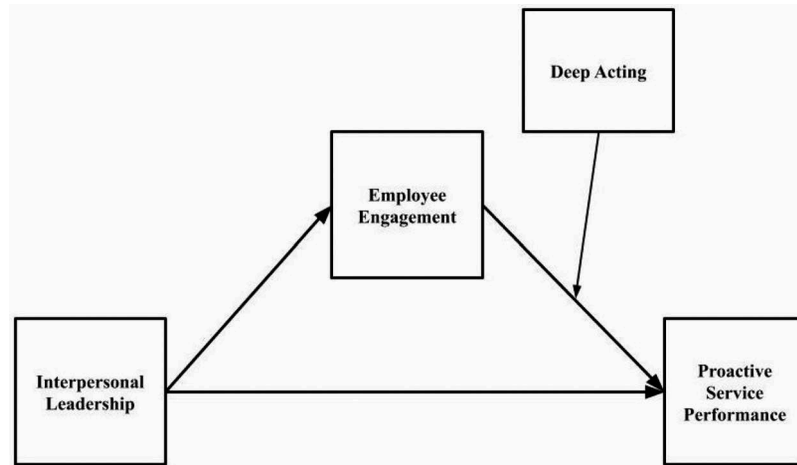
employee well-being (Cangiano & Parker, 2015; Cangiano et al., 2019; Otto et al., 2019). So, it is likely that proactively motivated frontline employees, through their initiative and drive to excel, provide excellent guest experience to hotel customers (Vachon, 2013). It can result in a unique competitive advantage for hospitality organizations. It is so because, on the one hand, proactive people do not follow the status quo and take the initiative to achieve a self-determined future for not only themselves but for others too (Grant, n.d.). On the other hand, they inspire bystanders as well for taking self-started action to thrive (AngelaN, 2019).

Therefore, proactivity is one commendable phenomenon that makes people forward-looking and active in foreseeing problems and opportunities to deal with (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Scientific evidence supports this hypothesis of positive outcomes associated with workplace proactivity (see for review, Fuller & Marler, 2009; Thomas et al., 2010). Hence, it is likely that the proactive behavior of frontline hospitality employees might have the potential to turn dreadful business situations around for the hotel industry. Significant theoretical work has been done during the last two decades to develop comprehensive proactivity models (e.g., Bindl & Parker, 2010; Parker & Collins, 2010; Parker & Wang, 2015; Parker et al., 2010; Wu & Parker, 2011). As a result, organizational scholars have been showing a burgeoning interest in researching proactive forms of employee behaviors (Parker & Bindl, 2017). Similarly, hospitality researchers have recently started giving importance to active forms of employee behaviors by investigating well-thought proactive service performance research models (e.g., Chen et al., 2016; Lyu et al., 2016; Raub & Liao, 2012; Wu et al., 2016).

However, by and large, passivity dominates in the employee performance empirical literature because organizational researchers frequently neglect proactive forms of employee behaviors (Parker & Bindl, 2017). Moreover, this gap is even more severe in the services management literature (Raub & Liao, 2012). As a result, the lack of evidence-based solutions regarding the development of a proactive workforce, especially in the services sector, is alarming for theory and practice. Though fragmented organizational literature on active forms of employee behavior played a vital role in the dearth of research on the topic in the services literature, management and organizational psychology researchers also ironically have almost totally conceded the ownership of the customer service domain to marketing disciplines (Bowen, 2016). In a recent annual review published in the Annual Reviews, Groth et al. (2019) documented the dominance of customer-focused interpretation of services research by stating, “customer service performance has been almost exclusively examined from the customer’s perspective” (p. 103). So, it is of practical importance to study employee-focused service performance behaviors. Thus, to fill the literature gap mentioned above, we developed a theory-based mediating-moderating research model in this study (see Figure 1). Hence, the proposed research model of the current study to find possible distal and proximal predictors for the development of proactive service performance in frontline hospitality employees is timely and novel.

