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“Achieving engagement among hospitality employees: A serial mediation model”

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Abstract

Purpose- This paper aims to disclose some mechanisms whereby job engagement can be created in a hospitality context. A study was conducted to examine the relationships among high-performance work practices (HPWPs), empowering leadership behaviors, psychological empowerment, and engagement.

Design/methodology/approach- A theoretical serial mediation model was developed to examine the proposed relationship. The hypotheses were tested using regression analysis with bootstrapping. 340 hotel workers participated in this study.

Findings- Both empowering leadership and psychological empowerment were found to be independent mediators of the HPWPs-engagement relationship; in addition, empowering leadership and psychological empowerment *mediated* this relationship *serially*.

Research implications- Results suggest that hospitality organizations should implement HPWPs and encourage empowering leadership behavior in their managers to create a work context that fosters psychological empowerment. These strategies will, in turn, generate employee job engagement. A richer, deeper understanding of various antecedents of engagement is the main theoretical contribution of this work.

Practical implications- This research stresses the importance of specific organizational conditions and managerial strategies in achieving psychological fulfillment of hospitality employees. In sum, the present study provides important insights for managers and human resource managers in the hospitality industry who seek to foster empowered, engaged employees.

Originality/value- The findings suggest that HPWPs are associated with employee engagement *through a serial mediation model with two mediators*. No research to date has used this nascent methodology to explore the association between HPWPs and engagement.

Keywords- High-performance work practices, empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, engagement, hotels.

Paper type- Research paper

Introduction

Tourism and its workplaces have undergone turmoil and transformation throughout the last decade (Baum, 2015). In fact, a profound transformation in human resources (HR) has occurred due to crisis and globalization. Service companies find that they are now dealing with a heterogeneous workforce of diverse background and demographics, with varying skills, changing demands, and high expectations. As a result, new workplace employment relations, as well as different trends in human resource management (HRM) and leadership, have emerged (Ling *et al.*, 2016). The need to adapt to these new labor trends in tourism is currently compelling organizations to design new formulas to motivate workers, build capabilities, and engage valuable contributors. Some of the greatest opportunities for hospitality organizations to improve service, customer loyalty, growth, and performance rely on reinvigorating human capital strategies. Essentially, to achieve high performance, the modern service firm must create work environments that build passion and purpose.

In parallel, many organizational behavior studies in academia have shifted their focus towards the *Positive Psychology Paradigm* (De Klerk and Stander, 2014; Seligman *et al.*, 2005). A growing body of research is oriented towards investigating “healthy organizations” (Jaimez and Bretones, 2011) and employee wellbeing (Quiñones *et al.*, 2013). These studies highlight how organizations should nurture their employees’ positive psychological capital (Karatepe and Karadas, 2015; Paek *et al.*, 2015) and the important effects of positive work emotions in improving organizational functioning.

Constructs such as employee empowerment and engagement have received more research attention in recent decades, probably because they are seen as promising solutions for service organizations (Jose and Mampilly, 2014). Research has demonstrated that engaged employees display engrossed effort and show more energy and enthusiasm at work, thereby achieving higher levels of job performance and better service (Alfes *et al.*, 2013; Karatepe and Demir, 2014; Menguc *et al.*, 2013; Paek *et al.*, 2015). For this reason, many service organizations and practitioners are placing increased emphasis on identifying ways to raise the level of engagement among their employees.

Antecedents and consequences of engagement referred by extant literature are still exiguous, however (Jose and Mampilly, 2014), and little is known about the mechanisms or “black box” by which employee engagement is effectively achieved in service organizations. In addition, although employee engagement may have stronger repercussions in the hospitality industry than in other sectors, paradoxically, job engagement remains underreported in the hospitality literature (Lee, 2012). This study responds to the call for more scholarly research in this field.

Purpose

The hospitality industry is notorious for occupational strain, overtime, lack of recognition, and low pay. Its workforce frequently reports emotional exhaustion and

complains about working at “antisocial times” (Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016), conditions that often result in absenteeism and turnover. The key question, therefore, is *how to achieve engaged employees in this particular sector*.

Research has shown that firms can indeed create an atmosphere in which engagement thrives (Barnes and Collier, 2013). Company HRM policies are directly and positively related to employee engagement (Alfes *et al.*, 2013; Karatepe, 2013a). Further, supportive managerial environments allow people to make decisions without fear of the consequences, and encourage positive feelings of self-determination and competence among workers. For this reason, this investigation expects that a certain HR architecture, in conjunction with a participatory managerial style, can foster the feeling of self-efficacy that will generate employee psychological empowerment and engagement. In a sector characterized by long working hours and changing shifts, it is crucial to know how to develop enthusiasm in customer-contact employees.

This study enriches the engagement literature in several notable ways. First, it explains internal sequential procedures to achieve employee engagement in hospitality settings. Moreover, it is the first empirical study to examine the internal process through which HPWPs influence employee engagement with a *serial mediation* model (Hayes, 2013). Second, analyzing the *black box* between HPWPs and engagement reveals some contextual and psychological mechanisms underlying engagement for practitioners and the research community.

The sections to follow begin with a review of the literature on the topics to be studied, followed by the consequential development of hypotheses and an explanation of the conceptual research model (Figure 1). After testing the hypotheses employing survey data collected from a sample of Spanish hotel workers, the main results are discussed. The study concludes by highlighting its implications and limitations, and identifying directions for future research. This conclusion constitutes a pertinent starting point for more productive HR strategies and new insights into employee engagement.

Literature review

Theoretical framework on engagement

Employee engagement describes the positive, fulfilling psychological work-related state of mind that drives employees actively to involve themselves emotionally, cognitively, and physically in performing their jobs (Lee, 2012; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Maslach *et al.* (1997) conceptualize engagement as the reverse of or “positive antithesis” to the three dimensions of burnout: exhaustion, cynicism, and sense of inefficacy. Schaufeli *et al.* (2002) define engagement as employees’ vigor, dedication, and absorption at work. *Vigor*, the contrary of exhaustion in burnout, indicates willingness to exert energy and determination to invest effort in one’s work, expressing mental resilience and persistence even in difficult moments (Menguc *et al.*, 2013; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002).

Dedication involves “a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge” (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002: 74). *Absorption* refers to being highly focused and completely immersed in and happy with one's work, such that time passes quickly and it is difficult to detach from work (Salanova *et al.*, 2005).

