

How high-performance HR practices and LMX impact employee engagement and creativity in hospitality

Abstract

Drawing upon self-determination theory, this research explored the mediating role of psychological empowerment in explaining the interactive effects of high-performance human resource (HR) management practices and the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) on job engagement and employee creativity in hospitality. The theoretical model was tested using data from 485 employees at 73 hotel companies in China. The results showed that high-performance HR practices had a significant influence on employee engagement and creativity through psychological empowerment. The effect of high-performance HR practices on employee engagement was stronger with high-quality LMX. This theoretical framework was empirically tested to better explain the motivational mechanisms underlying employee engagement and creativity, and makes a valuable contribution to advancing the application of self-determination theory in hospitality.

Keywords: High-performance HR practices; LMX (leader-member exchange); Psychological empowerment; Job engagement; Employee creativity; Self-determination theory

Introduction

Employee engagement and creativity leading to customer satisfaction and loyalty are positive employee behaviors appreciated in the hospitality sector (Hon & Lui, 2016; Karatepe & Olugbade, 2016; Liao & Chen, 2018; Ružić, 2015). Job engagement refers to employees' willingness to fully invest themselves into work tasks not only physically but also cognitively and emotionally even without supervision (Chen Yen, & Tsai, 2014; Kahn, 1990; Lu, Lu, Gursoy, & Neale, 2016; Rich, Lepine, & Crawford, 2010). Employee creativity is defined as the production of novel and potentially useful ideas by individuals (Liu, Gong, Zhou, & Huang, 2017; Shalley & Blum, 2009; Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

In dynamic and uncertain environments, HR management in hospitality must recruit talented employees and inspire them to be engaged and creative in adapting with changing customer expectations and needs (Horng, Tsai, Yang, & Liu, 2016; Kim, 2018; Wang, 2016). Due to the nature of hospitality services, where there is simultaneity of service production and consumption, intangibility of service processes and outcomes, and customer involvement in service production, it is difficult if not impossible to do quality control checks after production to ensure service quality (Chuang & Liao, 2010; Hon & Lui, 2016). Evidence shows that job engagement and creativity have positive influences on customer satisfaction-loyalty, quality, profitability, and productivity (Barrick, Thurgood, Smith, & Courtright, 2015), especially in hospitality (Cheng & Chen, 2017; Karatepe, 2013; Hon & Liu, 2016). Therefore, how to promote employee engagement and creativity in the hospitality industry is drawing greater attention in research and practice.

The current research on organizational antecedents of employee engagement and creativity in hotels can be divided into two streams: HRM and supervisory leadership. The HRM stream focuses on the

impacts of organizational HRM systems and processes on individuals, while the supervisory leadership stream emphasizes the effects of interpersonal relationships among leaders and member employees (Leroy, Segers, Van Dierendonck, & Den Hartog, 2018). High performance HR practices are a bundle of practices aimed at improving employee work motivation, capabilities and opportunities to promote enhanced performance (Barrick et al., 2015; Jeroen, Anna, & Jan, 2018; Liu et al., 2017). The research evidence shows that HRM practices are positively associated with employee engagement (Chen, 2018) and creativity (Liu et al., 2017).

As to supervisory leadership, LMX theory highlights the dyadic relationship between leaders and subordinates, which affect employee attitudes and behavior (Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). LMX proposes that the exchange relationships that leaders develop with their followers differ regarding the resources, information, and support exchanged between parties (Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2006; Luo, Wang, Marnburg, & Øgaard, 2016; Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). LMX also significantly influences employee creativity (Lin, Ma, Zhang, Li, & Jiang, 2018; Zhang & Bartol, 2010) and work engagement (Cheng, Chang, & Johnstone, 2013).

However, the existing literature focuses on the individual impacts of HRM practices and LMX on employee engagement and creativity (Chang & Teng, 2017; Hon & Liu, 2016; Liu et al., 2017; Karatepe, 2013), and little attention has been paid to the interaction effects of HR practices and LMX, that may have joint and synergizing effects on employees (Bowen & Schneider 2014; Jiang et al. 2015; Leroy, Segers, Dierendonck, & Hartog, 2018; Madera et al., 2017). Although HR practices and LMX interact in influencing employee attitudes and behavior, their combined effects on employee engagement and creativity remain unclear (Leroy et al., 2018). Messersmith, Patel, Lepak, & Gould-Williams (2011) argued that more research is needed to clarify the role of LMX

and explore how line managers interact with HR practices in impacting engagement and creativity. Together with a need for further exploration of HRM practices and LMX relating to engagement and creativity, researchers are calling for a more fine-grained foundation for engagement (Barrick et al., 2015) and creativity (Horng, Tsai, Yang, & Liu, 2016). Therefore, it is appropriate to take the role of LMX into account to explore how to improve employee engagement and creativity (Alfes et al., 2013; Leroy et al., 2018; Li et al., 2012).

