How to fuel employees’ prosocial behavior in the hotel service encounter

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ABSTRACT

With mounting customer expectation for excellent service, frontline service employees’ prosocial service behavior is of great importance since it helps enhance customers’ perceived service quality, which is critical for maintaining a hotel’s competitive advantage relative to its comp set. Regardless of the importance of prosocial service behavior, role clarity, perceived organizational support, and psychological empowerment in encouraging employees’ prosocial service behavior has not received much attention. This study examines the effects of the above three predictors on the prosocial service behavior of customer-contact employees. The authors developed a conceptual model of prosocial service behavior and empirically tested it using structural equation modeling. The findings suggest that role clarity and psychological empowerment have a direct influence on prosocial service behavior. Psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between role clarity and prosocial service behavior and fully mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and prosocial service behavior.

1. Introduction

In the last decade, Positive Organizational Scholarship, an academic movement examining the logical and theoretical bases of individual, team, and organizational performance, has received major attention from researchers in academic fields related to human resources (Cameron et al., 2003). Positive Organizational Scholarship concentrates on using positive employee influences to transform firms and organizations into more vigorous and healthier workplaces in which organizational members can achieve their best performance (Bateman and Porath, 2003; Cameron, 2005; Luthans, 2002). Nonetheless, Positive Organizational Scholarship has been given limited attention in the academic field of hospitality since most organizational theory and empirical research have focused on the value and significance of negative phenomena, such as problem solving, managing job stress, and overcoming resistance to change (Cameron et al., 2003). These approaches center on minimizing what is wrong with human and organizational development and do not address the understanding of human strengths and optimal functioning (Luthans et al., 2007). Yet, people tend to excel by maximizing their strengths rather than concentrating on their weaknesses (Buckingham and Clifton, 2001), and thus, it is necessary to understand how organizational strategies can fuel employees’ positive behavioral intentions in the workplace. Prosocial Service Behavior, which is one of the salient outcome variables in Positive Organizational Scholarship, has been re-conceptualized as a compatible construct for the service sector (Bettencourt and Brown, 1997). Considering that the essence of service is helping others and that prosocial service behavior focuses on employees’ helping behavior toward customers or others (coworkers and organization) in service encounters (Bettencourt and Brown, 1997), hospitality companies should give their best efforts to enhance their employees’ prosocial service behavior due to its impact on customers’ perceived service quality and their satisfaction (e.g., Ackfeldt and Wong, 2006; Bettencourt and Brown, 1997), which are crucial to a hospitality firm’s success (e.g., Luoh and Tsaur, 2011; Manhas and Tukamushaba, 2015).

Still, despite the fact that prosocial service behavior is highly valued by the hospitality industry and more research is needed in order to discover the other factors that influence customer contact employees’ service behavior (e.g., Ackfeldt and Wong, 2006; Zou et al., 2015), only a handful of scholars have investigated how to support customer contact employees’ prosocial service behavior (e.g., Cheng and Chen, 2017; Dalvi and Vahidi, 2013; Tsaur et al., 2014) in the hospitality context. Most of the literature has examined the impact of (1) employees’ attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction and organizational commitment) (Dalvi and...
Vahidi, 2013; Limpanitkul et al., 2013), (2) psychological traits, such as job resourcefulness and work engagement (Cheng and Chen, 2017), or (3) situational factors, such as internal communication practice (Malhotra and Ackfeldt, 2016) and job standardization (Tsaur et al., 2014) on employees’ prosocial service behavior. This study fills the current gap by examining how organizational strategies (i.e., role clarity, perceived organizational support, and psychological empowerment) can encourage hotel employees’ prosocial service behavior.

One strategy for enhancing employees’ prosocial service behavior is to set clear role expectations. Role clarity minimizes role stress and helps employees provide higher level of services to their customers (Mukherjee and Malhotra, 2006). When employees know what their work goals are and how to achieve those goals, they are more likely to feel competent at accomplishing their service goals (Hall, 2008). In other words, a clear understanding of roles enhances employees’ service performance. Furthermore, employees with role clarity tend to engage in discretionary helping behaviors at their jobs (Newman et al., 2015). Also, perceived organizational support can enhance an employee’s prosocial service behavior because employees with high perceived organizational support reciprocate their perceived positive support from the organization with a better commitment to work (Karatepe, 2015), in-role performance (Du et al., 2018), and extra-role customer service (Karatepe, 2015). In addition, psychologically empowered employees gain intrinsic motivation that promotes employee discretionary helping behaviors (Chiang and Hsieh, 2012; Lee et al., 2006; Yen et al., 2004), which is essential to accomplishing excellent customer satisfaction and superb service quality in the hospitality industry (e.g., Malhotra and Ackfeldt, 2016).

Moreover, perceived organizational support might enhance employees’ prosocial service behavior because employees with high perceived organizational support reciprocate their perceived positive support from the organization with a better commitment to work (Karatepe, 2015), in-role performance (Du et al., 2018), and extra-role customer service (Karatepe, 2015). Thus, combining intrinsic motivation with clear role expectation and perceived organizational support may strengthen customer-contact employees’ helping behavior toward customers and co-workers. Based on evidence from the literature, employees felt empowered when they had a clear understanding of roles (Hall, 2008) and high perceived organizational support (Afszali et al., 2014), which in return led to their helping behavior toward customers and co-workers (e.g., Chiang and Hsieh, 2012; Spreitzer, 1995). Thus, employees’ psychological perception of empowerment is a vital condition for understanding the underlying mechanism between role clarity/organizational supporting factors and employees helping behavior. However, to the authors’ knowledge, scholars have not yet explored the role of empowerment as a mediator.

