

# Employee engagement, its antecedents and effects on business performance in hospitality industry: a multilevel analysis

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Received 18 December 2021  
Revised 20 March 2022  
30 May 2022  
Accepted 4 June 2022

## Abstract

**Purpose** – Employee engagement serves as a critical strategy for tourism and hospitality organizations to support their employees and fight adversity. This study aims to investigate the antecedents and effects of employee engagement and examine innovative behavior as a linchpin mechanism for the relationship between organizational engagement culture and organizational performance.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study analyzed the antecedents and effects of employee engagement through a hierarchical linear model that considers both organizational- and individual-level factors. The data was collected through a questionnaire survey from employees of 39 hotels in Guangzhou, China.

**Findings** – The results confirmed the significant positive effect of organizational empowerment, leadership and collaboration atmosphere on employment engagement. An individual's perception of rewards and recognition, distributive justice and procedural justice significantly affected employee engagement. It was also confirmed that employee engagement ultimately improved performance outcomes at the individual and organizational levels. Additionally, the mediation effect of organizational innovation culture on the relationship between organizational employee engagement and organizational performance was confirmed.

**Practical implications** – Organizations can improve their performance by enhancing employee engagement, which in turn, can be encouraged by empowering leadership and organizational collaboration culture. Organizations can also improve their performance by providing rewards and recognition appreciated by employees and ensuring justice to them.

**Originality/value** – This research contributes to the literature on employee engagement in the hospitality industry by demonstrating how organizational performance can be improved through employee engagement using a multilevel model. The findings highlight that organizations with engaged employees are more likely to achieve an innovative culture, which in turn, leads to organizational success. This study also confirmed



This research was supported by Guangdong Basic and Applied Basic Research Foundation (Grant Number: 2022A1515010376), Guangdong Planning Office of Philosophy and Social Science (Grant Number: GD19CGL31), and University of Macau (Grant Number: MYRG2019-00058-FBA).

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that empowerment, leadership and collaboration culture help improve organizational performance in the hospitality industry.

**Keywords** Justice, Innovation, Employee engagement, Business performance, Empowerment leadership

**Paper type** Research paper

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## 1. Introduction

Since the concept of employee engagement was introduced into the corporate world three decades ago (Kahn, 1990), it has received considerable attention from both academics and practitioners. Employee engagement strategies have been widely adopted to gain competitive advantage and achieve business success. However, according to an investigation on employee engagement across 141 countries, only 13% of employees are highly engaged worldwide (Mann and Harter, 2016). In addition, the coronavirus disease has had a dramatic impact on various business sectors, especially the tourism and hospitality industry. For example, 80% of tourism and hospitality companies in the UK stopped operating in April 2020 (Seifman, 2020). Consequently, tourism and hospitality employees were reported to suffer from feelings of uncertainty and isolation caused by the pandemic, and they became less engaged and prepared. Therefore, it is tourism and hospitality firms' responsibility to develop suitable employee support and engagement strategies to fight the crisis and minimize adversity while facing this unprecedented challenge.

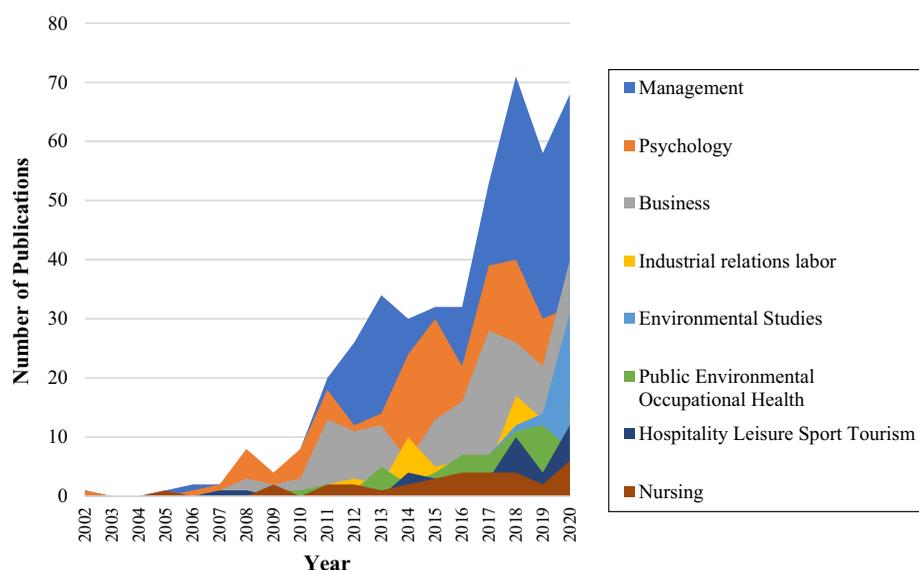
Engaged employees are fully aware of their responsibilities, outperform their roles and even motivate their colleagues for the success of the organization. Substantial positive outcomes of employee engagement have been identified, including a high level of employee job satisfaction, intention to remain, individual performance and eventually, organizational performance (Jones and Harter, 2005). In recent years, practitioners and scholars have invested considerable effort in exploring the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement (AbuKhalifeh and Som, 2013; Saks, 2006; Saks, 2019).