Based on self-determination theory (SDT: Deci et al., 2017), the primary purpose of this study is to develop and test a model of proactive service performance with interpersonal leadership as the distal contextual factor influencing the criterion through a proximal motivational state, employee engagement. Furthermore, positive emotional labor (cf. Humphrey et al., 2015), conceptualized as the deep acting emotion regulation strategy (Grandey, 2000), has been tested as a condition on the relationship between employee engagement and proactive service performance. Subsequently, the results of this study might contribute to research and practice in multiple ways. First, based on a well-established motivation theory (i.e., SDT), this research uniquely contributes to the body of knowledge by integrating literature from proactivity, leadership, justice, engagement, and emotional labor. Second, the current study is one of the very few empirical investigations in the management research using the positive side of emotional labor in the employee behavior research model (see exceptions e.g., Maneotis et al., 2014). While conceptualizing deep acting emotion regulation strategy as the condition on the relationship between employee engagement and proactive service performance, our study might

Figure 1. Research Framework.



provide evidence in support of Parker et al. (2010) and Parker and Griffin (2011). They argued that motivational states (such as employee engagement) per se might not represent or lead to active employee performance without the presence of some individual or job-related conditional factor. Third, findings of this study might support the importance of inclusive leadership styles (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018), such as interpersonal leadership, in enhancing employee engagement and, in turn, proactive service behavior. Finally, different from the negative perceptions associated with emotional labor, the results of this study might emancipate management researchers and service managers of the negative perceptions unquestionably linked with the concept of emotional labor. Figure 1 represents the research model of this study.

2. Proactive service performance

Although there remains a conceptual muddling about workplace proactivity in employee behavior literature (cf. Crant, 2000; Grant & Ashford, 2008), we agree with Parker et al. (2010) generally accepted fundamental characteristics of proactive work behavior. Those generally accepted characteristics are self-starting, change-oriented, and future-focused. In other words, any action satisfying the necessary conditions of being self-initiated, change-oriented, and future-focused can be called proactive. Moreover, this phenomenon is beyond job-role limitations (i.e., in-role, extra-role), as any job-related behavior can be performed more or less proactively (Carpini et al., 2017; Grant & Ashford, 2008). Importantly, however, though proactive behavior and organizational citizenship are discretionary behaviors, they are fundamentally different such that the former is necessarily based on a self-initiated process while the latter is primarily based on altruism (Den Hartog & Belschak, 2007; W.-D. Li et al., 2017).

Context plays a vital role in distinguishing proactive behaviors (Parker et al., 2006). So we define proactive service performance in this study as the degree of an “individual’s self-started, long term oriented, and persistent service behavior that goes beyond explicitly prescribed performance requirements” (Rank et al., 2007, p. 366). Since Rank et al.’s definition and development of a measure of proactive service performance, this operationalization has been regularly used in hospitality management research (e.g., Chen et al., 2016; Raub & Liao, 2012).

3. Theory and hypotheses development

In line with Kurt Lewin’s famous quote, “there is nothing as practical as a good theory” (as noted by Vansteenkiste & Mouratidis, 2016, p. 119), this study is based primarily on self-determination theory (SDT: Deci et al., 2017), which is an evidence-based individual-level theory of human motivation. On the one hand, the SDT recognizes the inherent human capacities to achieve the

optimal level of psychological, social, and behavioral functioning. On the other hand, it posits that it is the psychological and social environment that plays a central role in the facilitation or prevention of prime human performance (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The degree of innate desire to thrive, however, depends on the type of motivation one has in the result of the satisfaction of universal basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci et al., 2017; Vansteenkiste & Gagné, 2013).

3.1. Interpersonal leadership and proactive service performance

Based on Hansen et al. (2014), we conceptualize interpersonal leadership as an inclusive leadership style formed by three distinct but theoretically related concepts, i.e., transformational leadership, interpersonal justice, and informational justice. Interpersonal justice, together with informational justice, represent interactionally fair leadership characteristics, which share theoretical conception with transformational leadership. Hence, collectively forming a high-value leadership style showing care, support, empathy, and respect for the followers. While IL is a recently conceptualized higher-order construct, to the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical evidence of the relationship between IL and any proactive form of employee behavior. Components forming IL, such as transformational leadership, however, does have theoretical (Wu & Parker, 2011) as well as empirical (e.g., Schmitt et al., 2016) support for being a significant predictor of proactive behavior. Similarly, Narayanan and Rajaratnam (2019) found a significant relationship between leadership styles and service quality improvement in the hospitality sector of Malaysia. Likewise, though limited, literature highlights as well the importance of organizational respect and fairness (e.g., Al-Atwi, 2018; Rogers & Ashforth, 2017).