In addition, the dominant perspectives in understanding the relationship between HR practices and LMX, engagement, and creativity are based on social exchange (Jiang, Lepak, & Baer, 2012; Madera, Dawson, Guchait, & Belarmino, 2017). Social exchange theory pertains to the relationship between the organization and employee leading to employee engagement (Alfes, Schantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013) and creativity (Liu et al., 2017). Unfortunately, the social exchange perspective emphasizing the relationship between the employee and organization is neglected with respect to individual initiative in job engagement and creativity.

A neglected possibility in the hospitality literature is that the sense of self-determination, referring to psychological need satisfaction including competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and psychological internalization may impact employee engagement and creativity (Hon & Lui, 2016). According to self-determination theory, the basic psychological needs (competence, autonomy and relatedness) are important antecedents for individual employees, especially the need for competence and autonomy in workplaces, and the psychological internalization process refers to transforming external reasons into motivation (Van den Broeck, Ferris, Chang, & Rosen, 2016). Therefore, according to self-determination theory, psychological needs and internalization focus on psychological empowerment and may offer explanations as to how HR practices and LMX impact

employee engagement and creativity.

Psychological empowerment is defined as a psychological state encompassing four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Psychological empowerment can lead to employee engagement (Joo, Lim & Kim 2016) and creativity (Zhang et al., 2012). Moreover, sustainable employee engagement and creativity may be more driven by intrinsic motivation resulting from psychological need satisfaction and internalization in hospitality (Karatepe, 2013; Kim, 2018; Hon & Lui, 2016). Drawing on self-determination theory, this research proposes that HR practices and LMX are important organizational contexts which combine to impact upon employees' psychological needs leading to positive attitudes and behaviors (Jiang, Chuang, & Chiao, 2015).

Therefore, the goal of this research was to investigate how high-performance HR practices and LMX contribute to employee engagement and creativity in hospitality. There are two main contributions to the literature: First, the moderating effect of LMX on the relationship between HRM and employee outcomes; second, this research adopts assumptions based on self-determination theory and argues that it is the degree of psychological empowerment that makes a difference. The mediating role of psychological empowerment between the interaction of HR practices and LMX with job engagement and creativity is examined. A mediated moderation model was developed to explain how the interaction of leaders' actions and HR practices affects psychological empowerment following Liu, Zhang and Wang. (2012). The hypothesized model is depicted in Figure 1.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Literature Review and Hypotheses

It is proposed that high-performance HR practices and LMX represent critical organizational contexts that improve employee outcomes, including job engagement and creativity. However, how high-performance HR practices impact engagement and creativity is not well understood (Alfes, Shantz, Truss, & Soane, 2013; Karatepe, 2013; Liu et al., 2017), especially in hospitality (Madera, Dawson, Guchait, & Belarmino, 2017). Alfes et al., 2013, Zhong, Wayne, & Liden (2016) suggest that HR practices impact engagement through the social exchanges between organizations and employees. Unfortunately, the social exchange perspective is neglected with respect to individual initiative in job engagement and creativity. According to self-determination theory, all employees have innate, intrinsic, and positive tendencies to develop an elaborated and unified self-cognition (Liu, Chen, & Yao, 2011). There are at least three universal psychological needs, specifically the needs for competence (an individual's belief in his or her capacity to perform tasks with knowledge and skill); relatedness (need to be close to, trusting of, caring for, and cared for by others); and autonomy (the freedom of choice to perform tasks). Self-determination theory contends that the satisfaction of the fundamental human needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness ultimately determines the quality of individual engagement (Meyer & Gagné, 2008) and creativity (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Liu et al., 2016). HR practices and LMX are important organizational contexts which combine to impact upon employees' psychological needs leading to positive attitudes and behaviors (Jiang, Chuang, & Chiao, 2015).

High-performance HR practices and psychological empowerment

Psychological empowerment's four cognitions are meaning, competence, autonomy, and impact.

Meaning refers to feeling one's work is important; competence is defined as the self-efficacy or belief in one's ability to successfully achieve goals; autonomy is the feeling that one can choose the way to carry out tasks; and impact means that the employees view their behaviors as having a significant influence on work outcomes (Spreitzer, 1995; Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