Given the efforts made by prior studies to identify the mechanism of employee engagement, Akingbola and van den Berg (2019) noted that there remains a paucity of research on the antecedents of employee engagement in the hospitality service sector. By adopting social exchange theory (SET) as the theoretical framework, this study validates various predictors of employee engagement. SET views social behaviors as the outcome of exchange, and is driven by the motivation to maximize benefits and reduce expenses. If employees receive benefits from the organization, they would feel obliged to engage themselves more with their work role as a repayment. Moreover, the two major exchange partners of hotel employees are their supervisors and colleagues (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2002). The critical role of collaboration among coworkers in employee engagement has been explored in employee performance at work in other service sectors. A healthy relationship between coworkers that builds on collaboration can not only increase work efficiency but also make employees perceive greater meaning at work, which has been examined as a strong predictor of employee engagement (Cartwright and Holmes, 2006). In addition, as a form of supervisor support, leadership empowering behavior can also enhance job meaningfulness (Blanco-Donoso *et al.*, 2017), which consequently motivates employees to engage in their work. Empowerment practices have been adopted in the hospitality industry to engage employees. For instance, Ritz-Carlton grants their staff \$2,000 discretion funds, and they are permitted to spend that amount without authorization (Turner, 2008). However, the relationship between leadership empowerment behavior and employee engagement has not yet been investigated in tourism and hospitality literature. Therefore, the first objective

of our study was to examine the influence of various antecedents, including supervisor and colleague support (i.e. leadership empowerment behavior and collaboration) on employee engagement in the hospitality industry.

Another literature gap is that most extant studies that have focused on identifying the effects of employee engagement (e.g. employee performance and corporate performance) have often overlooked the underlying mechanism. Previous studies have documented that engaged employees have a higher tendency to exhibit innovative behavior (Wang *et al.*, 2022; Jung and Yoon, 2018), which leads to organizational success (Dedahanov *et al.*, 2017). However, the mediation effect of innovative behavior has not yet been explored in the hospitality context. Examining the mediation effect of aggregated employees' innovative behavior in the relationship between organizational engagement level and performance not only provides a holistic understanding of how organizational employee engagement leads to organizational success but also explores the possibility for hospitality firms to gain competitive advantages through employee-initiated service innovation. Thus, the second objective was to explore the mediation of aggregated employees' innovative behavior on the relationship between employee engagement and organizational performance at the organizational level.

Although hospitality industry relies heavily on employees' positive attitude, engagement, and behavior, there is a lack of research on employee engagement in this field (Figure 1). Additionally, tourism and hospitality firms exist globally; hence, employees are presented with customers with diverse characteristics worldwide, and employee engagement practices and states in this field vary greatly in different cultural contexts (Bhuvanaiah and Raya, 2014). Furthermore, while the studies on employee engagement in western regions are quite comprehensive, the results cannot be directly applied to a different region (e.g. eastern region) with different culture because the norm of reciprocity could vary across different cultural contexts (Van Knippenberg



**Figure 1.** Annual publications related employee engagement in top eight subject categories

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*et al.*, 2015). For example, in countries with high levels of collectivism, such as China and Japan, supporting team members are normally viewed as an obligation rather than a personal choice. Once the support is weakened, a stronger negative impact on employee engagement might occur in the workplace in China or Japan compared to the Western counterparts. Thus, the third objective of this study was to contribute to the body of literature by investigating the mechanism of employee engagement in a country with a high level of collectivism (i.e. China).

In summary, this study attempted to fill the abovementioned research gaps and make three notable contributions to the tourism and hospitality literature regarding employee engagement. First, it advances a more holistic understanding of the literature related to the precursors of employee engagement by shifting the focus from job characteristics, including job demands and resources, to organizational support (i.e. empowerment leadership), organizational culture of collaboration and perceived organizational support (i.e. rewards and recognition, as well as justice). Second, it complements the theoretical arguments and empirical evidence on the emerging debate regarding the mediating role of organizational innovation level on the positive relationship between organizational employee engagement and organizational performance enhancement. Third, it extends the research on employee engagement to the hospitality and tourism industry in an Eastern cultural context (i.e. China), where the norm of reciprocation might differ compared to its Western counterparts.

## **2. Related literature and hypotheses development**

### *2.1 Employee engagement*

The substantial positive influence of high level of employee engagement has resulted in a growing scholarly interest. Consequently, published research related to employee engagement has surged over the past decades (Figure 1), especially in subjects such as management, psychology and business.

*2.1.1 Conceptualization of employee engagement.* Quite a few different conceptualizations/definitions for “employee engagement” (and closely related concepts such as “job engagement,” “work engagement,” “staff engagement” and “personal role engagement) have emerged since “personal engagement” was first introduced by Kahn (1990, p. 694). By synthesizing the past literature according to definition and operationalization method, these conceptualizations can be categorized into six groups (Bailey *et al.*, 2017): personal role engagement (Kahn, 1990); work task or job engagement that focused on job demand-resource [as “opposite of burnout” (Maslach *et al.*, 2001, p. 416) or Utrecht Group definition as “a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind” (Schaufeli *et al.*, 20023, p. 381)]; multidimensional engagement [including both job engagement and organizational engagement (Saks, 2006; Saks, 2019)]; “engagement as a composite attitudinal and behavioural construct” which added behavioral engagement in measurement of the concept (Swanberg *et al.*, 2011); “engagement as management practice” that focused on “doing engaging”; and “self-engagement with performance” (sense of responsibility and commitment to performance) (Bailey *et al.*, 2017).

We adapted the multidimensional conceptualization approach to include organizational engagement in this study, aiming to gain some organizational implications from the results.