Accordingly, this study aims to address the existing gap in the literature of prosocial service behavior by identifying what stimulates employees to care about making a positive difference in the workplace and how their employer fuels their motivation. To do so, this research empirically investigated the joint effect of role clarity, perceived organizational support, and psychological empowerment on the prosocial service behavior of hotel customer-contact employees. Specifically, the authors developed a conceptual model (Fig. 1) of hotel employees’ prosocial service behavior to examine: (1) the effect of role clarity on prosocial service behavior, (2) the effect of perceived organizational support on prosocial service behavior, (3) the potential mediating role of psychological empowerment between role clarity and prosocial service behavior, and (4) the relationship between perceived organizational support and prosocial service behavior with psychological empowerment as a mediator.

2. Literature review

2.1. Prosocial service behavior

When a member of an organization promotes the welfare of another individual, group, or organization while performing his or her duties, that behavior is considered “prosocial organizational behavior” (Brief and Motowidlo, 1986, p. 710). Recognizing the importance of service quality to a firm’s performance, Bettencourt and Brown (1997) were among the first scholars to examine prosocial organizational behavior in a service context and to propose the concept of prosocial service behavior.

Prosocial service behavior is defined as customer contact employees’ helping behavior directed at either coworkers or consumers. It has three dimensions: role-prescribed customer service behavior, extra-role customer service behavior, and cooperation (Bettencourt and Brown, 1997). Role-prescribed customer service behavior refers to service behavior expected from service employees that is implicitly derived from norms or explicitly specified in organizational documents, such as job descriptions or job evaluation forms. Extra-role service behavior refers to the discretionary behavior of service employees who go above and beyond the call of duty to provide customer service that truly stands out. Cooperation refers to service employees’ helpful behavior toward their coworkers within an immediate workgroup and is considered a type of extra-role behavior when employees have not been evaluated for such behavior.

Prosocial service behavior is sometimes used interchangeably with organizational citizenship behavior, as both are prosocial organizational behaviors, although they differ in scope. Prosocial service behavior includes both role-prescribed and extra-role behaviors, whereas organizational citizenship behavior includes only extra-role helping behaviors. Furthermore, excellent customer service in the hospitality industry is often associated with both role-prescribed and extra-role helping behaviors directed toward customers. Thus, the authors chose prosocial service behavior over organizational citizenship behavior as the variable of interest for this study.

2.2. Role clarity, perceived organizational support, and psychological empowerment

Role clarity is when employees give employees the required information about how to complete their jobs (Teas et al., 1979). Role clarity is critical in hospitality operations since clear role expectations influence employee discretionary behaviors (Yadav and Rangnekar, 2014), organizational commitment, customer satisfaction, (De Ruyter
et al., 2001), and customer service quality (Mukherjee and Malhotra, 2006). Without a clear idea of what their work roles are, what is expected of them, and how to complete their tasks, employees struggle with assigning value to their work, determining whether they are capable of performing the work, assessing the amount of influence they have on work outcomes, and deciding whether they have the autonomy to initiate or continue certain work behaviors and processes. Spreitzer (1996) argued that when people are uncertain about their level of authority, they hesitate to act (i.e., lack of self-determination) and, consequently, feel incapable of making a difference (i.e., lack of impact). Conversely, employees feel confident about accomplishing their goals when they have clear work goals and know how to achieve those goals (Hall, 2008).

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) defined psychological empowerment as increased intrinsic task motivation with four cognitive components: impact, competence, meaningfulness, and self-determination. Impact is the extent to which an individual can influence outcomes at work (Hall, 2008). As used in the clinical psychology literature, competence or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, 1986) is a person’s belief that he or she can skillfully perform task activities (Spreitzer, 1995). Meaningfulness refers to the value an individual places on work relative to his or her own ideals and standards (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). Self-determination reflects an individual’s belief that he or she has the choice to initiate and adjust work behaviors (Spreitzer, 1995). Thus, empowerment has been recognized as a motivational construct (c.f., Thomas and Velthouse, 1990).

Scholars in various industries (e.g., manufacturing, financial services, and high technology) have argued that employees have less psychological empowerment when they feel that the scope of their tasks is ambiguous (e.g., Cordery et al., 2010; Hall, 2008; Humbron and Kuvaa, 2013). Blurry roles create role ambiguity, which negatively affects psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1996). On the other hand, clear role expectations and responsibilities enhance effective psychological empowerment for employees (Hall, 2008; Wang et al., 2016). More specifically, role clarity enables employees to actively self-determine because understanding the clear scope of authority leads them to have confidence about their decisions in the issues requiring immediate action (Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Ro and Chen, 2011; Spreitzer, 1996). Furthermore, role clarity motivates employees to contribute to their organizations by helping them to understand both the meaning and influence of their roles for organizational success (Sawyer, 1992; Spreitzer, 1996; Wu et al., 2016). In addition, Hall (2008) highlighted that establishing a clear process and goal helps to increase employees’ self-determination, competence, impact, and meaningfulness. In line with Hall’s (2008) findings, Ro and Chen (2011) emphasized the importance of engaging in service standards communication with employees (i.e., providing guidance regarding expected actions) to enrich three components (i.e., impact, meaning, and competence) of employees’ perceived empowerment. De Villiers and Stander (2011) also found that role clarity positively affects psychological empowerment that consists of meaning, competence, impact, and self-determination. Therefore, it is plausible that role clarity is likely to increase hotel service personnel’s psychological empowerment.