Kahn's (1990) conceptual work established the basis for the subsequent theoretical development of employee engagement. He related personal engagement to the individual choice of being present or absent in the present moment, referring to behaviors by which people involve or omit their personal selves during work role performances. People thus “use varying degrees of their selves—physically, cognitively, and emotionally—in the roles they perform” (Kahn, 1990: 692). For Kahn, moments of personal engagement/disengagement at work are highly influenced by work contexts and personal variables.

High-performance work practices and employee engagement

The findings of Alfes *et al.* (2013) and Barnes and Collier (2013) suggest that organizational variables influence employee engagement and behavior through employee perceptions and interpretations of the work climate.

HRM policy can thus be a powerful transmitter of messages reflecting the organization's orientation and values. Alfes *et al.* (2013) and Karatepe (2013a) provide evidence that employees' perceptions of HR practices influence their level of engagement. Recently, Barrick *et al.* (2015) provided a holistic view of the organizational resources that drive collective organizational engagement: work design, HRM practices, and CEO transformational leadership. HRM practices thus impact employees directly and indirectly by means of different processes and levels, not only by improving employees' skills but also by increasing their motivation (Takeuchi *et al.*, 2009).

Inspired by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), some authors argue that work engagement and positive job outcomes are some of the mechanisms through which employees repay the economic and socioemotional benefits they receive from the company (Alfes *et al.*, 2013; Karatepe, 2013b). This theory would explain how specific HRM interventions produce various beneficial consequences for employees, such as attachment and commitment (Batt, 2002) or engagement (Christensen Hughes and Rog, 2008). Moreover, high-performance HR practices (e.g., “selective staffing, extensive training, internal mobility, employment security, broad job design, results-oriented appraisal, rewards, and participation”) exemplify ways of formally investing in workers' skills, knowledge, and abilities (Sun *et al.*, 2007: 565). For Tsui *et al.* (1997: 1089), high-performance HR practices reflect a “mutual investment approach” to the employee-organization relationship.

High-performance HR practices are characterized as a complementary combination of single practices that jointly influence organizational outcomes and performance (Aït Razouk, 2011; Batt, 2002; Takeuchi *et al.*, 2009). The positive effect of HRM systems is greater than that of isolated HR practices (Chuang *et al.*, 2016). For Aït Razouk (2011), some intermediate variables explain the causal link between HPWPs and performance.

HPWPs can send a clear message that the organization values its human resources highly and is willing to establish a long-term, mutually beneficial relationship with its employees (Karatepe, 2013a; Sun *et al.*, 2007). As employees perceive more organizational investment and support (in terms of HPWPs), they feel more secure and discern that the company cares for their wellbeing; employees experience more engagement because they feel indebted to the company. One can thus expect employees' perception of the company's HRM practices to have a strong association with the level of engagement that employees experience.

H1. Employees' perceptions of HPWPs are positively related to their job engagement level.

Empowering leadership and engagement

The company's internal role models are effective means of communicating the organization's HRM orientation. Management's behavior reflects the vision and values of the company and inherently communicates information to employees about the company's orientation. Both supervisory feedback and perceived autonomy promote engagement among service employees (Menguc *et al.*, 2013).

An empowering style of leadership transmits and reinforces the message to employees that the company wants their participation and trusts their judgment. What is more, this participatory management style has a powerful positive impact on employees' self-concept and intrinsic motivation, raising self-efficacy levels (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; Zhang and Bartol, 2010). Empowering leaders show confidence in employees' competences and capabilities, and promote the self-development of followers both by encouraging behaviors such as self-leadership and self-regulation and by setting participatory goals and delegating authority (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005).

Research has shown that empowering leadership enhances the work climate for engagement by reinforcing the positive effect of a work context with high cognitive demands and high cognitive resources (Tuckey *et al.*, 2012). According to Kahn (1990), supportive, clarifying managerial interventions heighten *psychological safety*. When employees feel that they are being treated justly and taken into consideration by their company, they are likely to experience engagement. One can thus hypothesize that HPWPs manifested through management's simultaneous emphasis on reinforcing workforce effectiveness motivate employees to be more engaged.

H2. The relationship between high-performance work practices and employee engagement is mediated by empowering leadership.

Several studies in different contexts and countries show a strong correlation between the manager's empowering leadership behavior and employees' level of psychological empowerment: manufacturers in South Africa (Bester *et al.*, 2015), workers in a chemical products company (De Klerk and Stander, 2014), a midsize R&D organization in the U.S. (Lorinkova and Perry, 2014), and a large information technology company in China (Zhang and Bartol, 2010).

Psychological empowerment and engagement

Psychological empowerment refers to a cognitive state. Spreitzer (1995) identifies psychological empowerment as a work-related psychological state that reflects an active orientation to a work role. It is a motivational construct manifested in four cognitions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995). *Meaning* outlines the value employees assign to their jobs according to their own beliefs and references. *Competence* refers to the employees' conviction in their capacity to accomplish the work activities skillfully. It derives from the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) or personal mastery. *Self-determination* refers to individuals' sense of having *choice* in their actions. *Impact* is the extent to which an employee perceives that his/her behavior is "making a difference" in accomplishing the purpose of a task. For Conger and Kanungo (1988), several organizational factors and participatory management combine to play a pivotal role in creating this particular psychological state in the employee.

A wide range of characteristics of one's job and work environment has also been associated with psychological empowerment; among these variables are HPWPs (i.e., participation in decision making, sharing of key resources, employee development, etc.) (Messersmith *et al.*, 2011). HPWPs often emphasize some forms of merit-based pay, rewards, and performance feedback. Similarly, HPWPs are designed to share important information with employees. All of this activity creates greater opportunities for contributions from the workforce and thus for increased feelings of psychological empowerment.

Psychological empowerment can also be seen as an internal mechanism with high potential to help elucidate the linkages between work contextual factors and engagement (Quiñones *et al.*, 2013). Organizational emphasis on practices of employee autonomy and self-determination is likely to prime employee attention and facilitate feelings of engagement. Although few, some studies point out psychological empowerment as a significant precursor of work engagement (e.g., Jose and Mampilly, 2014; Macinga *et al.*, 2015; Quiñones *et al.*, 2013). It is hypothesized that, as employees become more empowered by the HPWP context, they find their work more

significant, self-fulfilling, and inspiring, and accordingly become more dedicated, energized, and immersed in their tasks—in sum, more engaged.