*2.1.2 Employee engagement in hospitality industry.* Although employee engagement research on tourism and hospitality has accounted for a relatively small proportion

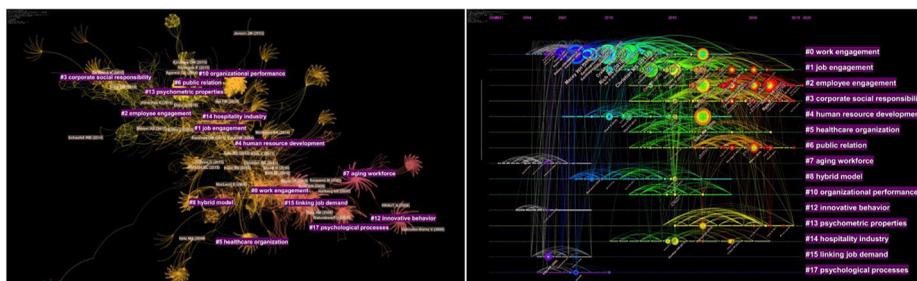
(Figure 1), according to the cluster and timeline maps summarized in Figure 2, the hospitality industry has recently become one of the hottest fields for employee engagement studies focusing on corporate social responsibility, public relations and psychometric properties. For example, recent hospitality literature has documented the prominent influence of hotel workers' engagement level on service delivery, employee loyalty, intention to stay, turnover intention, employees' proactive behavior, job performance, job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Jyoti and Dimple, 2022; Karatepe *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2020; Lee and Ok, 2016).

Meanwhile, various predictors (e.g. management commitment, job crafting, servant leadership, workplace ostracism, job embeddedness, work place incivility, workplace spirituality, leader satisfaction, high-performance HR practices, psychological capital, service climate, organizational climate, corporate social responsibility, professional identity, psychological contract breach, intentional branding, organizational tenure, social media brand communication, training and job position) have been identified and shown to substantially impact hospitality employees' engagement level (Ampofo and Karatepe, 2022; Guo and Hou, 2022; Haldorai *et al.*, 2020; He *et al.*, 2021; Kang and Busser, 2018; Karatepe *et al.*, 2021; Karatepe *et al.*, 2022; Kaya and Karatepe, 2020; Lu *et al.*, 2016; Van Nguyen *et al.*, 2021; Vong *et al.*, 2018; Wang *et al.*, 2020; Wang and Chen, 2020), as well as employee turnover rate in hospitality industry (Akingbola and van den Berg, 2019; Datta, 2020; Kang *et al.*, 2018).

In addition, as high employee turnover rate can be attributed to various reasons, including low engagement level (Davidson *et al.*, 2006), a comprehensive understanding of employee engagement is particularly important to the hospitality industry, where the employee turnover rate is 10%–15% higher than that of other industries (Dwesini, 2019; Young *et al.*, 2013).

Despite the great potential and gradual refinement of the role of employee engagement in the hospitality industry, there is still a need for a more comprehensive understanding of employee engagement mechanisms in the tourism and hospitality sectors (Lee and Ok, 2016). Therefore, with the primary aim of understanding how to improve employee engagement in the Chinese hospitality industry, this study also examined the mechanism of employee engagement among Chinese hospitality employees.

*2.1.3 The social exchange theory.* Employment can be considered as the relationship between an employee and the organization to which SET is applicable owing to the need to fulfill mutual satisfaction and expectations (Levinson, 2009). SET views social behaviors as the outcome of exchange, and is driven by the motivation to maximize benefits and reduce expenses. Specifically, one party would expect to receive a return in the future once they contribute to the other party. The other party who has received something of value will have



**Figure 2.**  
Cluster and timeline view of Employee Engagement publications' co-citation network

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a feeling of responsibility to reciprocate. In work settings, if the organization, employees' supervisors or colleagues have helped them, they tend to seek a chance to return the favor in the hope of gaining more benefits in the future.

In employee engagement literature, SET has been used as a theoretical framework to explain the varying degrees of engagement among employees (Bailey *et al.*, 2017). If employees receive benefits from the organization, they would feel obliged to engage themselves more with their work role as a repayment. On the contrary, if the organization fails to provide these benefits to employees, they are more likely to withdraw the cognitive, emotional and physical resources they have put in the work and the firm (Saks, 2006). Employees are likely to identify at least two primary exchange partners. In the long term, two of the most important exchange partners are their supervisors and colleagues (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2002). In the exchange process, partners must build trust for a positive outcome (Davies and Gould-Williams, 2005). For example, if supervisors trust their employees and empower them with discretion, employees would feel obligated to be engaged in their work or even present extra-role behavior. Similarly, if a colleague collaborates with the employee, the employee can reciprocate by building a collaborative relationship with the colleague and then strengthen team performance (Plugge and Bouwman, 2015). Hence, SET suggests that hospitality employees expect to obtain net positive value (i.e. rewards and recognition) by collaborating with their colleagues (Paraskevaidis and Andriotis, 2017). When the procedure and outcome are acceptable over time (i.e. procedural and distributive justices), hospitality employees would consider the relationship profitable and reciprocate with a sufficient level of engagement (Kim and Koo, 2017). Therefore, supervisor and colleague support (i.e. leadership empowerment behavior and collaboration), rewards and recognition and justice perception (procedural and distributive justices) were selected as the possible antecedents of employee engagement in the proposed model.

## *2.2 Hypotheses development*

### *2.2.1 Leadership empowerment behavior and employee engagement.*

Supervisors are normally the closest organizational link to employees, because they can communicate organizational intention directly to their subordinates (Saks, 2006). Therefore, subordinates view supervisors as a personal extension of the organization (Pati and Kumar, 2010). Empowering leaders provide a safety perception of the work environment, which has a direct impact on employee engagement and performance (Rahman *et al.*, 2018).

