

Importance-Performance Analysis of Employee Empowerment- A Comparative Study of Hospitality Industry in Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea

Abstract

Purpose - According to resource-based view, companies derive exceptional human resource from the motivation of employee empowerment. Research conducted by employee empowerment has focused on if employees generally believe in the importance of employee empowerment, does implementing empowerment yield consistent results (importance-performance analysis). It is, therefore, valuable to investigate how cultural values of different countries impact employee's valuation of the importance and effectiveness of empowerment.

Design/methodology/approach - This study collected data using a paper questionnaire in hotels in Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea. The questionnaires distributed by human resource managers to employees in the hospitality, 1025(Malaysia), 304(Thailand) and 385(South Korea) replied with completed data.

Findings - The findings indicate that supervisors of Malaysian hotel could provide support and training for the professional career development of employees, listen to employees, communicate thoroughly, establish transparent career promotion paths, facilitate employees to clearly understand the functions and goals to be achieved at each stage, and understand what professional training programs the hotel provides; Thai hotel managers could reallocate resources to other areas, such as innovation or human resource management, so that overall organizational resources may be better used; Korean hotel supervisors could give employees for freedom to make decisions, whether that is within the scope of their work or crossing boundaries to assist a coworker.

Originality/value - There has been little research on the cross-cultural analysis of employee empowerment. This study investigated the difference across groupings of the status of employee empowerment of hotel industry employees from Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea

Keywords: Employee Empowerment, Importance-Performance Analysis, Cross-Cultural Values, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea.

Paper type Research paper

1.Introduction

In recent decades, employee empowerment has generated considerable interest in management research and practice (Maynard, Gilson, and Mathieu, 2012). Most existing studies based on the theories of the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Yang,2020) suggest that employee empowerment improves organizational performance (Patel and Cardon, 2010) and develops valuable and exceptional human resources (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, and Baer, 2012) by cultivating the motivation and initiative of employees to respond to an ever-changing and competitive work environment. For these reasons, employee empowerment is considered as a best practice for improving employee productivity and organizational performance (Maynard et al., 2012).

An organization's power relationship between management and employees is called employee empowerment (Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Lee and Koh, 2001; Pelit et al., 2011). However, the current literature has its limitations. First, current theory implicitly assumes that employee empowerment will always improve an organization's performance regardless of the organization's specific characteristics (Kaufman, 2015; Yin et al., 2019). However, this thinking may be flawed. Can an organization improve its performance merely by empowering its employees? Recent studies have revealed that only few organizations implement employee empowerment measures (Kanjanakan et al.,2023; Wood and Wall, 2007; Yin et al., 2019). If an organization generally believes in the importance of employee empowerment, does implementing empowerment yield consistent results ? Do employees in different nations perceive the importance and effectiveness of empowerment differently? The current gap has not been addressed by existing research.

Through importance-performance analysis (IPA), this current study seeks answers to these questions. By comparing differences in employees' perception of the importance of empowerment implementations and the performance of the empowerment environments, supervisors and leadership teams of the internal organization can distinguish the qualities of the empowerment of different employee groups. Despite the fact that IPA has been utilized in numerous previous studies, there is a dearth of research on empowerment of employees of diverse nationalities. To address this question, we conducted a cross-cultural study of employee empowerment in the hotel industry in Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea. The literature on the application of IPA to employee empowerment is first summarized and categorized into four quadrants of empowerment strategies. Before making recommendations, we investigate the status of employee empowerment across groups of Malaysian, Thai, and South Korean employees in the hotel industry.

2.Literature review

2.1 Employee empowerment

Employee empowerment is a power dynamic within an organization that involves the transfer of power and responsibility from management to employees (Bowen and Lawler, 1992). The word “power” distinguishes empowerment from other management concepts (Forrester, 2000) Those who possess extensive professional knowledge and are self-motivated already hold power (Ma et al., 2021). From a structural perspective, empowerment is the process of managers and employees sharing power (Conger and Kanungo, 1988), roles (Pelit et al., 2011) and activity (Lee and Koh, 2001). From a psychological perspective, empowerment refers to the employees’ motivation (Thomas and Velthouse, 1990), mental state (Lee and Koh, 2001), or experience (Wall et al., 2004) and subsequent self-perception (Conger and Kanungo, 1988).

Empowerment means various things to different people (Quinn and Spreitzer, 1997), and the experience of employee empowerment varies as well (Greasley et al., 2005). In social contexts, external rules or incentives (including compensation, management, goals and leadership) are used to encourage desired behaviors in organizations. When employees’ intrinsic needs are met, they have internalized and integrated the external rules. That is to say, external values are translated into personal values and self-motivation. Through this process of internalization and integration, behavior governed by external rules is internalized and self-regulated, and the motivation for subsequent actions become self-determined (Fernandez and Moldogaziev,2015). The diverse working environments (Robbins et al., 2002), supervisor authorities (Honold ,1997) and teams (Spreitzer,1996) of various hotels affect employees’ perception of their empowerment experiences and generate variations across individuals. Employee empowerment is a multidimensional construct, and involves relationships between individuals (employees and supervisors), groups (leadership teams), and organizations (the work environment). On the basis of these three lenses, this current study investigates employee empowerment.