Although psychological empowerment reflects employees' innate and intrinsic task motivation, it can be influenced by HR practices, especially employee experiences with these practices in service delivery (Aryee Walumbwa, Seidu, & Otay, 2012; Liao, Toya, Lepak, & Hong, 2009; Messersmith, Patel, & Lepak, 2011). High-performance HR practices, such as extensive and integrated training improve employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities. Service firms may implement high-performance HR practices to arm employees with more required customer knowledge leading to enhanced capability development (Messersmith et al., 2011). These practices include selecting employees who have the potential to serve customers and training them to pay special attention to customer needs and to solve customer problems. Furthermore, performance feedback and participation in decision making may empower employees with the resources and opportunities to acquire and share the knowledge necessary to meet customer needs (Alfes et al., 2013). These practices help employees feel more confident in their abilities, better understand the meaningfulness of work, and value autonomy. Compensation contingent on service quality, performance-based appraisal, internal promotion, and job security affect organizational climate by building trust and collaboration. This helps employees perceive tasks to be important and meaningful. Service discretion, team participation, and information-sharing characterized as empowerment give employees a feeling of greater control in their work and promote a sense of impact, autonomy, and meaningfulness (Aryee et al., 2012; Messersmith et al., 2011).

Generally, high-performance HR practice enhancement signals to employees that their organizations are building their capabilities, autonomy, meaning, and importance (Aryee et al., 2012). This promotes self-management at work leading to psychological empowerment. Therefore, it is hypothesized that a positive relationship exists between high-performance HR practices and psychological empowerment:

H1₀: High-performance HR practices are not positively related to psychological empowerment.

H1₁: High-performance HR practices are positively related to psychological empowerment.

Moderating effects of LMX

LMX emphasizes the relationships between supervisors and employees. These relationships differ regarding the resources, information, and support provided (Liden et al., 2006; Luo et al., 2016; Wayne et al., 1997). Generally, low-quality LMX relationships have lesser levels of information, trust, and obligation, while high-quality relationships are characterized by mutual trust, respect, obligation, and reciprocation. Empirical studies have found that subordinates who have high-quality exchanges with their supervisors are inclined to receive greater job-related information, better job opportunities, and display higher competency (Park, Kang, Lee, & Kim, 2017).

It is essential to integrate the effects of HR practices and supervisory behavior in managing employee talent because they are the most direct organizational antecedents influencing employees. However, the fields of supervisory leadership and HR practices have developed separately, and the joint and synergistic effects of HR and LMX should be explored (Jiang et al., 2015; Leroy et al., 2018). An interactive effect between high-performance HR practices and LMX may be present in service businesses. HR practices focus on organizational processes that impact employees in a

systematic way; LMX represents the interpersonal influences of supervisors on employees (Leroy et al., 2018). LMX may strengthen the reciprocity in the relationship between HR practices and employees through interpersonal relationships (Alfes et al., 2013).

According to self-determination theory, employees' basic psychological needs can be satisfied through high-performance HR practices. In addition, LMX may strengthen the effects of HR practices on employee psychological empowerment. Evidence shows that LMX supplies significant psychological need satisfaction for employees along with HR practices (Wang & Wong, 2011). With high-quality LMX, employees tend to receive more resources, autonomy, and support; therefore, they may put effort into work tasks with higher perceived empowerment (Kim & George, 2005; Tims, Bakker, & Xanthopoulou, 2011; Wang & Wong, 2011; Zou, Tian, & Liu, 2015).

With high-quality LMX relationships, the leader and follower trust each other, and the employee has the resources and support that promotes experiences, competence, relationships, and autonomy (Leroy et al., 2018). Employees with high LMX can access more information, support, and trust leading to positive experiences and perceptions at work (Cheung & Wu, 2012). The interaction of HR and LMX has a significant influence on employees (Li, Frenkel, & Sanders, 2012; Leroy et al., 2018). For example, leaders instruct employees on how to deliver superior service, help them to learn from past events or experiences, and provide feedback to correct mistakes and reinforce appropriate ways of serving customers (Jiang et al., 2015).

Therefore, it is reasonable to propose that the relationship between HR practices and psychological empowerment is strengthened by LMX quality, and hence:

H2₀: LMX quality does not strengthen the relationship between high-performance HR practices and psychological empowerment.

H2₁: LMX quality strengthens the relationship between high-performance HR practices and psychological empowerment.

Mediation effects of psychological empowerment on the relationship of interactive factors and engagement

HR practices impact employee engagement in a systematic way. They comprise a bundle of practices that influence employee knowledge, skills and abilities, motivation and effort, and provide opportunities for employees to contribute (Jiang et al., 2012). From a strategic perspective, employee engagement is an important and positive behavior in hospitality workplaces enhancing organizational performance (Barrick et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2014). How to fuel employees' passion and increase their engagement is a great challenge, particularly in hospitality (Gannon, Roper, & Doherty, 2015).