Leadership empowerment behavior of supervisors is one aspect of supervisor leadership style and is defined as "a practice, or set of practices involving the delegation of responsibility down the hierarchy so as to give employees increasing decision-making authority in respect to the execution of their primary work tasks" (Leach *et al.*, 2003, p. 28). It refers to the redistribution and devolution of deciding power from supervisors to subordinates and providing subordinates with the power to accomplish a job (Johnson Pamela, 1994). Thus, it provides employees with an opportunity to resolve problems by themselves, thereby contributing to their ability to plan and execute tasks (Luoh *et al.*, 2014). Empowered employees are willing to take greater responsibility and decision-making power, and provide more information and feedback, which in turn creates an environment where success is fostered (Johnson Pamela, 1994). Hence, empowering leadership is expected to stimulate work engagement (Van Schalkwyk *et al.*, 2010), and lead to positive individual- and organizational-level outcomes as well as customer satisfaction (Zhu *et al.*, 2004; Alpander, 1991). Moreover, hospitality firms have implemented employee empowerment strategies to engage their employees and delight their customers.

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Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*H1.* Leadership empowerment behavior significantly encourages employee engagement.

*2.2.2 Collaboration and employee engagement.* Collaboration refers to “the interplay of situation-appropriate uses of four interrelated processes: teamwork communication, synchronicity, explicit coordination, and implicit coordination” (Chicchio *et al.*, 2012). From the perspective of the organization, collaborative processes are strongly associated with the efficiency of a team or an organization in various segments (Townsend *et al.*, 2014). Collaboration is considered the number one characteristic that leaders look for in their employees because it is the key to preventing workplace conflict and leads to positive outcomes for employees and the organization (Soieb *et al.*, 2015). On the contrary, aggressive work behavior is considered toxic and adversely impacts employees’ motivation level and performance (Liu *et al.*, 2021).

Collaboration can not only enhance organizational performance but also prevent employee burnout and enhance employee engagement level (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). Employees in the hospitality industry are frequently confronted with emotional demands from guests and may even be subjected to abusive behavior (Choo, 2017). In these troubled times, warm support from coworkers can help frontline employees to overcome their frustrations (Harjanti, 2019). Therefore, employees are more likely to recover from negative emotions and burnout, and engage in their work. From the management perspective, leaders should encourage and promote teamwork and collaboration to build an engaged workforce (Markos and Sridevi, 2010).

Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*H2.* Collaboration in organization improves employee engagement level.

*2.2.3 Rewards and recognition and employee engagement.* Rewards and recognition can be seen as the reinforcement of employees’ positive behavior or their accomplishment of a task for the organization (Mone *et al.*, 2011). They serve as two primary mechanisms for human motivation (Hansen *et al.*, 2002) and are normally viewed as an acknowledgement of how valuable employees are to the organization (De Lacy, 2009).

Rewards and recognition have also been found to be critical factors in the enhancement of employee engagement, morale, motivation and satisfaction (Mone and London, 2010; Alhmod and Rjoub, 2020). Employees who are not compensated or rewarded fairly are likely to experience a lower level of work motivation or even engage in expropriating firm resources for their personal benefits (Ferry *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, lack of the right recognition program could lead to employee burnout, which is the opposite of engagement (Maslach *et al.*, 2001). This could cause the devaluation of employees’ work, leading to a feeling of inefficacy (Cordes and Dougherty, 1993), and thereby, a high turnover rate (Younis and Al-Tawil, 2021). Therefore, rewards and recognition signify appropriate acknowledgment that could improve employee engagement.

Rewards and recognition from the organization provide a sense of return on investment and satisfaction for employees’ hard work (Saks, 2006). Consequently, employees tend to engage more in their jobs when higher rewards and recognition are received from the organization. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis:

*H3.* Rewards and recognition have a positive influence on employee engagement.

*2.2.4 Distributive justice, procedural justice and employee engagement.* Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of the degree to which resources are distributed in an

equitable manner (Blake, 2001). In practice, distributive justice normally involves managerial decisions, such as performance appraisals, pay and promotions (Colquitt *et al.*, 2001). Distributive justice exists when the outcomes of distribution (e.g. rewards, compensation, benefits) meet employees' expectations based on their input (Clay-Warner *et al.*, 2005).

Distributive justice is a motivator of employees' attitudes and behavior, job satisfaction (Colquitt *et al.*, 2001) and turnover intention (Biswas *et al.*, 2013). Distributive justice facilitates the configuration of social exchange process, and thus improve employee's attachment and involvement with the work (Greenberg and Scott, 1996).

Procedural justice refers to employees' perception of the fairness of formal procedures, means or processes used to determine the distribution of resources (e.g. rewards, benefits) at work (Colquitt, 2001). In contrast to distributive justice, procedural justice is characterized by the fairness and transparency of decision-making processes regarding the distribution of resources (Biswas *et al.*, 2013). Kuvaas (2008) noted that the fairness of managerial policies and practices is the primary informational source that forms employees' procedural justice perceptions.

Procedural justice is a critical driver of various employee outcomes, such as employees' cooperative behavior (Konovsky, 2000), organizational citizenship behavior (Colquitt, 2001) and task performance (Aryee *et al.*, 2004). Bies (2005) asserted that employees who are satisfied with decision-making procedures are more likely to be motivated to engage in their work. In addition, a lack of procedural justice can lead to burnout, whereas positive procedural justice can enhance job engagement (Maslach *et al.*, 2001).

SET illustrates that both employees and the organization have the responsibility to fulfill the obligation of each party. Particularly, if employees consider resource distribution and the process is fair, they tend to engage more in their work (Biswas *et al.*, 2013).

Accordingly, the following hypotheses were proposed:

*H4.* Distributive justice positively influences employee engagement.

*H5.* Procedural justice positively influences employee engagement.