H1. Role clarity positively affects hotel employees’ psychological empowerment.

While psychologically empowered employees may feel internally motivated to perform a task, employees who do not believe their organizations care about their contributions may not see the value in taking ownership of their jobs. Thus, organizational support is essential for employees to find meaning at work and to achieve self-determination, competence, and impact (Butts et al., 2009; Ro and Chen, 2011), all of which are components of psychological empowerment. Nonetheless, only limited studies have focused on the relationship between perceived organizational support and psychological empowerment (Afzali et al., 2014). When the responsibilities of a work role and an employee’s own values are aligned, jobs become meaningful (meaningfulness). Based on the reciprocity norm, employees with a sense of perceived organizational support are more likely to contribute to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2001) and expect that assistance is available when needed to better perform their jobs (Eisenberger and Stinghamber, 2011). When help is secured, employees may have the confidence to make decisions regarding whether and how to perform a task (self-determination). Because perceived organizational support is positively related to self-efficacy (competence; Caesens and Stinghamber, 2014; Eisenberger and Stinghamber, 2011), employees’ self-efficacy will increase as a result of the organization’s positive valuation of employees’ contributions. Confident and self-efficacious employees often feel that they have the ability to make an impact at their workplace (Afzali et al., 2014), which leads them to an increased sense of psychological empowerment.

Using a sample of bank employees, Afzali et al. (2014) found that perceived organizational support is positively associated with psychological empowerment. The banking industry is similar to the hotel industry in terms of high employee turnover (Afzali et al., 2014) due to long working and irregular hours. Thus, hotel employees’ wellbeing may be negatively affected by a high level of stress caused by unstable work shifts and high job demands (Fritz et al., 2010). The extent to which hospitality firms care about their employees and employee wellbeing has a significant impact on the extent to which employees intrinsically feel empowered to perform their jobs. Thus, the authors propose the following hypothesis:

H2. Perceived organizational support positively affects hotel employees’ psychological empowerment.

2.3. Role clarity and prosocial service behavior

Current scholarship identifies role perception (i.e., role clarity, role ambiguity, and role conflict) as an antecedent to employee in-role (role-prescribed) and extra-role performance (c.f., Brown and Peterson, 1993; Churchill et al., 1985; MacKenzie et al., 1998). Role clarity is especially important in the hospitality industry because employees often have to take on multiple tasks and, sometimes, have conflicting roles when taking care of different customers during service encounters (Kim et al., 2009a, b). Since employees with role clarity understand how they are expected to perform their jobs (Teas et al., 1979), such clarity provides for better employee performance (De Ruyter et al., 2001). Newman et al. (2015) proposed that role clarity is related to discretionary behavior based on two theories: social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). According to social exchange theory, employees feel obligated to engage in voluntary helping behavior to pay back the organization for creating a positive work environment that facilitates role clarity. Pursuant to COR theory, a lack of role clarity depletes employee resources, and employees tend to conserve their remaining resources by reducing their engagement in voluntary helping behaviors. Therefore, service employees who work for an organization with clear role expectations tend to demonstrate higher discretionary behavior; when role clarity is lacking, role-prescribed and extra-role service behaviors are negatively affected (Bettencourt and Brown, 2003). Thus, the authors propose the following hypothesis:

H3. Role clarity positively affects hotel employees’ prosocial service behavior.

2.4. Perceived organizational support and prosocial service behavior

According to organizational support theory (OST), perceived organizational support reflects employees’ general beliefs concerning how much the organization values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing (Eisenberger et al., 1986). It is also associated with the norm
of reciprocity (Bell and Menguc, 2002). Reciprocity plays an important role in employee-employer relationships and links perceived organizational support with various behavioral outcomes (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). When employees perceive commitment and support from their employer, they respond with increased efforts to help the organization reach its goals (Aseilage and Eisenberger, 2003; Butts et al., 2009). Perceived organizational support can also satisfy employees’ socioemotional needs, such as the need for emotional support, affiliation, esteem, and approval (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). In addition, employees’ felt obligation to reciprocate favorable treatment is stronger when the received treatment from their organization meets their specific socioemotional needs (Gouldner, 1960). As a result, they show better performance and display extra-role behavior. Hospitality employees often face the challenge of emotional exhaustion and burnout due to constant interactions with demanding and difficult customers (Pienaar and Willems, 2008). Consequently, these employees are likely to have higher needs for approval, esteem, emotional support, and affiliation. In other words, perceived organizational support that meets employees’ socioemotional needs can lead to better work behavior.