H3. The relationship between HPWPs and employee engagement is mediated by psychological empowerment.

Because engagement encompasses emotional, cognitive, and physical activation, the company must employ different mechanisms to influence employees through diverse processes and levels—while consistently communicating the same message. HPWPs generate a favorable work context in which leaders' empowering behaviors thrive. In the presence of this HRM context (HPWPs), leaders can actively encourage engagement by increasing their workers' feelings of self-efficacy and enthusiasm through psychological empowerment. It is therefore hypothesized that empowering leadership and psychological empowerment mediate the relationship between HRM practices and employee engagement, respectively.

H4: The relationship between HPWPs and employee engagement is serially mediated by empowering leadership and psychological empowerment.

Research methodology

Research model

This study theorizes that HPWPs are related to employee engagement first through empowering leadership and then through psychological empowerment. “Integrating the two models with mediation” through empowering leadership and mediation through psychological empowerment yields “a three-path mediation model,” depicted in Figure 1 (Hayes, 2013; Van Jaarsveld *et al.*, 2010: 1492). The model is assessed using a cross-sectional survey and regression analysis with bootstrapping (Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016). The PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) was employed to evaluate mediation effects.

Sample and data collection

The data were collected over a three-month period from July to September 2015 by approaching hotel workers in three major tourist destination cities in Spain face-to-face at their workplaces. Although data were collected from a convenience sample of 340 employees (Table 1), the sample is quite representative of the diversity of the hospitality industry in terms of star rating (11 one-star, 21 two-star, 105 three-star, 145 four-star, and 47 five-star hotels) and management strategy (39.5% independently managed, 60.5% belonging to hotel chains) (Mansour and Tremblay, 2016).

The target population of this study was limited to full-time customer contact personnel who had regular voice-to-voice or face-to-face interactions with customers (concierges, reservations agents, receptionists, reservations managers, and front desk managers).

Following Karatepe's (2013a) suggestions, hotel managers were not involved in the data collection; data were gathered directly from the hotel employees by approaching them in person during working hours.

The quantitative method used to test the research hypotheses included development of a three-section survey questionnaire to measure the hotel employees' perceptions. A pretest was conducted on a separate pilot sample of eight frontline hotel employees and two frontline managers in the hospitality industry. The questionnaire was revised to clarify ambiguous wording and include clearer definitions of some words and expressions.

Table 1: Sample characteristics

Variables	Frequency (N) and percentage	Variables	Frequency (N) and percentage
Respondent job type		Hotel star rating	
First-line manager*	77 (23.4%)	1 star	11 (3.3%)
Non-managerial**	252 (76.6%)	2 stars	21 (6.4%)
Total	329 (100%)	3 stars	105 (31.9%)
Gender		4 stars	145 (44.1%)
Female	136 (41.3%)	5 stars	47 (14.3%)
Male	193 (58.7%)	Total	329 (100%)
Total	329 (100%)		
		Hotel type	
Age		Hotel chain	199 (60.5%)
< 21	1 (0.3%)	Independent hotel	130 (39.5%)
21-25	58 (17.6%)	Total	329 (100%)
26-30	82 (24.9%)		
31-35	84 (25.5%)		
36-40	47 (14.3%)		
41-45	30 (9.1%)		
46-50	13 (4%)		
51-55	8 (2.4%)		
> 55	6 (1.8%)		
Total	329 (100%)		
Education			
Middle school	21 (6.4%)		
High school	51 (15.5%)		
University	204 (62%)		
Master's / Doctorate	53 (16.1%)		
Total	329 (100%)		

* (Front desk and reservations managers)

** (Concierges, receptionists, reservations agents)

A week before survey administration, a formal e-mail invitation was circulated to the sample hotels (Van Jaarsveld *et al.*, 2010). The e-mail presented the researchers and the aims of the study, and outlined confidentiality procedures. Later, a paper-based self-

completion survey was administered in person to frontline workers and first-line managers who had agreed to participate in the study. A cover letter was also enclosed indicating the purpose of the study and assuring the participants that “any data they provided would be treated confidentially and that no personal data would be reported” (Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016). The survey was anonymous to avoid positively biased responses. 340 individuals volunteered to participate in the current study and actually completed and returned the survey in a closed envelope collected personally by the research team at each hotel location. The respondents were not compensated for their role in the research but were given the option to receive the results of the study.

Of the 340 questionnaires collected, 11 were discarded due to non-completion or missing data, following the *listwise deletion* procedure outlined by Hair *et al.* (2006). Of the 329 respondents who provided usable surveys, 136 were female (41.3%) and 193 male (58.7%). Of the participants, 24.9% were 26-30 years old, and 25.5% aged 31-35. Sixty-two percent of the participants had completed university education. These employees were largely non-managers (76.6%), and their average tenure in the company was 6 years ($SD=7.36$ years). The sample characteristics are given in Table 1.

Measures

Existing multi-item scales from previous research were used. Some measures were adapted to the Spanish hospitality context. Conventional translation and back-translation following Brislin (1980) procedures were performed by two Spanish bilingual academics and two bilingual professionals independently to ensure equivalence of meaning and translation accuracy. Foreign references, uncommon words, and errors due to cultural differences were eliminated (Tuna *et al.*, 2016).

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with items using a Likert scale ranging from (1) *totally disagree* to (7) *totally agree*. Items for each construct were added and averaged to form individual composite scores; higher values indicate higher variable levels. (Karatepe and Karadas, 2015; Namasivayam *et al.*, 2014; Van Jaarsveld *et al.*, 2010). Measurement results are reported in Table A1 of the Appendix.

HPWPs. The theoretically informed measure of HPWPs developed by Sun *et al.* (2007), who drew upon prior research (Bamberger and Meshoulam, 2000), was used to measure employees' perceptions of the HPWPs. It consisted of 27 items based on eight unique domains for HR systems. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted and the expected 8-factor model solution emerged. Consistent with prior research (Patel *et al.*, 2013; Sun *et al.*, 2007: 565), the HPWPs scale “included eight dimensions: selective staffing, extensive training, internal mobility, employment security, broad job design, results-oriented appraisal, rewards, and participation”. Nevertheless, HPWPs are conceived here as a set of complementary HRM practices, not in terms of isolated practices (Aït Razouk, 2011). Following prior research, an index score was calculated to reflect a single comprehensive measure of the HRM system (Barrick *et al.*, 2015;

Chuang *et al.*, 2016; Patel *et al.*, 2013; Sun *et al.*, 2007). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .94.