*2.2.5 Employee engagement and individual performance.* Individual employee performance refers to employee's financial or nonfinancial outcomes, which are directly related to organizational performance (J, 2014). Engaged employees experience a fulfilling, positive state. The positive state induced by the high level of employee engagement helps develop an emotional connection with the organization, which influences the way employees treat their customers, thereby enhancing service quality and customer satisfaction (Sonnentag, 2003). Employee engagement indicates the employees' faith in the organization, which is shown to have a strong relationship with positive work outcomes (Zoghbi-Manrique de Lara, 2008). In addition, providing employees with engagement opportunities is a way of improving their loyalty level, encouraging them to be more involved in their jobs and developing a greater attachment to the organization. This, in turn, makes them less likely to leave the organization and enhances their individual performance (Salanova *et al.*, 2005). Accordingly, we proposed the following hypothesis:

*H6.* Employee engagement is positively associated with individual performance.

*2.2.6 Innovative work behavior, organizational performance and aggregated employee engagement.* Innovative employees are key for service organizations to gain competitive advantage and enhance their business performance (Sifatu *et al.*, 2020). Employees' innovative work behavior is a process that involves three critical stages (Janssen, 2000).

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First, a problem is identified and a novel method or idea is proposed to resolve it. Second, the new idea or solution is promoted to the team and eventually to the entire organization. Finally, the idea is generalized to the whole organization and to different tasks (Aldousari *et al.*, 2017).

Engagement is a key antecedent of employees' innovation and creativity in work settings (Rao, 2016). The positive emotion experienced by engaged employees broadens their thought–action range (Pattnaik and Sahoo, 2021). Additionally, the engagement program promotes employees' enthusiasm and provides a fertile place for inner motivation to generate new ideas (Eldor and Harpaz, 2016). Consequently, engaged employees are more motivated to develop new ways to effectively perform their tasks.

Employees are essential assets for service innovation in tourism and hospitality industries. Their continuous interactions with customers provide frontline employees with rich resources for innovative thinking (Xu and Wang, 2019). Furthermore, the interaction promotes the sharing of information and knowledge between the two parties, allowing for a better understanding of customer needs and preferences, thus generating more novel solutions (Schaarschmidt *et al.*, 2018). The relationship between employee engagement and innovative behavior in tourism and hospitality sectors has also been established (Slåtten *et al.*, 2011).

Service differentiation through employee innovation has become one of the most important and successful business approaches (Liu *et al.*, 2021). For example, Gree Electric Appliance Inc.'s (the largest air-conditioning company in China and the world) strategic approach is to achieve competitive advantages through talent management and employee innovation (Chen, 2021). Employee innovation is important in this regard.

In sum, it is reasonable to assume that the overall employee engagement level in an organization encourages innovation in the organization and then impacts the overall organization's performance. The term aggregated employee engagement was introduced to aggregate each hotel's individual level employee engagement for the purpose of multilevel analysis. Based on the above argument, aggregated employee engagement enables the employees in the organization to display innovative behavior, and it has a positive influence on organizational success. Hence, we proposed the following hypothesis:

*H7.* Aggregated employee engagement has a positive influence on organizational performance through the mediation of the collaboration level.

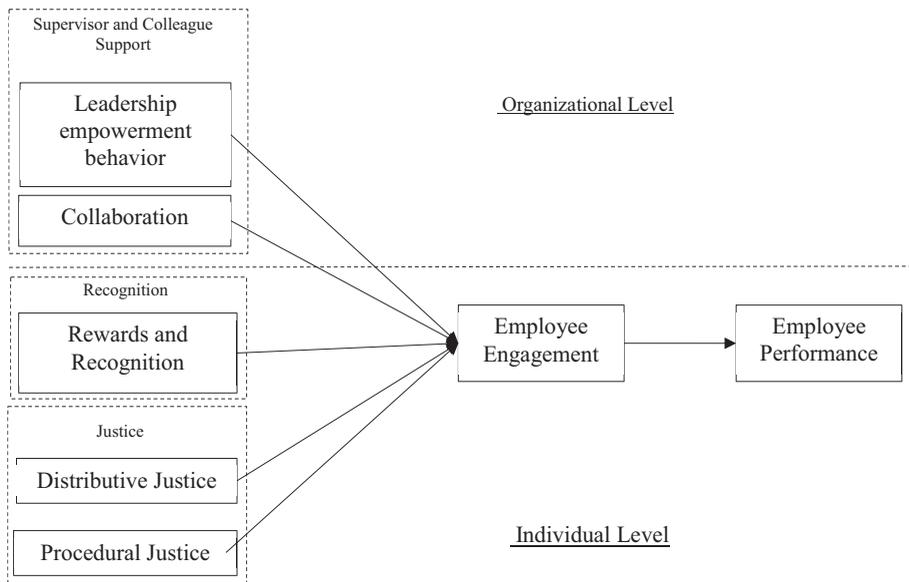
In summary, the following multilevel structural model for individual employees (Figure 3) and organizational level structural model (Figure 4) are proposed.

### 3. Methodology

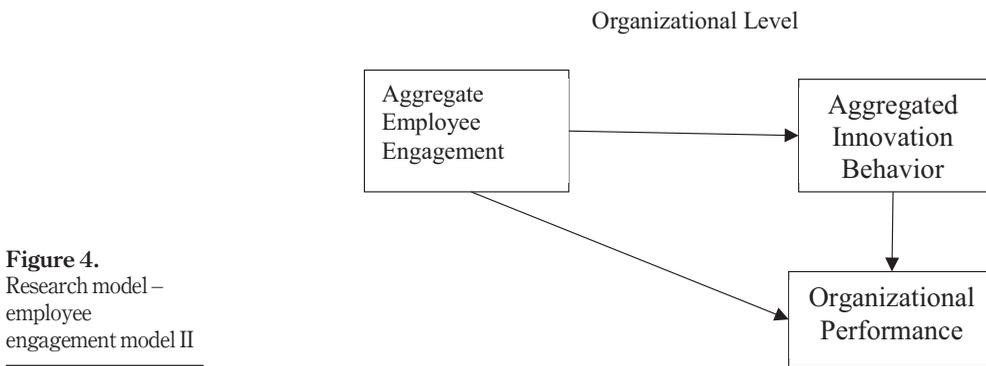
A multilevel analysis method was used to study the antecedents and effects of employee engagement on both the organizational and individual levels.