High-performance HR practices encourage employee engagement by satisfying the positive human and innate needs for job engagement. Specifically, high-performance HR practices, including comprehensive recruitment and selection, have a potential influence on employees' service knowledge, skills and abilities, and extensive employee training and development can improve hospitality-specific knowledge and skills (Jiang et al., 2015). Furthermore, HR practices such as formal performance appraisals, incentive compensation, and comprehensive benefits attract high-quality employees (Batt and Colvin, 2011). Job security and promotion from within make

employees believe they are valued and invested in for their long-term career development (Liao et al., 2009). Employee participation, teamwork, and information-sharing HR practices positively influence employee perceived autonomy and opportunities to contribute and share knowledge (Jiang et al., 2012; Jung & Yoon, 2016; Messersmith et al., 2011).

In addition, LMX is associated with employee engagement through interpersonal relationship influences. Employees with superior LMX have more information, support, and trust leading to positive attitudes and behavior (Cheung & Wu, 2012). Past research indicates that LMX changes the effects of HR practices on employee outcomes (Jiang et al., 2015). High levels of LMX engender employee motivation and the interaction of HR practices and LMX has a significant influence on employee behavior (Li et al., 2012; Leroy et al., 2018).

The accumulated literature shows that HR practices and LMX have a potential influence on employee work engagement including physical vigor, emotional involvement, and cognitive investment in service firms (Barrick et al., 2015; Li et al., 2012; Meijerink, Bosnehes, & Leede, 2018). Alfes et al. (2013) and Li et al. (2012) found that the systems of HR practices and LMX positively impacted job engagement in services.

How do HR practices and LMX improve employee engagement? This research suggests that job engagement can be influenced by psychological empowerment, which is influenced by HR practices and LMX. According to self-determination theory, all employees have innate, intrinsic, and positive tendencies to develop an elaborated and unified self-cognition (Liu, Chen, & Yao, 2011). There are at least three universal psychological needs, specifically the needs for competence (an individual's belief in his or her capacity to perform tasks with knowledge and skill); relatedness

(need to be close to, trusting of, caring for, and cared for by others); and autonomy (the freedom of choice to perform tasks). Self-determination theory contends that the satisfaction of the fundamental human needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness ultimately determines the quality of individual engagement (Meyer & Gagné, 2008) and creativity (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Liu et al., 2016).

In addition, the self-determination theory focuses on the psychological internalization process (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). HR practices and LMX need to satisfy employee psychological needs, so as to transfer the extrinsic motivation from the HR and LMX to intrinsic psychological motivation to improve employee engagement and creativity. Based on self-determination theory, Meyer and Gagné (2008) proposed that the satisfaction of psychological needs plays a mediating role between work environment impacts and job engagement. The vitality and energy expended in work is enhanced by the satisfaction associated with basic psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Psychological empowerment is presumed to be a contributor to intrinsic motivation (Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

Employees are more engaged in work when their psychological needs are satisfied and inner-directed, and they are more interested in or fascinated with tasks (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). There is a widely held belief that employee behaviors are motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic states (Liu et al., 2011), and intrinsic motivation can be a sustainable source of employee engagement and creativity in service performance. First, employees engage for the enjoyment of the work itself in an intrinsic state. Second, employees engage to obtain goals unrelated to the work. It is thought that intrinsic factors play a more important role in motivation. Such employees tend to be motivated by intrinsic psychological needs and engaged in their work leading to delivering quality service in

hospitality (Karatepe, 2013).

Psychological empowerment emphasizes employees' feelings of competence, autonomy, meaningfulness, and impact in work, where the basic psychological needs are satisfied leading to intrinsic motivation for job engagement and creativity (Chiang & Hsieh, 2012; Liu et al., 2011). Evidence shows that the meaning of work and competence among hospitality employees encourages them to be engaged in their jobs (Lee, 2015; Jung & Yoon, 2016; Paek et al., 2015). Therefore, psychological empowerment is positively related to job engagement.

Psychological empowerment may play a mediating role between the interaction effects of high-performance HR practices and LMX and job engagement. Considerable evidence shows that HR practices and LMX play an important role in determining psychological empowerment that results in job engagement, and the key to engagement is the satisfaction of innate psychological needs. When individuals find that they are more capable to influence performance to a greater degree, they are more likely to be enthusiastic about their work (Gagné & Deci, 2005). When employees feel they can implement a task successfully, they will pay greater attention and be more persistent. Feelings of autonomy, high-quality relationships, positive meanings, and impact can increase employees' energy in work through enhancing their interest and enjoyment. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that psychological empowerment is influenced by the interaction of high-performance HR practices and LMX and impacts employee engagement in hospitality work. It is proposed that the interaction of high-performance HR practices and LMX influence engagement through psychological empowerment:

H3₀: Psychological empowerment does not mediate the relationship of the interaction of

high-performance HR practices and LMX with work engagement.

H3₁: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship of the interaction of

high-performance HR practices and LMX with work engagement.