In this study, we argue that interpersonal leadership positively predicts proactive service performance in different ways. First, according to SDT, social context is vital in supporting or thwarting optimum individual performance (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Frontline hospitality employees require an environment that facilitates their initiative. So, the perceived positive vibes signaled by the leader might provide a facilitating context for subordinates to perform optimally. On the contrary, the negatively perceived leadership behaviors might represent a context devastating for motivation of personal initiative (e.g., Y. Li et al., 2016). Second, perceptions of a nourishing environment, safe for personal initiative, would encourage frontline hospitality employees to act thoroughly as their responsibility in a reciprocal way. Finally, experiencing a positive supporting context would motivate frontline hospitality employees to take the initiative. Hence, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1. Interpersonal leadership is positively related to proactive service performance.

3.2. The mediating role of employee engagement

Based on previous literature (i.e., Kahn, 1990; Rich et al., 2010; Shuck et al., 2017), we define employee engagement as the degree of an employee's positive, active, work-related psychological state of motivation represented by the simultaneous investment of his/her cognitive, emotional, and physical energies in performance outcomes. The importance of this construct as a motivational state in connection with SDT is evident from Meyer and Gagne (2008) seminal work "employee engagement from a self-determination theory perspective," in which they explained the common theoretical grounds of employee engagement and autonomous motivation.

In this study, we argue that engagement is vital for frontline hospitality employees in numerous ways. First, according to SDT, positive contextual cues by interpersonal leadership would stimulate engagement through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs and, in turn, might predict the proactive service behavior of frontline hospitality employees (Deci et al., 2017). Second, both theoretical (e.g., Saks & Gruman, 2014) as well as empirical evidence (e.g., Hayati et al., 2014; Tims et al., 2011) support the relationship between transformational leadership and employee engagement. Similarly, the relationship between employee engagement and proactive

behaviors is also warranted (e.g., Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008; Warshawsky et al., 2012). Besides, it is justified from the literature that employee engagement is a significant mediator between contextual factors and proactive behaviors (e.g., Ayu Putu Widani Sugianingrat et al., 2019; Cumberland et al., 2017). Deriving from the above, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2. Interpersonal leadership is positively related to employee engagement.

Hypothesis 3. Employee engagement is positively related to proactive service performance.

Hypothesis 4. Employee engagement mediates the relationship between interpersonal leadership and proactive service performance.

3.3. The moderating role of positive emotional labor

It is the very nature of customer service employees' job to regulate their felt emotional demands through emotion regulation strategies such as surface acting and deep acting: deep acting is changing internal feelings to match expressions while surface acting is faking only behavior to match with expressions (Grandey, 2000, 2003). In the current study, however, taking inspiration from Humphrey et al. (2015), we agree with the thought of the "bright side" of emotional labor and its significance for active employee behaviors. So, we conceptualize deep acting as the positive aspect of emotional labor and define it as the degree of effort of an employee in modifying inner feelings to match expressions (Grandey, 2003). This conception of emotional labor goes with the fundamental tenet of SDT as well, which says that every human has the innate desire to strive for excellence. So, in this study, we argue that engagement would transform into proactive behavior more strongly for those frontline hospitality employees who positively and innately regulate their feelings. Hence, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 5. Emotional labor moderates the relationship between employee engagement and proactive service performance, such that the relationship is stronger at high rather than the low level of emotional labor.

4. Research design and methods

4.1. Participants and procedures

The sample (N = 438) of this study is collected from the frontline (customer contact) employees of the hospitality industry in Malaysia. A cross-sectional self-report online survey is conducted through LinkedIn and Facebook. A screening question, however, was added at the start of the study questionnaire to make sure that the respondents represent the true population of interest. The screening question was worded as, "Is guest (customer) service your primary responsibility?". Purposive sampling was used to collect data because it was impossible to fulfill the condition of probability sampling to have a full list of customer-service employees of the hotel industry in Malaysia (Rowley, 2014). Similar to well-accepted paid crowdsourcing platforms for academic research such as Amazon's MTurk (cf. Chambers et al., 2016; Miller et al., 2017), LinkedIn and Facebook are two progressive social media platforms with billions of users. Furthermore, the educational community recognizes both social media platforms as valid tools for data collection (cf. Kosinski et al., 2015; Roulin & Levashina, 2019).