2.1.1 Employee Empowerment Experience with Manager

The manager’s perspective on empowerment involves the decentralization of decision making, wherein managers give employees more discretion and autonomy. Managers thus play a key role in empowering employees to increase their own motivation (Cheong et al.,2016 ; Cheung et al.,2012; Kundu et al,2019; Srivastava et al.,2006). This does not imply that managers must relinquish their power or control, but rather they must change how power and control are exercised (Ripley and Ripley,1992). Managers believe that empowerment behavior is determined by the supervisor's degree

of trust in employee performance and integrity, as well as the supervisor's own level of accountability (Hakimi et al.,2010). When managers exhibit empowering behavior, employees feel more empowered and demonstrate more commitment to organizations. According to affective events theory (AET) (Weiss and Cropanzano,1996), empowerment behavior is an emotional event, and the psychological experience of empowerment is an emotional reaction. Job satisfaction rises when employees see their supervisors acting in an empowering manner (Huertas-Valdivia et al.,2019 ; Namasivayam et al.,2014).

2.1.2 Employee Empowerment Experience with Leadership Team

A second perspective on empowerment is "group dynamics." Empowerment is a multilevel construct comprising the method by which high-level managers empowering teams (to empower), how the team members respond to empowerment (to be empowered) and how team members interact (Honold,1997). In order to comprehend employee empowerment from the group perspective, this study proposes the concept of "leadership team support" as a new perspective. In organizations, employee empowerment is a tool that promotes teamwork. Organizations can achieve their goals and compete with other organizations by empowering individuals and team members (D'Innocenzo et al., 2016). Managers who want to enhance organizational performance should make team empowerment as a central idea.

2.1.3 Employee Empowerment Experience with Work Environment

Organizations address employees' needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy through situational factors like management practices and behavior. Work-related attitudes including organizational commitment, changes to work commitments (Gagne, Koestner, and Zuckerman, 2000), work engagement (Deci et al., 2001), work enjoyment (Black and Deci, 2000) and job satisfaction (Vansteenkiste et al., 2007) are all positively impacted by these fulfillments. When employees feel their jobs are autonomous, their levels of job satisfaction are greater. Employee satisfaction as a whole is positively impacted by a self-determined management model, and this influence grows and strengthens employee empowerment measures. Empowerment measures in organizational contexts (empowerment in the work environment) can intrinsically motivate employees to be more satisfied with work and life than others (Vansteenkiste et al., 2007). Encouragement of self-determination management styles and behaviors can increase job satisfaction in different ways, such as increasing employees' sense of trust and psychological security to meet their own needs (Deci et al., 1989). Work environment empowerment measures increase job satisfaction by making employees feel a sense of control and the ability to make choices about their

jobs.

2.2 Importance-Performance Analysis

Originally developed by Martilla and James (1977), IPA is a two-dimensional matrix graphically representing employees' average importance rating (y-axis) against average performance rating (x-axis) for empowerment. Importance-performance analysis (IPA) is broadly applied in management, including customer management for automobile dealerships (Martilla and James, 1977), tourism management (Chu and Choi, 2000; Deng, 2007; Sulaiman Al Jahwari et al., 2016), hotel management (Koh et al., 2010), public policy (Lai and To, 2010) and environmental management (To et al., 2015).

In employee empowerment context, the grid is divided into four quadrants. The top left quadrant is labeled "Improvement Efforts" and it represents employees who believe that empowerment of the organization is important but that the associated effectiveness is relatively low (Boudrias et al., 2009). For data points in this quadrant, employees feel empowerment is very important, but performance is less than satisfactory (Lee, 2015). Management must therefore immediately pay attention and improve empowerment measures to raise employee performance. This is the critical quadrant where decision makers should devote more resources to improve performance. "Efficacy in Empowerment" is labeled in the top right quadrant. Employees in this quadrant have a strong sense of empowerment and performance. Organizational leaders in this area only need to maintain their ongoing efforts and empowerment. Decision makers in this quadrant may simply maintain existing resource and management allocations (Lee and Lee, 2009).

Employees in the bottom left quadrant with the label "Low Empowerment", employees put little emphasis on empowerment and performance. Managers of centralized organizations in this quadrant do need not to expend extra effort or allocate special attention to empowerment measures. On the bottom right quadrant with the label "Task Allocation" demonstrates employees with a high degree of performance but place little emphasis on empowerment itself. It is recommended that resources used for empowerment be reallocated to other areas for organizations in this quadrant (Cheung et al., 2012; Huang and To, 2018), for example for innovative management, employee commitment management (Lau et al., 2017) or human resources management.