In a review of more than 70 empirical studies on perceived organizational support, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found that, in general, perceived organizational support was positively related to performance measures, such as in-role and extra-role behaviors for individuals, coworkers, and the organization. In addition, scholars have paid more attention to the role of perceived organizational support on customer contact employees’ helping behavior toward customers as it has a great impact on customer satisfaction and firm performance. For example, Wu and Liu (2014) found a positive relationship between perceived organizational support and employees’ service-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (i.e., loyalty, service delivery, and participation) toward customers. Wang (2012) also found a positive effect of perceived organizational support on extra-role customer service among chain supermarket employees. In addition, Kim et al. (2009a, 2009b) examined the effect of organizational support and empowerment on employees’ job satisfaction and their prosocial service behavior. They confirmed the positive impact of organizational support on employees’ job satisfaction, which, in turn, led to extra-role customer service behavior. Based on the evidence, the authors proposed that perceived organizational support will enhance employees’ helping behavior toward customers and co-workers.

H4. Perceived organizational support positively affects hotel employees’ prosocial service behavior.

2.5. Psychological empowerment and prosocial service behavior

Hospitality employees are frequently caught in situations where they cannot put guests on hold to seek help or transfer their calls to other departments. Empowering employees to assume additional responsibilities and become more autonomous is among the best ways to provide a higher level of service and to satisfy customers (Chiang and Hsieh, 2012). Psychologically empowered service employees are likely to perform more customer-oriented helping behaviors (Chiang and Hsieh, 2012; Chiang and Jang, 2008; Kim et al., 2013). Empowered employees are “pulled” internally by the value of the task rather than “pushed” by management to carry out a task (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). In other words, psychological empowerment triggers intrinsic motivation. As suggested by motivation literature, intrinsic motivation is more effective than extrinsic motivation in predicting employee behaviors (Cho and Perry, 2012; Deci and Ryan, 2004). Hospitality scholars have examined employee empowerment to understand its impact on employee attitudes, such as job satisfaction (e.g., Namasiyavam et al., 2014), organizational commitment, job dedication, and turnover intention (Meng and Han, 2014).

Prior research has suggested that psychological empowerment is more likely to result in greater effectiveness and innovative behavior by service employees in complex and ambiguous roles (Bowen and Lawler, 1992). Effectiveness refers to how much employees fulfill or exceed work role expectations. Since empowered employees feel competent in their work and believe that their choices can influence the outcomes of their work in meaningful ways, they tend to actively perform their job duties, anticipate and solve problems, collaborate with coworkers, and, ultimately, increase job effectiveness (Spritzler, 1995). In other words, psychological empowerment may improve employees’ role-prescribed behavior and cooperation with others. Innovative behaviors, on the other hand, refer to the creation of something new or different, which can be a product, service, idea, or procedure (Woodman et al., 1993).

In the hospitality industry, guest perceptions, expectations, and experiences can vary significantly and, therefore, require different services to satisfy the specific needs of customers. To go above and beyond for guests, hospitality employees are likely to be engaged in creative extra-role behaviors to meet the demands of heterogeneous consumers, to delight various guests, and to handle unexpected situations. In other words, psychological empowerment is likely to encourage creative behavior that is not prescribed by the role but is essential to customer satisfaction. Furthermore, when intrinsically motivated by psychological empowerment, individuals not only experience the positive effects and satisfaction from well-performed tasks (Hackman and Oldham, 1980; Staw, 1977) but also meet higher-order personal needs and align work behavior with personal values through discretionary helping behaviors (Piccolo and Colquitt, 2006). Given that psychological empowerment is one of the concepts related to intrinsic task motivation (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990), it is possible that psychological empowerment facilitates hotel customer contact employees’ helping behaviors toward guests and coworkers.

H5. Psychological empowerment positively affects hotel employees’ prosocial service behavior.

2.6. Mediating effects of psychological empowerment

Based on evidence from the literature, the authors proposed a positive relationship between role clarity and psychological empowerment and between psychological empowerment and prosocial service behavior. Employees who have clear role expectations are likely to demonstrate helping behavior (Bettencourt and Brown, 2003), and knowledge of job is one of the critical conditions of employee empowerment as it increases employees’ confidence level when they make decisions to serve customers (Melhem, 2004). In other words, “going the extra mile” for customers may sometimes require employees to make decisions outside their authority or take on roles that are not stated in their job specifications. Without the right ability, flexibility, or sufficient power, employees may experience difficulty when it comes to effectively performing customer-oriented services (Zeglat et al., 2014). Thus, employees need to be psychologically empowered to perform helping behavior for quality service in addition to understanding work roles and expectations. This study anticipates that the effect of role clarity on prosocial service behavior is mediated through psychological empowerment. Therefore, the hypothesis is as follows.

H6. Psychological empowerment serves as a mediator between role clarity and prosocial service behavior.