Mediation effects of psychological empowerment on the relationship of interactive factors and employee creativity

Employee creativity in hospitality consists of idea generation, promotion, and realization in the intentional creation, introduction, and application of new ideas at work (Hon & Lui, 2016). Idea generation usually starts from perceived work-related problems and emerging trends, including problem identification, information search and encoding, and generating alternative ideas. Idea promotion means the sharing of ideas with potential cooperators, such as friends, backers, and sponsors engaging in and providing the necessary supportive power. Idea realization is producing a prototype to ultimately be applied in the organization. The essence of employee creativity is knowledge sharing and transferal, especially in service contexts (Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Hon & Lui, 2016).

HR practices and supervisory leaders must motivate employees to explore new work ideas.

According to self-determination theory, high-performance HR practices contribute to employee creativity by satisfying employees' psychological needs through management processes (Liu et al., 2017). These practices include extensive and integrated training and development, promotion from within, and job rotation providing opportunities for improving employee knowledge, skills, and abilities in creativity (Richter et al., 2012). Teamwork, group-based appraisal, and compensation are positively related to a harmonious organizational climate, in which trust and cooperation facilitate

knowledge exchange, sharing, and team learning behavior, and subsequent novel idea promotion (Hirst et al., 2009; Hon, 2012). Information sharing, job enrichment, and egalitarian participation practices satisfy the need for autonomy, and provide employees with opportunities to carry out tasks that are consistent with organizational goals (Dhar, 2015). He, Gu and Liu (2018) found that high-performance HR practices have a positive impact on employee creativity.

Furthermore, LMX can promote the effects of HR practice on employee creativity through interpersonal communications between supervisors and employees, especially with tacit service knowledge. First, LMX provides employees with more required customer knowledge in idea generation, and participation in decision making, and mutual trust may empower employees with resources and opportunities to acquire and share the knowledge necessary to meet customer needs (Alfes et al., 2013). In high-quality LMX relationships, leaders and followers trust each other and employees get the resources and support from supervisors that enhance experiences, competence, relationships, and autonomy (Leroy et al., 2018). Employees with high LMX can access more information, support and trust leading to positive experiences and perceptions (Cheung & Wu, 2012). The interaction of HR and LMX has a significant influence on employees (Li et al., 2012; Leroy et al., 2018).

Psychological empowerment may mediate the effects of HR practices and LMX on employee creativity based on self-determination theory. Psychological empowerment can create greater employee involvement in creative processes (Chang & Teng, 2017; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). When employees sense more encouragement, autonomy, and support, they will demonstrate greater initiative to identify problems, share information, and produce and promote novel ideas (Kim &

Koo,2017). When employees believe they have influence, they are more likely to put effort into novel and useful idea generation, promotion, and realization (Liao et al., 2018).

In addition, HR practices and LMX may provide enabling resources and opportunity structures that capable employees need to succeed in their endeavors (Bandura, 2001; Horng et al., 2016). HR practice and LMX may influence creativity (Lee, 2015; Richter et al., 2012). Self-determination theory implies that competence, autonomy, and relatedness are essential for promoting individual creativity (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Employees become more creative in an autonomous job with a supportive supervisory style that respects employees' perspectives, recognizes their feelings, and provides job-related choices and information (Liu et al., 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Based on self-determination theory, employee creativity can be viewed as the outcome of high-performance HR practices emphasizing employees' needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy and LMX could strengthen the effects of HR practice through psychological empowerment. Hypothesis 4 was therefore as follows:

H4₀: Psychological empowerment does not mediate the relationship of the interaction of high-performance HR practices and LMX with employee creativity.

H4₁: Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship of the interaction of high-performance HR practices and LMX with employee creativity.

Methodology

Sample and Procedures

The theoretical model (Figure 1) was tested using data from the employees of hotel companies in China which have an emphasis on service quality and creativity in their business strategies. Some 485 employees from 73 companies participated in this research.

There were three reasons for selecting this sample of respondents. First, the hospitality sector is rapidly developing in the economic transformation of China. Second, service quality and employee competence in hospitality in China needs great improvement. Third, HRM in Chinese hospitality firms faces significant challenges from employee burnout, significant turnover, generational changes, and attitudes to service industry employment, leadership styles, and other issues. The respondents were 53.6% male and 46.4% female. Online communications through WeChat, email and QQ were used to collect data. Data gathering was done by the alumni and interns of a hospitality management school at a university in eastern China.

There is an established communication group of alumni working in five-star hotels in China and internship cooperation with chain hotels including InterContinental, Marriott, Hyatt, Banyan Tree, and other companies. The questionnaires were sent through WeChat or QQ. The advantages of WeChat and QQ are in breaking through the geographic limitations and responses are more convenient. The disadvantage lies in the greater difficulty to control response quality. Invalid questionnaires were deleted according to the following criteria: 1. More than three blank responses; 2. Answers with more than eight consecutive similar responses or answering questions with other obvious regularity, and 3. adjacent questionnaires were exactly the same. On average, the respondents were 31.4 years old, had 4.84 years' tenure, and 91.8% had bachelor's degrees or above.