4.2. Measures

Proactive service performance is measured with a 7-items scale of Rank et al. (2007). This scale used a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Employee engagement is measured with 12-items job engagement scale (JES) of Rich et al. (2010), measuring reflective dimensions of cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement with 4-items each. This scale used a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Interpersonal leadership is a type-II reflective-formative higher-order construct (cf. Sarstedt et al., 2019) measured by three distinct dimensions forming this construct. So, transformational leadership is measured with a 7-items global transformational leadership (GTL) scale of Carless et al. (2000), interpersonal justice and informational justice are measured with 3-items each from the abridged measure of

organizational justice of Hansen et al. (2013). These scales used a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always). Deep acting is measured with a 4-items scale of Diefendorff et al. (2005). This scale also used a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 7 (always).

5. Data analysis and findings

Statistical package for the social sciences version 22 (SPSS) is used for descriptive statistics, and partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) is used for hypotheses testing. PLS-SEM is used for its suitability as a constructive multivariate data analysis technique for better results (Hair et al., 2013) in various fields of social sciences and business research (Hair et al., 2014; Henseler, 2016), such as knowledge management (Cepeda-Carrion et al., 2019) and tourism (Do Valle & Assaker, 2016). Furthermore, PLS is a preferred path modeling technique for complex and prediction oriented research models in hospitality and human resource management (HRM) research (Ali et al., 2017; Ringle et al., 2020). SmartPLS 3.2.8 (Ringle et al., 2015) is used as a comprehensive PLS-SEM software (Sarstedt & Cheah, 2019) in testing research hypotheses of this study in one single model.

5.1. Results of the study

5.1.1. Descriptive statistics

As for the demographic characteristics, 52.6% of respondents were male. Age-wise, 21 to 30 years received the most frequency of responses, with 45% respondents. In current experience, most respondents (29.5%) fell in the category of 1 to 3 years of experience with the current hotel. Table 1 represents satisfactory descriptive statistics of the study variables with moderate level correlations between study variables.

5.1.2. Measurement (Outer) model analysis

5.1.2.1. Reliability and convergent validity. For reflective measurement models in PLS-SEM, cutoff values of internal consistency (i.e., Cronbach alpha ≥ 0.70 and composite-reliability-CR ≥ 0.70), and convergent validity (i.e., item-loadings ≥ 0.60 , average variance extracted-AVE ≥ 0.5) should meet the given criteria (Hair, Hult et al., 2017; Ramayah et al., 2018). Table 2 represents satisfactory outer model outputs of all the reflective constructs of the study, establishing internal consistency (reliability) and convergent validity of the variables. Moreover, as recommended by Sarstedt et al. (2019), we provided the measures for reliability (CR = 0.93), and convergent validity (AVE = 0.82) for the reflective higher-order construct employee engagement.

For formative measurement models in PLS-SEM, three conditions are needed to be met; redundancy analysis (Path Coefficient (β) ≥ 0.70), the significance of the weights of formative items' (dimensions in this case), and the test of multicollinearity (VIF < 5) between formative dimensions

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Proactive Service Performance	5.44	0.768	1					
2	Employee Engagement	5.59	0.731	.581**	1				
3	Deep Acting	5.55	0.913	.477**	.724**	1			
4	Transformational Leadership	5.17	1.077	.542**	.502**	.436**	1		
5	Interpersonal Justice	5.21	1.079	.523**	.513**	.473**	.666**	1	
6	Informational Justice	5.42	0.869	.411**	.408**	.353**	.613**	.561**	1

Note: (N = 438) SD is Standard Deviation. Matrix represents two-tailed Pearson Bivariate Correlation with ** p<.01, * p<.05. Transformational Leadership, Interpersonal Justice, and Informational Justice are the distinct first-order dimensions of the second-order formative construct "Interpersonal Leadership".