#### 3.1 Sample data

Sample data were collected through a questionnaire survey targeting employees from 39 hotels in Guangzhou, China, in 2019. Guangzhou is a large metropolitan area with hundreds of starred hotels and is one of the most appealing destinations for hotel investors in southern China. A total of 323 valid questionnaires were completed (questionnaire efficiency, 90.22%). Among the respondents, 51.08% were men and 69% had at least two years of work experience. Regarding job positions, 29.41% worked in the front office, 21.36% worked in the food and beverage division, 17.96% were housekeepers, 16.72% worked in marketing



**Figure 3.**  
Research model –  
employee  
engagement model I



**Figure 4.**  
Research model –  
employee  
engagement model II

and sales and 8.05% were managers. While hospitality employees' demographic distribution was not available, prior studies report that the majority of the workforce was at the entry level and that the managerial position represented a relatively small proportion (sample: 8.05% managers) (Datta, 2021).

### 3.2 Measurements

In this study, all concepts were measured by applying measurements from previous studies (Table 1) adapted to the hospitality context (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005). For example, employment engagement was measured using a multidimensional engagement measurement that consists of nine items covering both job engagement and organizational engagement (Saks, 2006).

Construct	Measurement items
Leadership empowerment behavior (LEB) <i>Ahearn et al. (2005)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. My manager helps me understand how my objectives and goals relate to that of the company</li> <li>2. My manager makes many decisions together with me</li> <li>3. My manager believes that I can handle demanding tasks</li> <li>4. My manager allows me to do my job my way</li> </ol>
Employee engagement (EE) <i>Saks (2006)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I really “throw” myself into my job</li> <li>2. Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time</li> <li>3. This job is all consuming; I am totally into it</li> <li>4. My mind often wanders, and I think of other things when doing my job</li> <li>5. Being a member of this organization is very captivating</li> <li>6. One of the most exciting things for me is getting involved with things happening in this organization</li> <li>7. I am really not into the “going on” in this organization</li> <li>8. Being a member of this organization makes me come “alive.”</li> <li>9. Being a member of this organization is exhilarating for me</li> </ol>
Rewards and recognition (RR) <i>Saks (2006)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A pay raise</li> <li>2. A promotion</li> <li>3. Praise from your supervisor</li> <li>4. Some form of public recognition</li> </ol>
Procedure justice (PJ) <i>Colquitt (2001)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have you been able to express your views and feelings during those procedures?</li> <li>2. Have you had an influence over the (outcome) arrived at by those procedures?</li> <li>3. Have those procedures been applied consistently?</li> <li>4. Have those procedures been free of bias?</li> <li>5. Have those procedures been based on accurate information?</li> <li>6. Have you been able to appeal the (outcome) arrived at by those procedures?</li> <li>7. Have those procedures upheld ethical and moral standards?</li> </ol>
Distributive justice (DJ) <i>Colquitt (2001)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does your (outcome) reflect the effort you have put into your work?</li> <li>2. Is your (outcome) appropriate for the work you have completed?</li> <li>3. Does your (outcome) reflect what you have contributed to the organization?</li> <li>4. Is your (outcome) justified, given your performance?</li> </ol>
Collaboration (TC) <i>Chiochio et al. (2012)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. My teammates and I share knowledge that promotes work progress</li> <li>2. My teammates and I carry out our tasks at the appropriate moment</li> <li>3. My teammates and I discuss work deadlines with each other</li> <li>4. My teammates and I can foresee each other’s needs without having to express them</li> </ol>
Innovative behavior (IB) <i>Janssen (2000)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Searching out new working methods, techniques or instruments</li> <li>2. Making important organizational members enthusiastic for innovative ideas</li> <li>3. Introducing innovative ideas into the work environment in a systematic way</li> </ol>
Employ performance (EP)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I use to maintain high standard of work</li> <li>2. I use to keep myself updated with new skills and knowledge that help me to quickly adapt to changes in my core jobs</li> <li>3. I use to guide my new colleagues beyond my job purview</li> </ol>
Organizational performance (OP)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Satisfaction of customers or clients</li> <li>2. Relations between management and other employees</li> <li>3. Growth in sales</li> <li>4. Market share</li> </ol>

**Table 1.**  
The measurements of  
concepts

While the questionnaire survey collected the perceptions of individual employees, the organizational-level measurements (empowerment leadership, collaboration, employee engagement, innovation and performance) were obtained through aggregation (by averaging the perceptions of individual employees in that particular organization). The intra-class correlation coefficients (ICCs) were calculated to ensure the acceptability of this approach.

#### 4. Data analysis and results

Considering the nature of cross-sectional data, it is necessary to examine common method variance by conducting Harman's single-factor test for the combined list of measurement items. The results revealed that single factor explains only 22.13% of the total variance (less than 50%), suggesting that common method bias was not a problem in this study (Zhou *et al.*, 2016).

In addition, as sample data were collected from 39 hotels, ICCs were calculated for all organizational level constructs: leadership empowerment behavior (ICC1 = 0.41), colleague collaboration (ICC1 = 0.35), organizational performance (ICC1 = 0.55), innovative behavior (ICC1 = 0.28) and employee engagement (ICC1 = 0.65). Thus, it is safe to use hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to examine multilevel hypotheses (Bliese, 2000).