2.3 Cross-cultural Values in Employee Empowerment

Values have been conceptualized as the enduring beliefs that specific modes of conduct are important (Schwartz and Sagiv, 1995; Cleveland et al., 2011). Culture has

a direct impact on values because they emerge continuously through the assimilation of environmental information (Caputo et al., 2019). According to theories of social psychology, the theory assumes that employees from various cultural backgrounds may have different value structures for empowerment, which leads to different attitudes and behaviors. The rationale behind this hypothesis is that individuals with various social orientations may perceive and value employee empowerment differently. In other words, the value judgments of employees (that is, the importance they attribute to something) can vary according to their psychosocial programming and variances in the "Culture" of their social environment. This study assumes that orientation toward cultural values affects employee empowerment attitudes and behaviors (Hofstede, 2011). Therefore, this study investigates how groups may perceive the importance and performance of empowerment.

From an understanding of the cultural value of individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1980, 2001), Sakakida, Cole and Card (2004) and conducted a comparative study of the personal preferences of Japanese and American college students, discovering that American students tend to be more individualistic than Japanese students. Individualists value the individual's autonomy for choice and decision-making while collectivists value and believe in the choices and decisions made by groups (Sully and Sommer, 2000). Uncertainty Avoidance contributed towards explaining the differences in risk perception and employees' behavior because of its link to the willingness to accept potential risks (Hofstede, 2001; Yang and Wong, 2012). Dynamic externality was highly correlated with power distance, collectivism, and conservatism. The dimension, societal cynicism, was only correlated with two Hofstede (2001) dimensions—individualism (negatively) and long- and short-term orientation (Bond et al., 2004). Cultural dimension scores for Malaysia, Thailand and Korea as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Cultural dimension scores for Malaysia, Thailand and Korea

Country	Uncertainty Avoidance	Dynamic Externality	Societal Cynicism
Malaysia	36	80.9	55.4
Thailand	64	71.6	64.1
Korea	85	66.1	62.4

Note: The national scores of uncertainty avoidance, dynamic externality and societal cynicism are provided in Hofstede (2001) and Bond et al. (2004)'s paper.

Cultural differences lead to differences in the perceived importance and performance of employee empowerment in various aspects. Differences in perceived importance and performance stem from the varying cultural backgrounds of employees and the differing degrees of empowerment of their personal sensibilities. There are

considerable variances in the perceived importance and performance of empowerment among different cultural groups. Discussing employee empowerment from the perspective of cross-cultural value orientation can help us answer the third question: Is employee empowerment affected by cultural value orientation? Do cultural values in different countries affect employees' emphasis on empowerment and performance? Cultural value orientation provides a plausible explanation for differences in empowerment behaviors across cultures. These values are cross-culturally relevant and effective factors allowing for comparison between countries (Lin et al.,2018). Based on cross-cultural value theory, this study applied importance-performance analysis (IPA) to examine hotel employee empowerment differences and similarities across Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea.

3.Method

3.1 Sampling and respondents

The current study invited a total of 2000 hotel employees from 3-star, 4-star, and 5-star hotels to participate. Three countries' researchers invited hotels to participate in this survey. If the key personnel agreed to participate, the researchers would then provide them with study details and hard copies of survey questionnaires. The hotel employees who were invited to participate voluntarily in the online survey were given two weeks to complete it and a single follow-up email was sent to all the participants. Each country's Institutional Review Board's (IRB) authorized procedures to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

The sample consisted of 1025, 304 and 385 hotel employees from Malaysia, Thailand and South Korea respectively. Approximately 86% of Korean employees were less than 39 years old. There were more female respondents in Korea (54.8%), but slightly fewer in Malaysia and Thailand (46.5% and 45.1%, respectively). The vast majority of Korean respondents had either a bachelor's or master's degree (93% combined). In Malaysia and Thailand, 61.2% and 52% of respondents respectively reported completing university or higher level of education. That is, the majority of both groups were male, young, and well-educated. Further, the personal information in the hotel was realized, inclusive of tenure and position. First, in terms of the tenure, The majority of Malaysians (73.2%) and Thais (72.7%) had less than five years of full-time employment, whereas the majority of Korean (42.3%) had more than ten years of tenure.