Empowering leadership. The research utilized the 12-item measure of empowering leadership developed by Ahearne *et al.* (2005), due to its focus on individual supervisor-subordinate interactions (Lorinkova and Perry, 2014; Zhang and Bartol, 2010). An unrestricted maximum-likelihood factor analysis revealed a single underlying dimension of empowering leadership with acceptable fit. Based on this result, and in line with prior research (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005; Namasivayam *et al.*, 2014), the four scale scores were averaged to create a single composite score with an alpha of .95.

Psychological empowerment was assessed with Spreitzer's (1995) 12-item scale (e.g., "I have significant autonomy in determining how I do my job"). Its four dimensions (meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact) combine additively to form an overall construct (Albrecht and Andreetta, 2011; Quiñones *et al.*, 2013; Zhang and Bartol, 2010). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the scale in this study was .90.

Engagement was measured with the 9-item shortened version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale in Spanish (UWES-9; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). Each facet of engagement—absorption (e.g., "I feel happy when I am working intensely"), dedication (e.g., "My job inspires me"), and vigor—was assessed with three items. After the CFA was performed, the items were collapsed into a single composite measure to obtain a global measure of employee engagement (Albrecht and Andreetta, 2011; Macinga *et al.*, 2015; Quiñones *et al.*, 2013). Overall consistency for the composite engagement scale was .93.

Control variables. Three employee characteristics were used as control variables to reduce the power of alternative explanations of job engagement. Background variables such as age, gender (1 = female, 2 = male), and education level may be important predictors of engagement (Lu *et al.*, 2016; Macinga *et al.*, 2015; Quiñones *et al.*, 2013). Education was measured using a 4-point scale: middle school or less (1), high school or equivalent (2), college degree (3), postgraduate studies (4). Higher scores indicated a higher level of education (Karatepe, 2013b).

Common method

Since all measures were self-reported, the impact of common method bias was a concern. Established recommendations were followed to ensure that common method bias be eliminated or minimized (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). As a result, independent and dependent variables were arranged so as not to replicate the order of the hypotheses (Terglav *et al.*, 2016), only established scales were used, and different instructions and filler items were included to create a psychological separation between the sets of variables (Alfes *et al.*, 2013).

Data-analysis strategy

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software, version 22, and EQS 6.1 (Bentler and Wu, 2005; Byrne, 2013) were used to analyze the data collected from the questionnaire. The “mixed.cor” function of the statistical software R was used to find correlations for the various types of variables in this study (<https://www.r-project.org/>).

Preliminary analyses

Prior to analysis, accuracy of data entry, missing values, and outliers were examined. Namasivayam *et al.* (2014) and Paek *et al.* (2015) note the importance of identifying outliers because they may bias the mean and influence the normal distribution. Following Buchanan (2015) and Schulenberg *et al.* (2011: 870), “multivariate outliers were removed using indices from Mahalanobis distance, Cook’s values, and leverage”; at most, six outliers were removed, “all with very large multivariate outlier indicators and strong influence over slopes.” Assumptions of multivariate statistics (linearity, normality, homogeneity) were also analyzed and determined satisfactory.

Results

Before composing the scales for hypothesis testing, the construct validity of the measures was assessed using CFA.

Assessment of psychometric properties of the measures

CFA was conducted to examine convergent and discriminant validity. The convergent validity of a measure is the internal consistency of multiple dimensions for each construct. The composite reliability (CR) statistics of the constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Cronbach’s reliabilities for all scales were also above the recommended threshold of .60. Thus, all measures consistently indicated the scales’ internal consistency.

The average variance extracted (AVE) was used to test for sufficient discriminant validity of the constructs. Discriminant validity evaluates the extent to which each construct used in the model differs from the others (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1991). Each construct had an acceptable AVE value above .50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), indicating that “more than half of the variance in the constructs is explained by their corresponding measures rather than by errors” (Hair *et al.*, 2006; Terglav *et al.*, 2016: 7). Moreover, support for the discriminant validity of all constructs was found by comparing the square root of the AVE with the correlations between constructs (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988; Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The square roots of the AVE of empowering leadership (.859), psychological empowerment (.749), and engagement (.910) were greater than the correlations between the constructs. Consequently, all

measures exceeded the recommended threshold for convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 2: CFA of second-order constructs

Second-order construct	CFI	NFI	IFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	Scale reliability		
							CR	AVE	α :
Empowering Leadership	0.967	0.950	0.968	0.904	0.902	0.057	0.918	0.738	0.946
Psychological Empowerment	0.957	0.934	0.957	0.905	0.900	0.060	0.836	0.561	0.904
Engagement	0.957	0.945	0.958	0.917	0.907	0.052	0.935	0.828	0.928

CFA was also performed to analyze dimensionality and goodness of fit of the second-order constructs used in the model: empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, and engagement (Table 2). All fit indicators obtained guarantee good fit of the scales: RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), CFI (Comparative Fit Index), NFI (Bentler-Bonett Normed Fit Index) (Bentler and Bonett, 1980), IFI (Incremental Fit Index), and AGFI (Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index). The RMSEA is one of the most informative criteria for evaluating model fit. A RMSEA value lower than 0.08 is reasonable, but better fit is indicated by a value lower than or equal to 0.05 (Byrne, 2001). NFI, CFI, IFI, GFI, and AGFI values higher than 0.9 indicate acceptable fit (Byrne, 2001). As Table 2 shows, all values obtained through CFA for the second-order constructs are within the range regarded as sufficient in the literature.

The relationships between the variables were determined using the "mixed.cor" function of the statistical software R (see <https://www.r-project.org/>) to "find correlations for mixtures of continuous, polytomous, and dichotomous variables," the situation in this study. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated for the continuous variables and polyserial/biserial correlations used for the mixed variables (Revelle *et al.*, 2010).

Table 3 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all study variables. The study results confirm a close correlation between the variables, with psychological empowerment and engagement having the strongest linear relationship ($r= 0.68$ and $p <.001$). Participants with more education tended to perceive more empowerment behaviors in their managers and also to experience more psychological empowerment.