There were 162 front-line employees (33.4%), 136 junior managers (28%), 152 middle managers (31%), and 35 senior managers (7.2%).

Measures

The measures chosen have shown satisfactory psychometric properties in a variety of cultural contexts, including within China. Participants rated high-performance HR practices, LMX, psychological empowerment, employee creativity, and job engagement using five-point Likert scales ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5).

A 27-item scale for high-performance HR practices was adapted from Sun et al.’s (2007) research focused on hotels in China. The scale showed good reliability, with a Cronbach’s α of 0.89. LMX quality was measured with Graen and Uhl-Bien’s (1995) scale. This is a classic scale with acknowledge validity and reliability, and has been applied in Chinese-context research (Wang et al., 2005). Items included “Suggests new ways to achieve goals or objectives” and “Searches out new technologies, processes, techniques, and/or product ideas.” The Cronbach’s α was 0.91. Psychological empowerment was measured with a 12-item scale adapted from Spreitzer (1995) and Zhang and Bartol (2010). The Cronbach’s α was 0.89. Job engagement was measured with an 18-item scale adapted from Rich et al. (2010), including physical, emotional, and cognitive engagement. The Cronbach’s α was 0.94. A 13-item scale from Zhang and Bartol (2010) measured employee creativity. The Cronbach’s α was 0.89. Because past studies have indicated that demographic variables may be related to employees’ behavior, age, gender, education level, position and tenure, and company ownership, they were treated as control variables (Liu et al., 2017).

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA results with LISREL 8.70 showed that the five-factor model (i.e., high-performance HR practices, LMX, psychological empowerment, employee engagement, and employee creativity) fit the data better than alternative models (Table 2). For instance, the five-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 3.35 < 5$; NFI = 0.96; NNFI = 0.97; CFI = 0.97; IFI = 0.97; RMSEA = 0.070) yielded a better fit than the four-factor model formed by combining employee engagement and creativity into one factor. According to the results of CFA on the key variables of high-performance HR practices, LMX, psychological empowerment, employee engagement, and employee creativity, the five-factor model indicated an acceptable fit. Engagement was viewed as a concept defining employees' willingness to fully invest themselves into work tasks, not only physically but also cognitively and emotionally. These three dimensions are more holistic. Following the research of Rich et al. (2010) and Barrick et al. (2015), engagement was treated as the average of these dimensions as outcomes.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Descriptive Statistics

The means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliability statistics for the five key variables are presented in Table 2. The five variables all possessed acceptable degrees of internal consistency and reliability.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Hypothesis Testing

Linear regression was applied to test the mediated moderation model (Figure 1) focusing on how the interactive effects of HR practices and LMX affect psychological empowerment, employee engagement, and creativity. This process explains how the moderator changes the relationship between the independent variable and the mediator, and the relationship between the mediator and outcome variables (Liu et al., 2012). The process was as follows: First, propose a positive relationship between HR practices and psychological empowerment; second, test LMX on the relationship between HR practices and psychological empowerment; and third, develop the mediated moderation model to examine the relationship between HR practices and engagement and creativity as well as the moderating effects of LMX and the mediating effects of psychological empowerment.

H1 suggests that high-performance HR practices have positive effects on employee psychological empowerment. H1 was tested by entering control variables in the first step, and the independent variables of high-performance HR practices in the second step. High-performance HR practices were significantly related to psychological empowerment ($M3: \beta = 0.378, p < 0.001$). The null hypothesis $H1_0$ was rejected. The alternative hypothesis $H1_1$ was supported.

H2 suggested that LMX quality strengthens the relationship between high-performance HR practices and psychological empowerment. H2 was tested by entering control variables in the first step, the independent variables of high-performance HR practices and LMX in the second step, and the interaction of HR practices and LMX in the third step. The interaction of HR practices and LMX was significantly related to psychological empowerment ($\beta = 0.076, p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis $H2_0$ was rejected. The alternative hypothesis $H2_1$ was supported. High-performance HR

practices, LMX and their interaction were positively related with employee psychological empowerment. LMX strengthened the effects of high-performance HR practice on employee psychological empowerment. (Figure 2)