Table 2. Reflective Measurement Model Analysis

Construct (2 nd Order)	Dimension/Construct (1 st Order)	Item	Loading	Cronbach Alpha (α)	CR	AVE
Employee Engagement		Cog-E	0.915	-	0.932	0.820
		Emo-E	0.910			
		Phy-E	0.892			
	Cognitive Engagement	EE1	0.854	0.884	0.920	0.743
		EE2	0.894			
		EE3	0.874			
		EE4	0.824			
	Emotional Engagement	EE5	0.843	0.887	0.922	0.747
		EE6	0.856			
		EE7	0.889			
		EE8	0.868			
	Physical Engagement	EE9	0.850	0.877	0.915	0.730
		EE10	0.859			
		EE11	0.865			
		EE12	0.843			
	Proactive Service Performance	PB1	0.658	0.870	0.899	0.561
		PB2	0.766			
		PB3	0.661			
		PB4	0.806			
		PB5	0.779			
PB6		0.795				
PB7		0.765				
Deep Acting	DA1	0.868	0.885	0.920	0.742	
	DA2	0.873				
	DA3	0.865				
	DA4	0.840				
Transformational Leadership	IL1	0.889	0.952	0.960	0.776	
	IL2	0.914				
	IL3	0.904				
	IL4	0.886				
	IL5	0.876				
	IL6	0.819				
	IL7	0.877				
Interpersonal Justice	IL8	0.865	0.843	0.905	0.762	
	IL9	0.914				
	IL10	0.838				
Informational Justice	IL11	0.903	0.857	0.913	0.778	
	IL12	0.881				
	IL13	0.862				

Note: CR is composite reliability and AVE is average variance extracted. Cognitive Engagement, Emotional Engagement, and Physical Engagement represent the reflective first-order dimensions of the reflective second-order construct, Employee Engagement. Transformational Leadership, Interpersonal Justice, and Informational Justice are the first-order reflective dimensions forming the higher-order formative construct, Interpersonal Leadership.

Table 3. Formative Measurement Model Assessment

Construct (2 nd Order)	Dimension (1 st Order)	Convergent Validity	VIF	Weight	t-value	Sig.
Interpersonal Leadership		0.871 (67.246)				
	TL		2.11	0.63	47.44	<0.001
	Inter-J		1.93	0.25	33.42	<0.001
	Infor-J		1.72	0.24	28.12	<0.001

Note: Convergent validity shows the value of the path coefficient in redundancy analysis. VIF is the variance inflation factor. TL (Transformational Leadership), Inter-J (Interpersonal Justice), and Infor-J (Informational Justice) represent the 1st order dimensions of the 2nd order formative construct “Interpersonal Leadership”.

(Hair, Hollingsworth et al., 2017; Hair, Hult et al., 2017). As is manifested in Table 3, the higher-order formative construct of this study is a valid reflective-formative type-II construct (Becker et al., 2012). Because, first, weights of the first order dimensions forming interpersonal leadership are found significant, i.e., transformational leadership ($\beta = 0.63, p < .001$), interpersonal justice ($\beta = 0.25, p < .001$), and informational justice ($\beta = 0.24, p < .001$). Second, VIF measures for all three dimensions are considerably less than 5, confirming there is no multicollinearity problem between the dimensions forming interpersonal leadership. Finally, the path coefficient of redundancy analysis ($\beta = 0.871$), conducted with its first-order dimensions and a global item, is also significantly higher than the threshold i.e., 0.70 (Hair, Hult et al., 2017).

5.1.2.2. Discriminant validity. Discriminant validity is a measure of the degree of accuracy to which items measure their respective constructs. It establishes the discrete position of study variables. Fornell-Larcker (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), traditional criteria, and Hetrotrail-Monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT: Henseler et al., 2015), a comparatively new but preferred test in PLS-SEM, are the two well-established measures of discriminant validity (Hair, Risher et al., 2019). Table 4 confirms the discriminant validity according to the Fornell-Larcker criteria, as the square root of the AVEs (given on the diagonal line) is higher than the shared variance between variables (Hair, Sarstedt et al., 2019). Similarly, the output of HTMT criteria provided in Table 5 also confirms the discriminant validity of the constructs, as all values are less than 0.85. Besides, none of the bias-corrected confidence intervals, in parenthesis of Table 5, contain the value of 1 in any of the constructs, and so confirming discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015; Ramayah et al., 2018).