Table 3: Means, standard deviations, and correlation matrix

	Mean	S.D.	1x	2x	3x	4x	5	6	7
1.HPWP	3.88	1.26	-						
2.Empowering Leadership	4.82	1.41	0.65**	-					
3.Psychological Empowerment	5.58	0.98	0.59**	0.62**	-				
4.Engagement	5.11	1.24	0.62**	0.60**	0.68**	-			
5.Age	4.02	1.65	-0.06	-0.10	-0.01	-0.02	-		
6.Gender	1.48	0.50	0.09	0.08	0.05	0.07	0.24**	-	
7.Education	3.88	0.75	0.12*	0.17**	0.16**	0.09	-0.33**	-0.40**	-

** Significant at a significance level of 0.01

* Significant at a significance level of 0.05

Notes: **Pearson correlation coefficients are calculated for the continuous variables, and polyserial / biserial correlations are used for the mixed variables.**

Composite scores for each variable were computed by averaging scores across items representing that variable; S.D. standard deviation

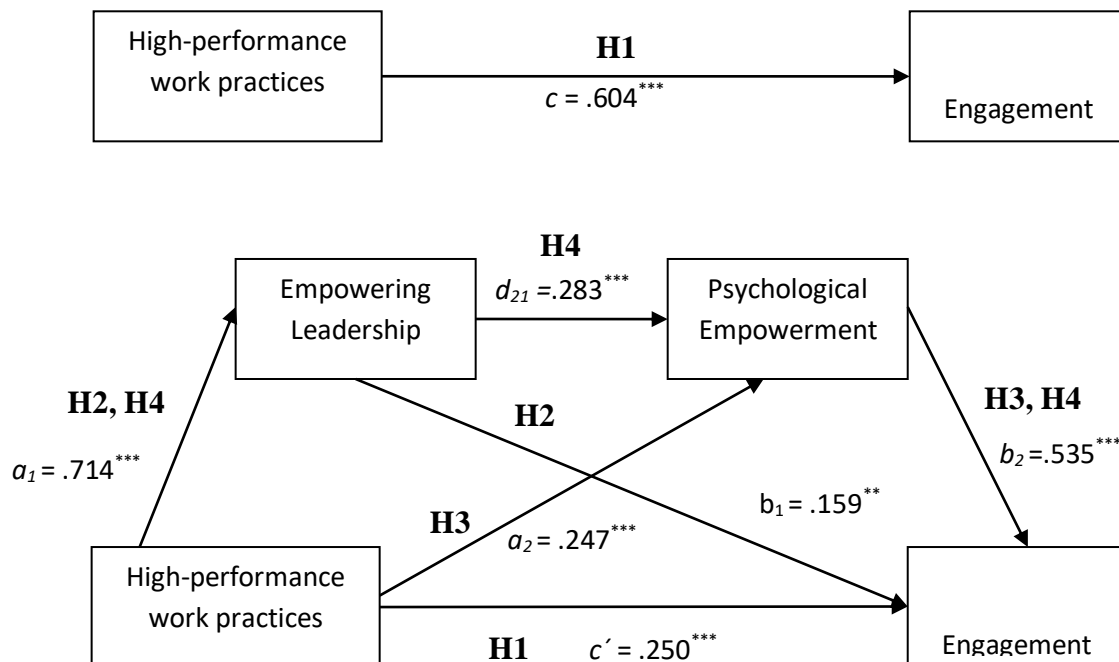
Hypothesis testing

An analytical approach outlined by Hayes (2013) was used to test the hypotheses. A three-path mediated effect was then examined (Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016; Van Jaarsveld *et al.*, 2010). All path coefficients were calculated using regression analysis with the PROCESS plug-in for SPSS developed by Hayes (2013). Table 4 shows the results. The advantage of this approach, as outlined by Van Jaarsveld *et al.* (2010: 1496), is that it enables isolation of each mediator's indirect effect: empowering leadership (Hypothesis 2) and psychological empowerment (Hypothesis 3); further, this approach also allows investigation of "the indirect effect passing through both of these mediators in a series" (Hypothesis 4). Figure 1 illustrates these models and identifies the estimates of the path coefficients.

This procedure is outlined by Hayes (2013) as superior to alternative evaluations of mediating effects. Hayes' mediation approach "directly tests the indirect effect between the predictor and the criterion variables through the mediator via a bootstrapping procedure, addressing some weaknesses associated with the Sobel test" (Van Jaarsveld *et al.*, 2010: 1497). The bootstrap resampling method requires many fewer assumptions

than the Baron and Kenny (1986) approach, provides tests of significance in small samples, and is widely accepted across a variety of literatures (Gardner *et al.*, 2011).

Figure 1: Three-Path mediation model



$N = 323$

This study calculated all path coefficients, simultaneously controlling for employee age, gender, and education. As demonstrated in Table 4, however, none of the control variables was related to the study variables at a significant level. Based on 10,000 subsamples with 323 cases, the results evidence that “the 95% confidence intervals for all indirect effects do not contain zero”, confirming the proposed constructs (empowering leadership and psychological empowerment) as mediators between HPWPs and engagement (Tergrag *et al.*, 2016). In Table 5, estimates of the indirect effects are provided along with the 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals for the path estimates.

Analysis of the first hypothesis (H1) tested the total effect of HPWPs on engagement (c'). The result of the regression analysis shows the hypothesized effect to be significant ($\beta=.604$, $SE=.04$, $p<.001$), **supporting H1**. Hypothesis 2 states that empowering leadership mediates the path between HPWPs and employee engagement. The significance test required prediction of an indirect effect of HPWPs \rightarrow empowering leadership \rightarrow engagement. According to the results, the effect is significant ($\beta=.113$, $SE=.04$, $p<.001$), **supporting H2**.