Based on the current literature, perceived organizational support may be positively related to prosocial service behavior through the norms of reciprocity. Bell and Menguc (2002) argued that few researchers have considered the situational factors that may affect employees’ choice to perform extra-role behaviors. Job autonomy is required for employees to perform behaviors that reflect their attitudes and beliefs (Bell and Menguc, 2002). Job autonomy refers to the degree to which employees have the freedom to decide how they perform their jobs (Bell and Menguc, 2002) and is reflected in the self-determination
3.1. Sample and data collection

Furthermore, employees with perceived organizational support have a higher level of self-efficacy (Casens and Stinglhamber, 2014), a component of psychological empowerment, because they feel secure and supported by the organization. Moreover, Afzali et al. (2014) found that perceived organizational support enhanced psychological empowerment, while Zeglat et al. (2014) found that psychological empowerment positively impacted the customer-oriented behavior of service employees (i.e., prosocial service behavior). These connections suggest a possible mediating effect of psychological empowerment on the relationship between perceived organizational support and prosocial service behavior. In other words, psychologically empowered employees who perceive support from their organization may not be constrained by their own roles and may take every step to take care of a guest. Thus, it is plausible that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between perceived organizational support and prosocial service behavior.

H7. Psychological empowerment serves as a mediator between perceived organizational support and prosocial service behavior.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample and data collection

Full-time employees who had served in their workplaces for more than a year and worked at four or five-star hotels in Seoul, South Korea participated in this study. The authors did not target three-star or below hotels for this study because of the following reason. Prosocial service behavior is assessed in three dimensions (i.e., in-role, extra-role service behaviors, and cooperation), which are classified by the duties and responsibilities based on a job description. However, three-star or below hotels in South Korea often have a small workforce structure without clearly documented job descriptions. Moreover, the researchers excluded employees who had less than one-year experience with their current organizations because they may not be able to accurately evaluate their perceptions of role clarity and empowerment due to their short tenure with their current hotel. Based on the hotel census database from the Korea Hotel Association, the researchers classified 70 hotels as four- or five-star rating hotels out of a total of 291 hotels in Seoul. They then sent invitations to executives and HR managers at those 70 hotels. Two four-star and two five-star hotels agreed to participate in the research. The authors used Qualtrics for the research design and data collection, and departmental heads distributed the survey link to employees through the online bulletin boards of the food and beverage and rooms divisions.

After a brief introduction of the study, the researchers used three screener questions to disqualify employees who did not work at service touch points, had less than one year working experience, or were part-time employees. The respondents had one-time access to the survey, and the authors systematically blocked any re-access from an IP address at which a survey had already been completed. Also, the survey displayed scale items in random order to reduce Common Method Variance (CMV). Through this sampling procedure, 320 employees (69 from the four-star hotel A, 73 from the four-star hotel B, 92 from the five-star hotel C, and 86 from the five-star hotel D) voluntarily participated in the survey. After deleting 69 uncompleted surveys and 28 outliers, the researchers used 223 valid surveys (56 from the hotel A, 43 from the hotel B, 63 from the hotel C, and 61 from the hotel D) for further analytics. Among the respondents, 55.2 percent were male, 50.7 percent were in their twenties (20-29 years old), and 56.5 percent had a bachelor’s degree. Moreover, the majority of respondents held entry-level positions (74.9 percent), and 25.1 percent held middle-level management positions. Over half of the sample (58.3 percent) had worked at their hotels from 1-year to 3-years. 67.7 percent of the respondents worked for food and beverage departments, and 32.3 percent worked for front office or housekeeping departments. The researchers compared the gender information to those of recent studies (e.g., Jung and Yoon, 2015; Kim et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2016) that targeted hotel employees in South Korea. The results demonstrate the gender distribution of the sample is not significantly different from those in other studies (0.000 < χ² < 0.860, p > 0.05), which implies that the representativeness of the sample is not a concern.

3.2. Measures

The survey included two parts: demographic questions and the participants’ perception of role clarity, perceived organizational support, psychological empowerment, and prosocial service behavior. The authors adopted all measures from the existing literature for validity and reliability using a five-point Likert-type scales, where “1” indicated “strongly disagree” and “5” indicated “strongly agree.” For the survey, two separate independent translators performed the back-to-back translations from English to Korean and from Korean to English to mitigate a translation error.

The Mukherjee and Malhotra (2006) scale, which was originally designed by Rizzo et al. (1970), measured employees’ perception of role clarity. Six items from the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (Eisenberger et al., 1986) measured perceived organizational support. To measure employees’ psychological empowerment, the authors used four dimensions (meaningfulness; competence; self-determination; impact) measured by twelve items (three items for each dimension) from Spreitzer (1995). Finally, 15 items (Bettencourt and Brown, 1997) measured employees’ prosocial behavior using a scale consisting of three dimensions (five items for each dimension): (1) extra-role customer service, (2) role-prescribed customer service, and (3) cooperation.

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model

Using a two-step approach (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988), the researchers used a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the measurement model to confirm the construct validity and to check several statistical assumptions. They parcelled psychological empowerment and prosocial service behavior into each sub-scale by using the mean values to reduce the model complexity (see Nasser and Wisenbaker, 2003). The model of the study, as a result, consists of four latent constructs and 18 reflective indicators.

4.1.1. Model fit

Overall the indices of model fit indicated that the measurement model showed a good fit to the data [Normed χ² = 2.141; SRMR = 0.059; NFI = 0.900; NNFI = 0.933; CFI = 0.944; RMSEA = 0.072 (LO90 = 0.060, HI90 = 0.083)].