Confirmatory factor analysis (in SPSS 24.0 and AMOS 21.0) was conducted to examine the discriminant validity, consistency and reliability of the measures, the results of which are presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4. The data fit the model well ( $\chi^2/df = 1.567$ , CFI = 0.958, TLI = 0.952, RMSEA = 0.042, SRMR = 0.044) (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). All measurement items' factor loadings were significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and close to or above 0.70, except for one item, which was 0.67. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all factors were greater than the cut-off value of 0.70 and suggested internal consistency (Nunnally, 1978). The composite reliability of the factors ranged from 0.824 to 0.930, which exceeded the threshold of 0.70, suggesting acceptable internal reliability. Furthermore, Tables 2 and 3 show that the square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) (diagonal elements) were greater than the construct correlations (off-diagonal factors), which suggested good

**Table 2.**  
Correlations matrix  
for constructs  
( $n = 323$ ) model  
I – individual level

Items	Mean	SD	LEB	TC	RR	DJ	PJ	EE	EP
LEB	4.772	0.884	0.811						
TC	4.940	0.789	0.309**	0.761					
RR	4.769	0.949	0.284**	0.266**	0.785				
DJ	4.536	0.859	0.097	0.150**	0.174**	0.754			
PJ	4.948	0.677	0.248**	0.163**	0.130*	0.003	0.735		
EE	5.171	0.832	0.488**	0.359**	0.286**	0.263**	0.418**	0.876	
EP	4.590	1.338	0.021	0.018	-0.023	0.041	-0.009	0.174**	0.864

Notes: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Table 3.**  
Correlations matrix  
for constructs  
(companies = 39)  
model II –  
organizational level

Items	Mean	SD	OP	IB	EE
OP	4.760	0.931	0.876		
IB	4.878	0.686	0.553**	0.868	
EE	5.203	0.683	0.251	0.395*	0.876

Paths	Loadings	( <i>t</i> -value)	CR	AVE	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Organizational performance (OP)			0.930	0.768	0.929
OP1	0.895***				
OP2	0.906***	24.304			
OP3	0.890***	23.436			
OP4	0.812***	19.479			
Innovation behavior (IB)			0.901	0.753	0.919
IB14	0.953***				
IB23	0.876***	22.391			
IB56	0.765***	17.739			
Leadership empowerment behavior (LEB)			0.885	0.658	0.883
LEB1	0.825***				
LEB 2	0.830***	16.694			
LEB 3	0.812***	16.246			
LEB 4	0.775***	15.308			
Collaboration (TC)			0.846	0.579	0.845
TC1	0.729***				
TC2	0.783***	12.742			
TC3	0.803***	13.002			
TC4	0.726***	11.919			
Rewards and recognition (RR)			0.865	0.616	0.863
RR1	0.712***				
RR2	0.770***	12.705			
RR3	0.873***	13.962			
RR4	0.776***	12.785			
Distributive justice (DJ)			0.840	0.568	0.838
DJ1	0.747***				
DJ2	0.758***	12.476			
DJ3	0.726***	12.001			
DJ4	0.783***	12.806			
Procedural justice (PJ)			0.824	0.540	0.822
PJ1	0.792***				
PJ2	0.747***	12.745			
PJ3	0.676***	11.555			
PJ4	0.720***	12.327			
Employee engagement (EE)			0.908	0.767	0.928
EE123	0.835***				
EE456	0.943***	21.340			
EE789	0.845***	18.665			
Employee performance (EP)			0.922	0.747	0.921
EP1	0.864***				
EP2	0.900***	21.803			
EP3	0.874***	20.739			
EP4	0.817***	18.480			

Fit indices of the reflective measurement model:  $\chi^2$  (df) = 769.480 (491),  $p < 0.00$  ( $\chi^2/df = 1.567$ ); CFI = 0.958; TLI = 0.952; RMSEA = 0.042; SRMR = 0.044

Notes: \*:  $p < 0.10$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*:  $p < 0.00$ ; The average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR) appear in the reflective scales to evidence reliability

**Table 4.** Confirmatory factor analysis

convergent validity. In addition, the AVE of all constructs ranged from 0.540 to 0.768, which were above the recommended value of 0.50, suggesting good discriminant validity.

4.1 Testing the structural model

The proposed structural model was tested (using HLM12) and the results are presented in Figure 5. All hypotheses proposed at the individual employee level (level I) are supported. In other words, organizational leadership empowerment behavior and collaboration level, both, improved individual employee engagement ( $p < 0.01$ ); employees' perceptions of rewards and recognition significantly affected employee engagement ( $p = 0.015$ ). The results also suggested a positive association between perceived distributive justice and employee engagement ( $\beta = 0.169, p = 0.012$ ) and between procedural justice and employee engagement ( $\beta = 0.200, p = 0.011$ ). Furthermore, higher employee engagement generated higher individual employee performance ( $\beta = 0.556, p = 0.001$ ).

With respect to the organization-level model, the results suggest that the organizational employee engagement level impacts organizational performance significantly through the innovation level in the organization. This mediating role of innovation level in organizations was further confirmed by the bootstrapping method with 10,000 random samples (Shrout and Bolger, 2002).