For testing the mediation effects, traditional indirect effects analysis and bootstrap standard error-based tests were used (Messersmith et al., 2011). To test Hypotheses 3 and 4, the procedures suggested by Muller, Judd, and Yzerbyt (2005) and Sun, Song, and Lim (2013) were followed. Three conditions are required to support a mediated moderation model through three-step tests. H3 proposed that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship of the interaction of high-performance HR practices and LMX with work engagement. As a first step, it must be established that HR practices and LMX significantly interact to determine psychological empowerment. In the second step, the mediator (psychological empowerment) was regressed on employee engagement and the interaction between high-performance HR practices and LMX. The interaction terms are required to be significant. Finally, in step 3, the mediator (psychological empowerment) was added into the equation in Model 7 (Table 4), while additionally controlling for the interaction terms between the moderator (LMX) and the mediator (psychological empowerment). Consistent with hypothesis 3, high-performance HR practices and LMX showed a significant interactive effect on employee engagement (M6: $\beta = 0.106$, $p < 0.001$), that was mediated by psychological empowerment (M7: $\beta = 0.560$, $p < 0.001$). The interactive effects on job engagement are depicted in Figure 3. In addition, the bootstrap test confirmed that the indirect effect was significant (M7: 0.41, 0.65, $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis $H3_0$ was rejected. The alternative hypothesis $H3_1$ was supported. Therefore, the interaction of HR practices and LMX had a significant, indirect effect on employee engagement through psychological empowerment.

H4 was tested following the process of H3. As shown in Model 10, the interactive effect of high-performance HR practices and LMX on creativity was no longer significant (M10: $\beta = 0.043$, ns). In addition, the mediation effect of psychological empowerment in the link between high-performance HR practices and employee creativity was not significant (M11: 0.009, ns). The null hypothesis H4₀ was accepted. So, psychological empowerment did not mediate the relationship of the interaction of high-performance HR practices and LMX with employee creativity.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Discussion

This research shows that high-performance HR practices and LMX had significant impacts on employee engagement and creativity. In addition, the interaction of HR practices and LMX had a significant, indirect effect on employee engagement through psychological empowerment. This means that LMX can strengthen the effects of high-performance HR practices on psychological empowerment leading to employee engagement. However, the impact of the interaction of HR practices and LMX on employee creativity was not supported. Post hoc interviews with respondents indicated that for LMX, they found it difficult to differentiate between organizational and supervisory support with respect to creativity. According to the substitutive perspective, there is a substitute effect between HR practices and supervisors. HR practices and supervisors may overlap in the process of customer knowledge sharing in a service context (Jiang et al., 2015) and knowledge sharing plays an important role in the employee creativity process (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Therefore, this may partially explain why the effect of the interaction of high-performance HR practices and LMX on creativity was not significant. Future research should consider the

features of specific environments to explore when and how the interaction of HR practices and LMX influence creativity within different organizational contexts. These findings offer several important theoretical and managerial implications, which are now discussed.

Theoretical implications

The present research makes a valuable contribution to advancing self-determination theory. This theoretical framework was empirically tested to better explain the motivational mechanisms underlying employee engagement and creativity. The central premise of self-determination theory is that the satisfaction of the fundamental need for autonomy produces motivational forces that can unleash human creative potential and engagement (Liu et al., 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Furthermore, this research examined the psychological internalization process by exploring the mediating effects of psychological empowerment between the interactive effects of HR practices and LMX and engagement and creativity. Self-determination theory revealed there is a psychological internalization process representing how individuals transform external contexts to intrinsic motivation. The finding that psychological empowerment focused on intrinsic psychological motivation translates HR practices and LMX into engagement offers evidence that self-determination theory is a useful theoretical lens for exploring engagement as a motivational outcome. In response to the research of Van den Broeck et al. (2016), the findings offer important insights into the combined and synergistic effects of HR practices and LMX for employee propensities to seek psychological need satisfaction when promoting engagement and creativity, and reveal the roles of psychological need satisfaction and internalization processes in improving employee behaviors.

This research extends strategic human resource management and leadership research by examining

the interaction effects of HR practices and LMX on employee outcomes. LMX can strengthen the effects of HR practices on employee psychological empowerment and job engagement. It is acknowledged that both HR practices and LMX are important organizational contexts fueling employee motivation and fostering the employee work engagement and creativity (Cheng et al., 2013; Karatepe, 2013; Lin et al., 2018; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), yet little attention has been paid to the interaction of the two (Leroy et al., 2018). The strategic HR management research focuses on the effects of HR management separately, however, HR management is not implemented in isolation, the effects of HR management can be impacted by other organizational factors. Line managers play important roles. This research provides evidence that HR practices can achieve better effects with appropriate support from supervisors (Leroy et al., 2018). In particular, LMX plays a more important role than HR practices on the engagement and creativity through comparing the standard β index.