4.1.2. Normality assumption

The normality assumption is important because the authors estimated parameters of the study by maximum likelihood (Curran et al., 1996). They checked the skewness and kurtosis to assure the normality of the measurement model. After deleting the 69 outliers, the skewness ranged from −0.516 to 0.011 and kurtosis from −0.516 to 1.141. Consequently, the non-normality of the measurement model was not severely violated because the absolute values of both skewness and kurtosis did not exceed Kline’s (2005) thresholds (i.e., skewness < 3.00; kurtosis < 10.00).

4.1.3. Common method variance (CMV)

The authors used several procedural remedies based on Podsakoff et al.’s (2003) recommendations to lessen the CMV concern. They designed diverse cover stories for each scale to separate participants’
psychological connection between scales and provided a cover page assuring anonymity and confidentiality to minimize evaluation apprehension. Nonetheless, the authors could not guarantee that the possible CMV was completely controlled for the self-administered survey in a cross-sectional study. Thus, they used Harman’s single-factor analysis to investigate whether the potential CMV seriously affected the measurement model of the study. The single-factor model in which the 18 indicators correlated with one latent variable did not fit the data well, showing poor model fit indices ($\chi^2(185) = 841.867$; normed $\chi^2 = 6.236$; SRMR = 0.095; NFI = 0.696; NNFI = 0.694; CFI = 0.730; RMSEA = 0.154 ($LO_{90} = 0.144$, $HI_{90} = 0.164$)). This result indicated that the potential CMV did not seriously influence the measurement model.

### 4.1.4. Reliability of the scale

The researchers also examined the internal consistency of the measures by checking several statistics. They estimated Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for the constructs of role clarity, perceived organizational support, psychological empowerment, and prosocial service behavior as 0.857, 0.903, 0.915, and 0.830, respectively. In addition, the values of the composite reliability (CR) ranged from 0.905 to 0.965, exceeding Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) criterion (0.70). Thus, the results demonstrate a strong reliability for each scale.

#### 4.1.5. Convergent validity of the scale

The researchers checked several statistical values to identify the convergent validity of the measurement model as reported in Table 1. First, all significant ($9.205 \leq t \leq 17.255$) and high (0.645 $\leq \lambda \leq 0.879$) standardized factor loadings indicated that the measurement model sufficiently met convergent validity. Second, the $R^2$ values implied that there was a strong linearity ($0.417 \leq R^2 \leq 0.772$) between the indicators and converged constructs (Hair et al., 2013). Finally, the average variance extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.654 to 0.873, all above Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) threshold of 0.50.

Table 1

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<th>Constructs and Indicators</th>
<th>Factor loadings</th>
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<td>.654</td>
<td>.919</td>
<td>.903</td>
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<td>POS2</td>
<td>.724</td>
<td>10.134***</td>
<td>.524</td>
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<td>POS3</td>
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<td>.719</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>.717</td>
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<td>11.020***</td>
<td>.625</td>
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<td>POS6</td>
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<td>10.864***</td>
<td>.606</td>
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<td>Psychological</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>empowerment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>COM</td>
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<td>.873</td>
<td>.965</td>
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<tr>
<td>SED</td>
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<td>16.555***</td>
<td>.709</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMP</td>
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<td>16.117***</td>
<td>.688</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEA</td>
<td>.870</td>
<td>17.588***</td>
<td>.757</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Prosocial service</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>RPS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>.811</td>
<td>.927</td>
<td>.830</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERS</td>
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<td>12.492***</td>
<td>.596</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>COO</td>
<td>.722</td>
<td>11.528***</td>
<td>.521</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Notes: COM stands for competence, SED for self-determination, IMP for impact, MEA for meaning, RPS for role-prescribed customer service, ERS for extra-role customer service, and COO for cooperation. All loadings are standardized estimations.

$p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

### 4.1.6. Discriminant validity of the scale

This study evaluated the discriminant validity of the measures by comparing the square root values of AVE for each construct with the coefficients of bivariate correlations between the paired constructs. All the values of the square root of AVE (Table 2) appeared to be greater than all of the correlation coefficients. The results, therefore, demonstrate that the discriminant validity was held.

#### 4.2. Structural equation model

##### 4.2.1. Examining the theoretical model

The authors also used structural equation modeling (SEM) by maximum likelihood estimation to examine the conceptual model (see Table 3 and Fig. 2). The conceptual model of the study adequately fits the data as well [Normed $\chi^2 = 2.141$; SRMR = 0.059; NFI = 0.900; NNFI = 0.933; CFI = 0.944; RMSEA = 0.072 ($LO_{90} = 0.060$, $HI_{90} = 0.083$)]. Perceived organizational support and role clarity accounted for 53 percent of the total variance in psychological empowerment, and perceived organizational support, role clarity, and psychological empowerment explained 57 percent of that in prosocial service behavior. The SEM results displayed that psychological empowerment was positively and significantly affected not only by role clarity ($\lambda = 0.365$; $t = 3.944$) but also by perceived organizational support ($\lambda = 0.421$; $t = 4.463$). Therefore, the findings support both $H_1$ and $H_2$. The findings from testing $H_2$ demonstrated that role clarity had a positive and significant effect on prosocial service behavior ($\lambda = 0.509$; $t = 5.025$), while $H_4$ illustrated that perceived organizational support did not have a significant effect on prosocial service behavior ($\lambda = -0.186$; $t = -1.808$). Hence, the results supported $H_3$, but $H_4$ failed to get support. An examination of $H_2$ revealed that psychological empowerment had positive and significant effects on prosocial service behavior ($\beta = 0.467$; $t = 4.775$). Thus, the outcomes supported hypothesis 5.