5.1.3. Common method variance

Although procedural remedy measures, such as anonymity and disturbance in the causal flow, were taken during the data collection process to avoid common method bias, we used the PLS

Table 4. Discriminant validity based on Fornell-Larcker criteria

	DA	EE	Infor-J	Inter-J	PSP	TL
DA	0.862					
EE	0.725	0.906				
Infor-J	0.359	0.409	0.882			
Inter-J	0.471	0.516	0.565	0.873		
PSP	0.502	0.592	0.428	0.547	0.749	
TL	0.436	0.503	0.613	0.666	0.555	0.881

Note: Square Root of Average Variance Extracted (**SQRT-AVE**) is shown in bold on the diagonal line, whereas other entries stand for intercorrelations between the variables. DA is Deep Acting. EE is Employee Engagement. TL (Transformational Leadership), Inter-J (Interpersonal Justice), and Infor-J (Informational Justice) are the 1st order dimensions of the 2nd order formative construct “Interpersonal Leadership”. PSP is Proactive Service Performance.

Table 5. Discriminant validity based on Hetrotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) Criteria

	DA	EE	Infor-J	Inter-J	PSP	TL
DA						
EE	0.795 (0.729, 0.848)					
Infor-J	0.409 (0.293, 0.519)	0.456 (0.351, 0.567)				
Inter-J	0.545 (0.437, 0.650)	0.577 (0.484, 0.666)	0.665 (0.572, 0.745)			
PSP	0.552 (0.467, 0.647)	0.646 (0.562, 0.725)	0.478 (0.351, 0.579)	0.621 (0.520, 0.707)		
TL	0.474 (0.366, 0.592)	0.531 (0.437, 0.615)	0.678 (0.589, 0.758)	0.744 (0.671, 0.805)	0.598 (0.507, 0.669)	

Note: Parentheses represent bootstrapped bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (LL, UL) at 0.05 significance level. All values in bold represent HTMT ratio of correlations (Less than $HTMT_{0.85}$). DA is Deep Acting. EE (Employee Engagement) is a 2nd order reflective construct. TL (Transformational Leadership), Inter-J (Interpersonal Justice), and Infor-J (Informational Justice) are the 1st order dimensions of the 2nd order formative construct “Interpersonal Leadership”.

marker variable approach to better comprehend CMV (Rönkkö & Ylitalo, 2011). This approach requires the collection of non-relevant items simultaneously with study data collection. We directly adopted three marker items from Lin et al. (2015) to create a method factor in testing CMV. This method factor was added as an independent variable in the baseline study model predicting both endogenous variables of the study, i.e., proactive service performance and employee engagement. Analysis of the method factor model, however, revealed that the marker variable was not significantly related to both the endogenous variables and also did not produce any significant R² change. Hence, PLS marker variable analysis did not find any common method variance issue in the data of this study.

5.1.4. Structural (Inner) model analysis

Figure 2 is the graphical representation of structural model output from SmartPLS analysis. Likewise, Table 6 provides a summary of the results of the path model analysis. First, interpersonal leadership significantly predicted proactive service performance (IL→PSP: $\beta = 0.390$, $p < 0.001$, t -value = 6.91, 95% CI [0.274, 0.497]) and employee engagement (IL→EE: $\beta = 0.562$, $p < 0.001$,

Figure 2. SmartPLS Structural Model Analysis using Latent Variable Scores.