4.2 Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to examine the employee engagement model, including the key constructs related to employee engagement, its antecedents, individual and organizational outcomes and the mediation effect of organizational innovation behavior on the relationship between aggregated employee engagement and organizational performance. Compared to reward and recognition and employees' justice perception, the results indicated a stronger influence of supervisor leadership empowerment ( $p = 0.001$ ) and colleague collaboration level ( $\beta = 0.498, p = 0.009$ ) on individual employee engagement. These results are consistent with previous findings on colleague and supervisor support (Baqir et al., 2020). The results also revealed that employees' perception of rewards and recognition ( $\beta = 0.152, p = 0.015$ ), distributive justice ( $\beta = 0.169, p = 0.012$ ) and procedural justice ( $\beta = 0.2, p = 0.011$ ) affected individual employee engagement, which had a significant influence on individual performance. The organizational model suggests that improving the

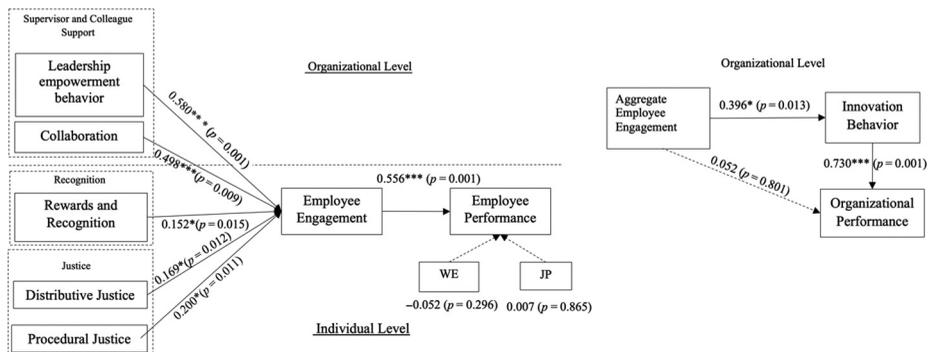


Figure 5.

Hierarchical linear modeling results

Notes: Control variables: WE: work experience; JP: job position  
Sources: \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$

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organizational culture of employee engagement will enhance the organizational culture of innovation, which in turn, will help ameliorate organizational performance.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

### 5.1 Conclusions

This research developed a multilevel model to examine the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement in the hospitality industry. The results showed that organizational empowerment, collaboration, rewards and recognition, distributive justice and procedural justice are positively associated with employee engagement. The results also revealed that employee engagement improved individual and organizational performance outcomes. The mediating effect of organizational innovation culture on the relationship between organizational employee engagement and organizational performance was also validated. Several theoretical and practical contributions were advanced by this study.

### 5.2 Theoretical implications

This research makes several contributions to the literature. First, it examined the antecedents and effects of engagement at both individual and corporate levels. The model examined five drivers of individual employee engagement at two levels: organizational-level drivers (leadership empowerment behavior and collaboration) and individual-level drivers (rewards and recognition, and distributive justice and procedural justice). The HLM analysis results echo prior research on the significant effect of empowerment on employee engagement (He *et al.*, 2021). The results further confirmed that all five drivers significantly affected employee engagement. Additionally, the results suggest that employee engagement can enhance employee and organizational performance.

Second, the research model illustrates the relationship among aggregated innovative behavior, aggregated employee engagement and organizational performance at the organizational level. Although aggregated employee engagement does not have a direct influence on organizational performance, it does have an indirect effect on organizational performance through aggregated innovative behavior. The result for innovative behavior is consistent with previous studies on the relationship between employee engagement and innovative behavior at the individual level (Jung and Yoon, 2018; Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2011). In addition, the mediating role of innovative behavior not only points out the importance of innovative behavior in the employee engagement model but also shows a close relationship between innovative behavior and employee engagement in enhancing organizational performance.

Third, employee engagement is an underexplored area in tourism and hospitality contexts. This research extends the current findings and contributes to the existing studies on employee engagement by applying this concept in the tourism and hospitality context and empirically proving how managers or supervisors can engage employees, thus enhancing organizational performance.

### 5.3 Practical implications

This study offers insights into building effective engagement practices for better business performance in tourism and hospitality organizations. According to the findings, the following suggestions can be applied to the relationship between supervisors and subordinates: First, the proposed employee engagement model provides a blueprint to improve employee engagement in organizations. From the organization's perspective, the management team should provide leadership training programs to supervisors to help them support and display empowered leadership behavior towards their employees and

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foster corporate cultures characterized by collaboration. From a supervisor's perspective, the management team should provide adequate support to employees. For example, leaders should ensure that employees know that they are approachable and willing to communicate barriers to them at work. Additionally, leaders should encourage collaboration among team members, making employees more engaged and productive. For example, leaders could encourage informal social events among coworkers in addition to compulsory team building events. Moreover, leaders can clarify the roles of team members in their collaboration and specify long-term goals for employees to ensure that all employees are on the same page.

Second, a fair rewards and recognition system program can be adopted to reduce absenteeism and turnover. To encourage innovative behavior, managers need not only provide rewards and recognition for the length of service but also reward employees who contribute to innovation and technological advancement. To retain engaging employees, leaders need not only provide fair rewards and recognition to encourage excellent behavior, but also pay attention to the negative reaction from employees caused by unfairness perception in the workplace. Managers should communicate and become more emotionally intelligent to boost their employee engagement.

#### *5.4 Limitations and future research*

This study has some limitations. First, although the authors adopted a multilevel analysis approach, the measurement of variables was self-reported by hospitality employees themselves, which might lead to subjective assessments. Future studies could measure organizational and employee performance through supervisors. Second, with the extensive range of potential antecedents to employee engagement, future research could broaden the examination of other predictors. In addition, the cross-sectional nature of the present study limits the understanding of the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. Therefore, future research could use longitudinal data to investigate employee engagement. Moreover, the data were collected before the COVID-19 pandemic; thus, the results might differ in the pandemic setting. Future studies could use this research model for a comparative study. Finally, this study was conducted in a single culture/country (China). Future research could consider a cross-culture/country study or employee engagement in a mixed-culture workplace to increase the generalizability of the research model.

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