Table 4. Regression coefficients, standard errors, and model summary information for the serial multiple mediator model

Antecedent	M_1 (ELW)			Consequent M_2 (POW)			Y (ENG)					
	Coeff.	SE	<i>p</i>	Coeff.	SE	<i>p</i>	Coeff.	SE	<i>p</i>			
X (HPWPs)	a_1	.714	.047	< .001	a_2	.247	.043	< .001	c'	.250	.052	< .001
M_1 (ELW)	--	--	--	--	d_{21}	.283	.038	< .001	b_1	.159	.048	.001
M_2 (POW)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	b_2	.535	.065	< .001
Constant	i_{M1}	1.303	.485	< .010	i_{M2}	2.788	.336	< .001	i_y	.541	.428	n.s.
Age		-.034	.038	n.s.		.039	.026	n.s.		.003	.030	n.s.
Gender		.149	.126	n.s.		-.013	.086	n.s.		.009	.099	n.s.
Education		.170	.086	n.s.		.082	.059	n.s.		-.045	.069	n.s.
		$R^2 = .439$				$R^2 = .452$				$R^2 = .551$		
		$F(4, 318) = 62.201, p < .001$				$F(5, 317) = 52.198, p < .001$				$F(6, 316) = 64.490, p < .001$		

HPWPs: High-Performance Work Practices, ELW: Empowering Leadership; POW: Empowerment; ENG: Engagement. Controls: age, gender, education level.

M1: First mediator; M2: Second mediator.

$$\widehat{M}_1 = 1.303 + 0.714X; \quad \widehat{M}_2 = 2.788 + 0.247X + 0.283M_1; \quad \widehat{Y} = (0.541) + 0.250X + 0.159M_1 + 0.535M_2$$

Table 5. Indirect effects

Indirect Effects	Boot. SE	95% Confidence Interval*		Figure Path
		<i>Boot. Lower level CI, Boot. Upper level CI</i>		
<i>HPWPs</i> → <i>ELW</i> → <i>ENG</i> = 0.113	(.038)	(0.043,	0.192)	<i>Ind1: (a₁b₁)</i>
<i>HPWPs</i> → <i>ELW</i> → <i>POW</i> → <i>ENG</i> = 0.108	(.024)	(0.024,	0.072)	<i>Ind2: (a₁b₁+ d₁₂b₂+ a₂b₂)</i>
<i>HPWPs</i> → <i>POW</i> → <i>ENG</i>) = 0.132	(.029)	(0.029,	0.082)	<i>Ind3: (a₂b₂)</i>
Total indirect effects: 0.357	(.044)	(0.276,	0.450)	

*10,000 bootstrap samples for bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals.

For Hypothesis 3, that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship of HPWPs to engagement, the significance test entailed estimation of an indirect effect of HPWPs → psychological empowerment → engagement. The test revealed that HPWPs predicted psychological empowerment ($\beta=.247$, $SE=.04$, $p<.001$) and that psychological empowerment predicted engagement ($\beta=.535$, $SE=.06$, $p<.001$). HPWPs affected engagement indirectly through the mediation of psychological empowerment ($\beta=.247 \times .535 = .132$, $SE=.03$, $p<.001$). Thus, **H3 is supported**.

Hypothesis 4 states that empowering leadership and psychological empowerment serially mediate the relationship between HRM practices and employee engagement. The indirect effect of HPWPs → empowering leadership → psychological empowerment → engagement was thus examined. The indirect effect of HPWPs on engagement through the mediation of empowering leadership and psychological empowerment was significant ($\beta=.108$, $SE=.02$, $p<.001$). Therefore, the results of the analysis show that HPWPs are associated with higher empowering leadership and psychological empowerment, which relate to higher levels of employee engagement. Thus, **H4 is also supported**. As a result, the study accepts all of its hypotheses.

Discussion and conclusions

Conclusions

Kahn's (1990) basic assumption is that people's experiences of themselves and their work environments influence moments of personal engagement and disengagement. Based on Kahn's premises, this study sought to identify which variables explained the processes by which people adjust their selves in roles.

Alfes *et al.* (2013), Karatepe (2013a), and Karatepe and Olugbade (2016) outline the role of HPWPs as antecedents of work engagement. De Klerk and Stander (2014) also find strong associations between empowering leadership, psychological empowerment, and engagement. Finally, recent studies demonstrate a strong correlation between psychological empowerment and engagement (Jose and Mampilly, 2014; Macinga *et al.*, 2015). For this reason, HPWPs, empowering leadership, and psychological empowerment were considered together as key drivers of engagement to be explored in this research.

It appears that employees who perceive the company as implementing high performance HR practices also report that their managers display more empowering leadership behavior and, in turn, seem to experience a higher level of psychological empowerment. Moreover, HPWPs and empowering leadership make employees feel that they have a certain degree of autonomy to perform their tasks, that they are involved in the company decision-making process, and that the organization nurtures development of their skills and abilities. In sum, when employees understand that the company is trying to help them to enhance their performance, they experience higher levels of psychological empowerment, which in turn lead to higher levels of work engagement. All of these

process mechanisms have direct and indirect effects on the employee's experience of engagement. The results also suggest that none of the control variables (e.g., age, gender, and educational level) has significant effects on perceptions of HPWPs, empowering leadership, or level of psychological empowerment and engagement experienced by the workforce.

Theoretical implications

The theoretical significance of this research is threefold. First, this study extends existing HRM and engagement literature by showing that HPWPs have a significant impact on employees' engagement. It responds to the call for more scholarly research on these topics in service contexts (Subramony, 2009). Second, the findings suggest that HPWPs are associated with employee engagement *through a serial mediation model with two mediators*, namely, empowering leadership and psychological empowerment. This finding is relevant because prior studies show that empowering leadership and psychological empowerment are associated with each other and have significant implications for positive employee outcomes, but no research has analyzed how the two function together in this relationship. Third, very few studies (e.g., Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhipongs, 2016; Van Jaarsveld *et al.*, 2010) have tested a complex model with two serial mediators using the PROCESS macro recently developed by Hayes (2013) (see www.processmacro.com for further information). No research to date has used this nascent methodology to identify the internal mechanisms between HPWPs and engagement. This approach can be seen as a strength of the study.

Overall, the study provides a richer, deeper understanding of various organizational and personal antecedents of job engagement.

Practical implications

The results of this research also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the ways to achieve employees' psychological empowerment and engagement in the hospitality industry. From a practical standpoint, it is essential for modern service firms to discover what they can do to maintain and enhance high levels of engagement among their employees.

Specific organizational and personal factors should be nurtured to foster engagement. One strategy is for organizations to implement HPWPs to boost employee skills, motivation, and participation, and to encourage leaders to display empowering behaviors.