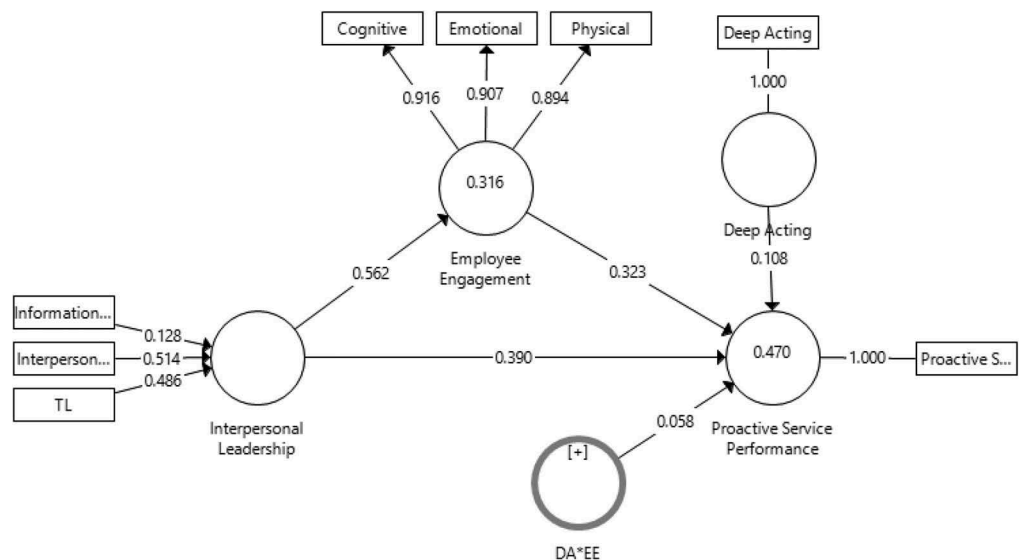
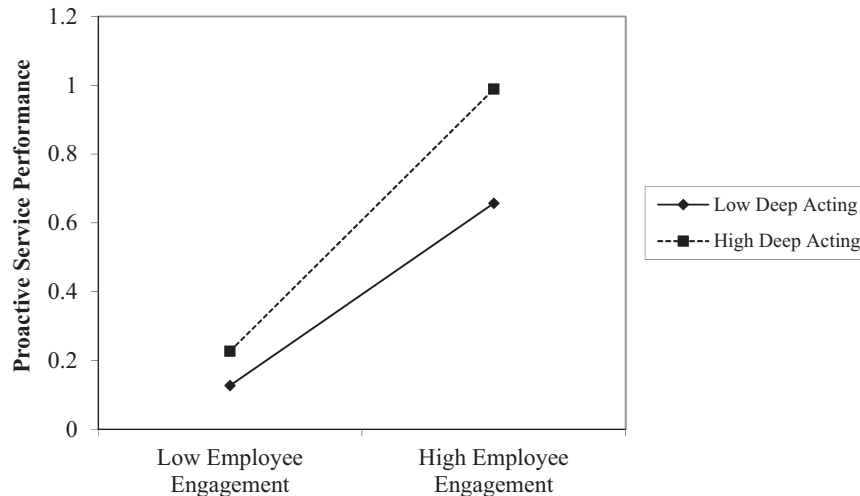


Table 6. Results of Hypotheses Testing

	Relationship	β value	SE	t-value (p-value)	CI-LL (2.50%)	CI-UL (97.50%)	Decision	VIF	f ²	R ²	Q ²
H1	IL→PSP	0.390	0.056	6.91 (<.001)	0.274	0.497	Accepted	1.501	0.191	0.470	0.435
H2	IL→EE	0.562	0.041	13.61 (<.001)	0.472	0.636	Accepted	-	0.461	0.316	0.241
H3	EE→PSP	0.323	0.062	5.19 (<.001)	0.209	0.447	Accepted	2.376	0.083		
H4	IL→EE→PSP	0.182	0.039	4.65 (<.001)	0.113	0.263	Accepted	-	-	-	-
H5	DA*EE→PSP	0.058	0.025	2.27 (0.023)	0.007	0.112	Accepted	1.166	-	-	-

Note: Results are the output of 2-Tailed Bias Corrected and Accelerated (BCa) Complete Bootstrapping with 1000 subsamples at the 0.05 significance level. PSP is Proactive Service Performance. IL is Interpersonal Leadership. EE is Employee Engagement. DA is Deep Acting.

Figure 3. Simple Slope Analysis.



t-value = 13.61, 95% CI [0.472, 0.636]). Thereby hypotheses 1 & 2 are accepted. Second, employee engagement not only directly predicted proactive service performance (EE→PSP: $\beta = 0.323$, $p < 0.001$, t-value = 5.19, 95% CI [0.209, 0.447]), but also played the role of a significant mediator (IL→EE→PSP: $\beta = 0.182$, $p < 0.001$, t-value = 4.65, 95% CI [0.113, 0.263]) between interpersonal leadership and proactive service performance. Thus, hypotheses 3 & 4 are accepted. Finally, hypothesis 5 is also accepted because results comply with both the conditions of moderation analysis. First, the interaction term of the moderator (DA) and independent variable (EE) is significant (DA*EE→PSP: $\beta = 0.058$, $p = 0.023$, t-value = 2.27, 95% CI [0.007, 0.112]) and, second, simple slope analysis (see Figure 3) confirms that the relationship between employee engagement and proactive service performance is stronger when the values of the moderator (Deep Acting) are one standard deviation above the mean.