#### 4.3. Examining the mediation effects of psychological empowerment

In order to test the mediation effects of psychological empowerment in the relationships between role clarity and prosocial service behavior and between perceived organizational support and prosocial service behavior, the authors employed the bootstrapping method, the most powerful method for testing significance of the mediation effect, recommended by Preacher and Hayes (2008). The method generated 1000 bootstrap samples, and the authors performed the bias-corrected percentile method for 95 percent confidence intervals to estimate the significance of the mediation effects based on the recommendations by Preacher and Hayes (2008) (see Table 4).

A partial mediator refers to the mediator where both direct and indirect effects between an independent variable and a dependent variable are all significant, while a full mediator maintains that only the indirect path is significant in the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable (Baron and Kenny, 1986). In summary, the compounded findings of the SEM and the mediation tests indicate that psychological empowerment partially mediates the relationship between role clarity and prosocial service behavior because the indirect effect by psychological empowerment (effect size = 0.170;
vice behavior. The organizational support, and psychological empowerment on prosocial service, are all significant. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that psychological empowerment acts as a full mediator in the relationship between perceived organizational support and prosocial service behavior because only the indirect effect by psychological empowerment (effect size = 0.196; p < 0.001) is significant in those relationships. Thus, both H6 and H7 were supported.

5. Discussion

This study developed and empirically tested a conceptual model to simultaneously understand the effects of role clarity, perceived organizational support, and psychological empowerment on prosocial service behavior. The findings reveal that hotel frontline employees’ clear cognition of their roles let them have psychological empowerment, in turn, lead them to more prosocially behave in performing their service work roles. A clear understanding of work roles gives less work-related stress to employees (Mukherjee and Malhotra, 2006), and they feel work roles. A clear understanding of work roles gives less work-related stress to employees (Mukherjee and Malhotra, 2006), and they feel psychological empowerment, in psychological empowerment (De Villiers and Stander, 2011; Hall, 2008) with a sample of manufacturing employees and employees in financial firms, it also extends the current literature by exploiting its relationship through the use of hotel customer contact service employees. Furthermore, the authors explicitly tested the relationship between positive organizational support and psychological empowerment in this study. A handful of studies (e.g., Chiang and Hsieh, 2012; Jaiswal and Dhar, 2016) have investigated perceived organizational support and psychological empowerment simultaneously.

5.1. Theoretical implications

First, the current research contributes to employee work behavior literature by identifying role clarity, perceived organizational support, and psychological empowerment as significant antecedents of the prosocial service behavior of hotel customer contact service employees. Specifically, role clarity indicated a critical effect on psychological empowerment and prosocial service behavior. Although a positive impact of role clarity on both role-prescribed and extra-role behaviors could be inferred by previous research (c.f., Avinandan and Neeru, 2006; Yadav and Rangnekar, 2014), to the best of the authors’ knowledge, no study has tested the relationship between role clarity and prosocial service behavior. Moreover, psychological empowerment was a vital factor in enhancing hotel service employees’ extra-helping behavior toward co-workers and customers at work. This study fills the existing gap in the literature as the results confirmed the proposed possible relationships from the previous literature. Hence, the current study contributes to management and hospitality literature by extending and unveiling new antecedents that have a strong impact on employees’ behavioral intention.

Second, this study broadens the research on psychological empowerment by exploring two essential predictors (i.e., role clarity and positive organizational support) in the hospitality context. While the result of this study is consistent with the current literature where role clarity affects psychological empowerment (De Villiers and Stander, 2011; Hall, 2008) with a sample of manufacturing employees and employees in financial firms, it also extends the current literature by exploiting its relationship through the use of hotel customer contact service employees. Furthermore, the authors explicitly tested the relationship between positive organizational support and psychological empowerment in this study. A handful of studies (e.g., Chiang and Hsieh, 2012; Jaiswal and Dhar, 2016) have investigated perceived organizational support and psychological empowerment simultaneously.

### Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Standardized coefficients</th>
<th>t-Values</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1 Role clarity → Psychological empowerment</td>
<td>.365</td>
<td>3.944***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2 Perceived organizational support → Psychological empowerment</td>
<td>.421</td>
<td>4.463**</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3 Role clarity → Prosocial service behavior</td>
<td>.509</td>
<td>5.025***</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4 Perceived organizational support → Prosocial service behavior</td>
<td>-.186</td>
<td>-1.808</td>
<td>Not supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5 Psychological empowerment → Prosocial service behavior</td>
<td>.467</td>
<td>4.775**</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.
within the hospitality context. However, those studies employed both constructs as the antecedents for the outcome variables, such as OCB, job performance (Chiang and Hsieh, 2012), or employee commitment (Jaiswal and Dhar, 2016) but did not investigate the linkage between them. Organizational support serves as a motivator (Afzali et al., 2014; Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011), and psychological empowerment measures employee's motivated states (Spreitzer, 1996; Wu et al., 2016); hence it is plausible that organizational support influences psychological empowerment. Appropriately, this study examined not only the causality between perceived organizational support and psychological empowerment but also investigated the sequential effects of these two constructs on employees' service behavior at work. Thus, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing a better understanding of the research on psychological empowerment in the hospitality context.