Examples of HPWPs that hospitality companies should implement to enable higher performance are: *staffing* procedures emphasizing long-term employee potential; extensive formal *training* programs, both to help new hires develop the necessary skills

to perform their jobs and to increase employees' promotability in the organization; individual career paths and opportunities for *upward mobility*; guarantee of *job security* to employees; accurate and up-to-date *job descriptions* so that the employees clearly understand all of their duties and how to perform them; *results-oriented appraisal* and measures of performance with objective quantifiable results; matching payment of individuals to their performance; allowing employees to *participate in decision-making* and providing them with the opportunity to suggest improvements in the way things are done (Gardner *et al.*, 2011; Sun *et al.*, 2007). Given the constraints on their application in current practice, one must acknowledge that all investments in human capital and in implementing HPWPs are costly (Jiang and Liu, 2015); however, as Sun *et al.* (2007: 573) advocate, "investment in HPWPs really 'pays off'."

In addition, HPWPs seem to orient and support managers' empowering behaviors. Managers exhibit empowering leadership when they not only distribute responsibility towards the base of the hierarchical pyramid but also share knowledge, information, and power with their subordinates. Empowering leaders also foster employees' participation in decision making, letting them decide the best way to solve some daily problems. It is important for supervisors to understand the extent to which their own behaviors influence their employees' feelings of empowerment and engagement.

All of these actions should promote employees' intrinsic task motivation and self-efficacy levels (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; Conger and Kanungo, 1988), increasing the likelihood that employees experience psychological empowerment. Due to empowerment, employees feel they have flexibility, choice, latitude, and control in performing their jobs, and understand their role in the organization's total performance. The resulting heightened feeling of self-competence and sense of worth at work will produce employee engagement, one of the main drivers of employee enthusiasm and dedication at work.

Hospitality organizations such Ritz Carlton (Michelli, 2008) and Four Seasons (Sharp *et al.*, 2009), for instance, are good examples of the successful implementation of empowerment principles. Empowerment normally yields benefits for both employees and employers, and increases job satisfaction (Pelit *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that *empowering employees is not the cure for all organizational sicknesses*, and that "[this] approach might not be right for everyone" (Bowen and Lawler, 1992: 31). Companies must examine in depth the costs and benefits of empowering employees and decide carefully why, how, when, and whom to empower. To implement empowerment successfully, the hotel must have reached a stage at which staff can be trusted to think for themselves and make different types of decisions. Moreover, effective empowerment requires that the company have managers who believe that their employees can act independently—termed "*Theory Y managers*" by Bowen and Lawler (1992), referencing McGregor's theory.

This paper helps managers to answer the question of how to achieve engaged employees in a sector such as the hospitality industry, characterized by low pay, long working

hours, and changing shifts. The answer is simple: making workers feel better about their jobs and about themselves at work. Companies can achieve this goal by satisfying one of the most basic psychological needs: sense of achievement, self-realization.

Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations, which can be seen as opportunities for future research. First, the cross-sectional research design limits the extent to which cause-effect relations can be inferred from the findings. The results should be interpreted considering this limitation.

The second limitation has to do with the sampling method. The study's use of a convenience sample is not fully representative of hotel workers in Spain. Generalization of the results is thus limited. Future research should use random sampling methods to obtain representative samples of Spanish hotel workers.

Third, the study relies on self-report measures because it seeks to learn about the employees' perceptions (management cannot speak for its employees, since empowerment and engagement represent individual employees' perspectives). Nevertheless, some of the findings may have arisen "as a result of self-serving bias" (Van Jaarsveld *et al.*, 2010: 1500). New investigations should be designed as multilevel studies that also include members of management and customers as respondents (Wong, 2016). This approach would reveal actual HRM practices according to the company's view and the customers' perceptions of employee behavior.

Existing measures of HPWPs are composites formed by averaging or adding respondents' standardized ratings related to a set of HRM practices (Gardner *et al.*, 2011; Patel *et al.*, 2013). All components of the HR system are thus assumed to have identical impact on the outcomes (Jiang and Liu, 2015), and different practices can be substituted for one another to obtain similar effects (Batt, 2002). Subramony (2009) explains, however, that different sets of HR practices may impact the same outcomes in a heterogeneous way. Researchers should therefore explore new combinations of HPWPs, also considering possible synergistic effects (Aït Razouk, 2011).

The present study argues that HPWPs lead to higher levels of employee engagement through empowering leadership and psychological empowerment in a hospitality context. Previous research has demonstrated the association between transformational leadership and psychological empowerment (Avolio *et al.*, 2004; Gill *et al.*, 2010). It would thus be worthwhile to explore the role of other traditional and emerging management leadership styles in enhancing employee engagement (e.g., paradoxical leadership, servant leadership). Finally, it would be valuable to assess whether and how these relationships differ across industries and countries to account for specific cultural factors.

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APPENDIX

Table A1. Summary of factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, construct reliability, and average variance extracted

Item	Mean	S.D.	Factor loadings	t-value	R2	Scale reliability
EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP (From Ahearne et al. [2005] in Zhang et al. [2010]).	Empowering leadership (enhancing the meaningfulness of work)					
Enhancing meaningfulness	Empowering leadership (enhancing the meaningfulness of work)					
Elwme1. Helping understand objectives.	4.240	1.940	0.917	a	0.841	CR: 0.955
Elwme2. Helping understand the importance of my work.	4.529	1.908	0.957	22.835	0.917	AVE: 0.875
Elwme3. Understanding how job fits into the bigger picture.	4.386	1.960	0.932	29.233	0.868	α : 0.942
Fostering participation	Empowering leadership (fostering participation in decision making)					
Elwpa1. Making decisions together.	4.106	2.028	0.940	a	0.940	CR: 0.925
Elwpa2. Consulting on strategic decisions.	4.036	2.000	0.926	27.106	0.926	AVE: 0.804
Elwpa3. Soliciting opinion.	4.559	1.901	0.820	23.315	0.820	α : 0.902
Expressing confidence	Empowering leadership (expressing confidence in high performance)					
Elwcf1. Handling demanding tasks.	5.517	1.506	0.926	a	0.857	CR: 0.956
Elwcf2. Ability to improve.	5.486	1.554	0.913	24.107	0.834	AVE: 0.880
Elwcf3. Ability to perform.	5.620	1.473	0.974	39.008	0.949	α : 0.929
Providing autonomy	Empowering leadership (providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraints)					
Elwau1. Doing my job my way.	5.073	1.732	0.880	a	0.754	CR: 0.872
Elwau2. Keeping the rules and regulations simple.	4.787	1.721	0.735	14.782	0.540	AVE: 0.696
Elwau3. Allowing me to make important decisions quickly.	5.346	1.682	0.888	16.786	0.789	α : 0.837
PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT (From Spreitzer [1995]).	Empowerment (meaning)					
Meaning	Empowerment (meaning)					
Powmea1. Importance of work.	5.638	1.602	0.944	a	0.892	CR:0.964
Powmea2. Meaningful work activities.	5.441	1.601	0.945	41.745	0.894	AVE: 0.900
Powmea3. Work meaningful to me.	5.580	1.585	0.958	49.589	0.958	α : 0.947
Competence	Empowerment (competence)					
Powcom1. Confidence about my ability.	6.444	0.817	0.871	a	0.759	CR:0.914
Powcom2. Self-assured about my capabilities.	6.422	0.841	0.983	18.203	0.967	AVE: 0.781
Powcom3. Necessary skills mastered.	6.283	0.885	0.786	11.237	0.685	α : 0.878