In addition, the research contributes to the engagement literature. First, it enhances the theory with a model in which HR practices and LMX are associated with employee engagement in the workplace. Second, the research highlights the role of psychological empowerment as a key mechanism by which important organizational resources (HR practices and LMX) influence employee engagement (Rich et al., 2010). This notion suggests that scholars should not only be concerned with identifying the antecedents and consequences of individual-level engagement, but also recognize that organizations can proactively devote resources toward facilitating engagement. In addition, Kahn's and Rich's theories are extended by considering psychological need satisfaction serving as an important mechanism through which perceived high-performance HR practices impact job engagement and employee creativity. It was proposed that employee engagement and creativity in work was influenced by intrinsic motivation resulting from employees' feelings of meaning,

impacts, autonomy, and self-efficacy in work (psychological empowerment) (Chen, 2018).

Practical implications

Based on theoretically derived hypotheses, this research has important managerial implications for the enhancement of service quality and financial success in hospitality companies.

High-performance HR practices should be applied in hospitality to inspire employee engagement and creativity, especially in today's dynamic environments. High-performance HR practices are a benefit to hotels in China, however, most of the hotels there pay little attention to HR management system design and innovation. However, the era characterized by low labor costs and inferior service quality in hospitality in China has now passed, and high quality developments are increasing with the thriving hotel and tourism sector. With the rapid development of the hospitality industry in China, command-and-control-based HR management is gradually turning to involvement- and innovation-based high-performance practices (Sun et al., 2007; Karatepe, 2013). These practices include selective staffing, extensive training, internal mobility, employee security, clear job descriptions, results-oriented appraisal, incentive rewards, and participation, all of which will improve employee motivation. It is acknowledged that human resources are the basic source of high-quality development in hospitality, and the HRM in hotels faces great challenges in dynamic and uncertain environments (Madera et al, 2017). The spread of high-performance HR practices will promote employee engagement and creativity and hotels and will encourage sustainable high-quality hospitality development.

More importantly, hotels should invest in HR management and LMX training simultaneously. Strategic HR management research and leadership research highlight the effects of HRM and

leadership separately. However, HRM and LMX have joint effects on employee engagement. The results showed that HR practices enable hotels to stimulate greater job engagement through psychological empowerment, with LMX strengthening the effects of HR practices on engagement. Therefore, hotel managers should have training on leadership skills to improve LMX, as high quality LMX improves the employee behaviors at work. However, the HR practices and supervisors may overlap in the process of customer knowledge sharing in a service context (Jiang et al., 2015) and knowledge sharing plays an important role in employee creativity (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Therefore, the beneficial interpersonal effects of LMX should be considered and maintained at an appropriate level.

Hospitality managers should pay more attention to improving employee psychological need satisfaction (competence, autonomy, influence and meaning in the work), especially for the 1980s and 1990s generations' workforces. There are uncertainties about how best to motivate these Millennial employees in hospitality. Prior research emphasizes the commitment relationship between individuals and organizations to improve employee attitudes and behavior. However, even when companies provide generous benefits for them, they still seem to lack adequate passion for their work. This research shows that employee psychological need satisfaction can improve employee engagement with the organization. In addition, the HR practices and LMX as the extrinsic context can be transformed into employee psychological motivation. Practically speaking, the levels of meaning, impact, autonomy, and competence employees perceive in their work tends to be in response to HR practices and high quality LMX. This research provides evidence that managers should improve high-performance HR practices and LMX, thereby generating enhanced feelings of psychological empowerment, more engagement and creativity, and better job performance. The desirable employee attitudes and motivating behaviors that promote enhanced service quality

leading to customer satisfaction and loyalty are important resources of competitive advantage in hospitality. Managers should focus on employees' competence, autonomy, impact, and meaning in work that make unique contributions to fostering desirable service attitudes and behaviors, and ultimately improved financial performance.

Limitations and future research needs

As with any research, this study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design of the research precludes a causality relationship explanation. Longitudinal research exploring the causality relationship between high-performance HR practices and job engagement and creativity over time should be adopted in the future. Second, data were collected only from employees and the single source inevitably leads to common variance, although common variance was tested and was acceptable in this research. Future research should gather data from multiple sources. Third, data were collected through WeChat and QQ, which have the previously mentioned advantages and disadvantages. However, face-to-face surveys should be applied in future research. Fourth, this study focused on how employees perceived high-performance HR practices. The individual level research should be expanded by developing multi-level models to examine the impact and influence of HR practices on outcomes at both the individual and unit levels.

Conclusions

Employing self-determination theory, it was found that high-performance HR practices positively influenced service employees' engagement and creativity in hospitality via psychological empowerment. The mediated moderation effect on employee engagement was strengthened by LMX. This research responded to the call for exploring the effect of LMX on HR practices on employees by Leroy et al.(2018). Positive employee attitudes and behavior are important to organizations, especially within hotels. HRM and LMX are key antecedents of employee attitudes and behavior. HRM focuses on the systems and processes that impact people, while LMX

highlights personal relationships. It is important and interesting to explore the connection between the two streams of research. The research results should help in deepening the theoretical comprehension of hospitality employee behavior research and provide a platform for future related research.

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