Finally, results indicate that both the regression models of the structural model are functionally meaningful with large total variance accounted for proactive service performance ($R^2 = 0.470$) and employee engagement ($R^2 = 0.316$) (cf. Cohen, 1988, 1992). Besides, above zero output of the Stone-Geisser's test (PSP, $Q^2 = 0.435$; EE, $Q^2 = 0.241$) confirms the predictive relevance of both the regression models (Hair, Hult et al., 2017).

6. Discussion

In times of intense competition in the hospitality services industry world-over, this study tried to find the means for competitive advantage by finding factors predicting the proactive behavior of frontline employees. In today's experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), organizational science literature widely acknowledges the strategic significance of frontline employees as one of the potent sources of organizational success because "it seems harder to duplicate high-performing human assets than any other corporate resource" (Wirtz & Jerger, 2017, p. 780). However, on the one hand, the customer perspective dominates the employee perspective in broader services management research (Subramony et al., 2017; Subramony & Pugh, 2015). On the other hand, research on passive forms of employee behavior overshadows the research on active forms of employee behavior concepts in extant organizational literature (Parker & Bindl, 2017).

Therefore, based on self-determination theory (SDT), we developed and tested a mediating and moderating model of proactive service performance. Employee engagement is the mediator and positive emotional labor (i.e., deep acting emotion regulation strategy) is the moderator in the proposed research model of this study. Employee engagement is vital because it has recently been found as one of the superior psychological mediating mechanisms connecting contextual antecedents and change-oriented employee behaviors (Ng, 2017). Similarly, the significance of the proposed

role of deep acting as the bright side of emotional labor in the current study is advocated in influential organizational literature (e.g., Ashkanasy et al., 2017; Humphrey et al., 2015).

The results of the study support all the theorized relationships of the research model. Consequently, consistent with previous literature (Hansen et al., 2014), this study confirms the importance of interpersonal leadership in enhancing employee engagement and, in turn, the proactive performance of frontline hospitality employees. We also found that employee engagement is a significant mediator, transferring the impact of interpersonal leadership on proactive behavior. Furthermore, by confirming the deep acting emotional labor strategy as a significant moderator of the workplace proactivity, we provide empirical evidence in favor of the above mentioned bright side of emotional labor. Hence, significant mediation and moderation of the current study provide critical insight into how proactive service performance in frontline hospitality employees can be achieved.

7. Implications for research and practice

The findings of the current study are important for theory in multiple ways. First, the significance of interpersonal leadership in predicting employee engagement and proactive service behavior in this context suggests that IL is an important factor in engaging frontline hospitality employees through the satisfaction of their basic psychological needs. Second, evidence for employee engagement as a significant mediator is one step further in understanding the ways through which proactivity can be achieved. Finally, we provided initial evidence for the importance of the bright side of emotional labor in employee performance research. This finding is congruent with the underlying assumption of SDT that every human being has an innate desire to strive.

The results of this study might guide practitioners of the hospitality industry as well. In the presence of digital rivals such as Airbnb, gradually, it is becoming difficult for hospitality organizations to secure competitive advantage. Hospitality organizations, however, still have an excellent source of competitive advantage, the human factor. Now it is on the business managers in the industry that how they capitalize on this unique advantage. While it is unquestionable that a proactively motivated workforce is the key to success in today's services dominant business world, the results of our study provide valuable information to hospitality managers for developing service leaders based on the characteristics of interpersonal leadership. Doing so, they might satisfy the basic psychological needs of their frontline employees and, in turn, employees might perform optimally. Moreover, while planning training and development activities, hospitality managers can incorporate SDT logic by highlighting the innate desire of every employee to flourish through optimum levels of individual performance.

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