Self-determination	Empowerment (self-determination)					
Powdet1. Autonomy.	5.705	1.451	0.884	a	0.781	CR: 0.939
Powdet2. Deciding how to go about doing my work.	5.389	1.621	0.981	23.630	0.963	AVE: 0.838
Powdet3. Independence.	5.210	1.629	0.877	18.216	0.769	α : 0.920
Impact	Empowerment (impact)					
Powimp1. Large impact in my department.	5.052	1.722	0.866	a	0.749	CR: 0.937
Powimp2. Control.	4.848	1.762	0.898	18.097	0.807	AVE: 0.832
Powimp3. Influence.	4.666	1.824	0.969	20.246	0.939	α : 0.918
ENGAGEMENT (UWES-9, from Schaufeli and Bakker [2003]).	Engagement (vigor)					
Vigor						
Engvi1. Feeling I am bursting with energy.	4.970	1.604	0.968	a	0.937	CR: 0.924
Engvi2. Feeling I am strong and vigorous.	5.106	1.575	0.950	29.535	0.902	AVE: 0.805
Engvi3. Feeling like going to work.	4.404	1.834	0.758	17.133	0.575	α : 0.892
Dedication	Engagement (dedication)					
Engde1. Enthusiastic about my job.	4.617	1.796	0.962	a	0.907	CR: 0.912
Engde2. Job inspiration.	4.477	1.871	0.926	23.549	0.858	AVE: 0.777
Engde3. Proud of the work.	5.593	1.547	0.740	14.369	0.503	α : 0.862
Absorption	Engagement (absorption)					
Engab1. Happy when working intensely.	5.112	1.639	0.768	a	0.637	CR: 0.897
Engab2. Immersed in my work.	5.772	1.217	0.981	8.764	0.962	AVE: 0.746
Engab3. Getting carried away when working.	5.815	1.118	0.829	10.423	0.559	α : 0.827
HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORK PRACTICES (Sun et al. [2007]).	High-performance work practices (staffing)					
Staffing						
Hrstf1. Effort to select the right person.	4.56	1.886	0.903	a	0.815	CR: 0.945
Hrstf2. Long-term potential emphasized.	4.56	1.920	0.765	18.370	0.584	AVE: 0.813
Hrstf3. Importance on staffing process.	4.43	1.886	0.966	32.092	0.934	α : 0.942
Hrstf4. Effort in selection.	4.35	1.834	0.958	31.335	0.919	
Training	High-performance work practices (extensive training)					
Hrtra1. Extensive training programs.	3.98	1.880	0.731	a	0.534	CR: 0.907
Hrtra2. Training programs every few years.	3.50	2.027	0.860	15.522	0.739	AVE: 0.709
Hrtra3. Formal training programs to teach new hires.	3.43	2.050	0.890	16.078	0.793	α : 0.903
Hrtra4. Training to increase employee promotability.	3.22	1.998	0.878	15.859	0.771	
Mobility	High-performance work practices (internal mobility)					

Hrmob4. Clear career paths.	3.05	1.74	0.712	a	0.507	CR: 0.684 AVE: 0.520
Hrmob5. Potential positions to be promoted to.	3.322	1.52	0.730	10.726	0.532	α :0.687
Job security	High-performance work practices (job security)					
Hrsec1. Long term expectations.	4.49	1.927	0.833	a	0.756	AVE: 0.773 CR:0.872
Hrsec2. Job security guaranteed.	4.03	1.928	0.923	11.772	0.851	α :0.869
Job description	High-performance work practices (clear job description)					
Hrjds1. Duties clearly defined.	4.72	1.865	0.762	a	0.581	CR: 0.910
Hrjds2. An up-to-date job description.	4.46	1.978	0.914	18.102	0.835	AVE: 0.774
Hrjds3. Accurate description of all duties.	4.72	1.934	0.951	18.648	0.904	α : 0.906
Appraisal	High-performance work practices (results-oriented appraisal)					
Hrapp1. Objective quantifiable results.	3.59	2.006	0.929	a	0.863	CR: 0.927
Hrapp2. Performance appraisals.	3.51	1.907	0.944	30.146	0.891	AVE: 0.81
Hrapp3. Long-term and group-based achievement.	3.71	1.867	0.822	21.601	0.675	α : 0.923
Rewards	High-performance work practices (incentive reward)					
Hrrew1. Bonuses.	2.59	2.101	0.789	a	0.623	CR:0.773 AVE: 0.629
Hrrew2. Close matching of pay to performance.	2.38	1.780	0.798	9.978	0.637	α :0.767
Participation	High-performance work practices (participation)					
Hrpar1. Participation in decisions.	4.09	2.108	0.819	a	0.671	CR:0.901
Hrpar2. Allowed to make decisions.	4.54	1.814	0.819	17.073	0.671	AVE: 0.696
Hrpar3. Improvements suggestions.	4.85	1.911	0.903	19.397	0.815	α : 0.898
Hrpar4. Open communications.	5.09	1.931	0.792	10.279	0.627	

¹a indicates that the parameter was set at 1.0. If a different parameter is set at 1.0, however, the indicator of the scale is also statistically significant.