Third, the current study contributes to the literature by strengthening the understanding of another mechanism (i.e., partial mediation of psychological empowerment) behind the linkage between role clarity and prosocial service behavior. The finding of a partial mediation model shows that role clarity influenced prosocial service behavior directly and indirectly through the effect of psychological empowerment. Thus, psychological empowerment helps in the understanding of how role clarity leads to prosocial service behavior. More specifically, the reason why employees who perceive role clarity tend to exhibit prosocial service behavior is that, in part, they are likely to feel psychologically empowered and intrinsically motivated to accomplish work tasks. Furthermore, the current study also contributes to organizational support theory (OST) by showing that psychological empowerment fully mediates the effect of perceived organizational support on employee helping behavior. While previous studies returned inconsistent results regarding the effect of perceived organizational support on desirable extra-role helping behavior, such as organizational citizenship behavior (Bell and Mengu, 2002), the current study provided a plausible explanation that the inconsistent results might be caused by the different levels of psychological empowerment perceived by employees. The finding adds value to organizational behavior literature by showing how this motivational factor influences customer contact employees' helping behavior.

### 5.2. Practical implications

The present research also delivered several crucial suggestions to HR practitioners and hotel operators in the hotel industry. First, hotel firms need to strive to enhance role clarity of customer-contact employees. To do so, full information about the expectations related to each work role should be clearly communicated to employees by the organization through orientation, training, and performance evaluation. Supervisors, as agents of the organizations, should interpret the rules and procedures set by their organizations in a way that clarifies the job roles of employees and provides consistent feedback and support to employees who experience role conflict and ambiguity daily or during appraisals. Supervisors should encourage employees to participate in the decision-making process pertaining to their jobs and voice their concerns to their supervisors for clarification (Mukherjee and Malhotra, 2006). Training employees to handle unanticipated role expectations can also play an important role in mitigating the negative effects of a lack of role clarity. These practices are not only important for HR practitioners but also for hotel operators. Having role clarity helps employees find more meaning at work (Spreitzer, 1996), and it makes employees feel confident and increases their self-efficacy, which helps employees when they are making timely decisions during service encounters. In addition, confident and self-efficacious employees have an impact in the workplace (Afzali et al., 2014).

Second, for service employees to demonstrate higher levels of prosocial service behavior, hotel firms need to increase perceived organizational support. Hotel operators should convince employees that the organization truly cares about employee contributions and wellbeing as employees are most likely to treat their customers in the same way they are treated by their organizations. Additionally, management should be mindful that intrinsic motivation, such as psychological empowerment, is a necessary trigger between perceived organizational support and PBS. The results from this research strongly suggests that hotel firms should empower their employees by clarifying work roles and committing to employees. Organizational decision-makers must understand the knowledge of psychological empowerment, its benefits to the hotel industry and encourage the practice of empowerment. Psychological empowerment may serve as a signal to hotel employees that the organization truly cares about customer service. This was exemplified by the Ritz Carlton's famous $2000 rule that any employee can spend up to $2000 to make any single customer satisfied. Based on the service-profit chain model, enhancing growth and profitability of a firm starts from enhancing internal service quality (Heskett et al., 2008). In other words, when employees have role clarity and perceive organizational support, along with adequate empowerment (providing the right skills and power to serve guests, having internal service quality), they will return the favor by producing better products (i.e., delivering quality service), which leads to customer satisfaction, loyalty, and profits to hotel firms.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research

The current study has several limitations. First, the sample comes from four and five-star hotels in Korea. Limpanitgul et al. (2013) noted that prosocial service behavior is subject to differences in cultural values and norms. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to hotel employees in other countries. Also, limited service hotel employees often assume several roles but are less empowered than other hotel employees. Thus, the findings may not be generalized to hotel employees from limited or select service hotels. Future studies may replicate this study using different samples to ensure the robustness of the study findings.

Second, the current study simultaneously examines the effects of role clarity, perceived organizational support, and psychological empowerment on prosocial service behavior. Given that prosocial service behavior has three components, it is possible that the effects of role clarity, perceived organizational support, and psychological empowerment on the individual components of prosocial service behavior may vary. Also, this study employed psychological empowerment as an intrinsic motivation to explain the relationship between antecedents and outcome variables. Finding other possible mediators would enhance the understanding of prosocial service behavior literature. Purposely, the sample of the current study was customer contact service employees as

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**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causal relationships</th>
<th>Mediation effects</th>
<th>Lower (95%)</th>
<th>Upper (95%)</th>
<th>SEs</th>
<th>p-values</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H6 Role clarity to prosocial service behavior</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.313</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7 Perceived organizational support to prosocial service behavior</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>.095</td>
<td>.352</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1000 bootstrap resamples were obtained; bias was corrected for 95% confidential intervals.
they are the first employees to encounter customers. For future studies, it would be a valuable undertaking to see if employee helping behaviors are variant between front of the house and back of the house employees in an organization as back of the house employees also strive for quality service delivery as a support to the front of the house team.

References

Nasser, F., Wisenbaker, J., 2003. A monote carlo study investigating the impact of item