Table 2 Demographic characteristics of respondents by nationality

Variables	Malaysia (n=1025)	Thailand (n=304)	Korean (n=385)
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Age ^a			
<30	42.3%(434)	37.8%(115)	34.3%(132)
30-39	25.9%(266)	42.4%(129)	51.4%(198)
40-49	21.7%(222)	14.1%(43)	11.7%(45)
50-59	9.0%(92)	5.3%(16)	2.6%(10)
60 or above	1.1%(11)	0.3%(1)	0
Sex			
Male	53.5%(548)	54.9%(167)	45.2%(174)
Female	46.5%(477)	45.1%(137)	54.8%(211)
Education ^a			
High school, equivalent or less	38.8%(398)	48.0%(146)	7.0%(27)
College/University Degree	49.7%(509)	47.0%(143)	82.1%(316)
Post-graduate Degree	11.5%(118)	4.9%(15)	10.9%(42)
Tenure			
< 5years	73.2%(750)	72.7%(221)	22.1%(85)
6-10years	14.1%(145)	24.0%(73)	35.6%(137)
10years or above	12.7%(130)	3.3%(10)	42.3%(163)
Job Position			
Non-managerial level	40.9%(419)	79.6%(242)	37.9%(146)
Managerial level	46.6%(478)	12.5%(38)	44.1%(170)
Chief Executive Officer	3.1%(32)	1.3%(4)	13.8%(53)
Other ^b	9.4%(96)	6.6%(20)	4.2%(16)

a Age and education of Thailand employees do not sum to 100% due to the elimination of a few minor cases.

b Other includes a few cases of part-time employee and unclassified categories.

3.2 Measurement

The original 50-item empowerment was developed in the United States and was validated by Petchsawang et al. (2022). Each nation participated in translating the original language (English) into national languages and back translating them until consensus was reached between the original and translated versions (Douglas and Craig, 2007). For the back translation, each country would then appoint two local senior academics with bilingual proficiency. EFA results presented three factors, including employee experiences: 1) with their work environment (20 items), 2) with their manager (20 items), and 3) with the leadership team (10 items).

4.Result

4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to examine the validity and reliability of the research instrument. Validity was addressed in two ways. First, operationalization of the constructs drew on an extensive literature review, and the questionnaires were discussed with employees in actual organizations. Both processes were intended to enhance content validity. Second, the results of the CFA indicated that variables displayed convergent validity since the analysis yielded factors with the factor loading displaying the expected patterns. Table 3 shows the standard factor loading of the CFA model. The final CFA model had χ^2 value of 5676.751, $df = 1172$ ($p < .001$). The RMSEA index for this model was 0.061, with a 90 percent confidence interval from 0.060 to 0.063, indicating acceptable fit of the model to the data. Other indices of fit also showed acceptable fit ($GFI = 0.92$, $CFI = 0.87$, $NFI = 0.85$, $NNFI = 0.87$). Standardized factor loadings along with the descriptive item data are shown in Table 2. The standard factor loading of the CFA model for the items of this study all exceeded the 0.40 threshold (deleted F1-12, F2-3 and F3-2), with validity of the items thus confirmed. These items entered equations on Likert scale from 1-5. The Cronbach's α coefficients for the variables of this study all exceeded the 0.90 threshold, with both reliability and internal consistency of the variables thus confirmed.

Table 3 Factor analysis for the items and the mean for each factor

Factors and Items	Factor	Reliability	Mean value.	Mean value.	Mean value.
	loading	coefficient	Importance/(Performance)	Importance/(Performance)	Importance/(Performance)
			Malaysia(n=1025)	Thailand(n=304)	Korean(n=385)
Factor1- Employee Empowerment Experience with Work Environment		0.924	3.849(3.766)	3.562(3.728)	4.004(3.299)
1. I am not afraid to disagree with my manager.	0.423		3.642(3.681)	3.228(3.627) ***	3.665(2.410) ***
2. I can trust that I will be treated fairly in my performance appraisal if I fail to achieve a goal that has a reasonable risk.	0.629		3.869(3.821)	3.526(3.692)**	3.992(3.436) ***
3. I am held accountable for the decisions that I make.	0.635		3.914(4.021)***	3.887(4.199) ***	3.847(3.587) ***
4. My freedom in making decisions on the job grows as my expertise grows.	0.614		3.909(3.885)	3.593(3.762)**	4.052(3.842) ***
5. I am able to influence my professional development for career growth.	0.672		3.926(3.962)	3.743(3.957) ***	4.125(3.995) ***
6. It is acceptable for me to admit that I don't know something if the information/data are not available and are not expected to be available.	0.454		3.743(3.724)	3.404(3.609) ***	4.044(2.255) ***
7. I have access to the resources necessary to carry out my work.	0.658		3.907(3.808)***	3.591(3.766)**	4.036(3.262) ***
8. I receive the training I <u>want</u> for career growth.	0.637		3.951(3.699)***	3.857(3.930)	4.114(3.540) ***
9. I receive the training I <u>need</u> for career growth.	0.624		4.029(3.763)***	3.842(3.881)	4.130(3.683) ***
10. I can influence my professional development for career growth.	0.734		3.878(3.881)	3.736(3.859)*	4.218(3.943) ***
11. I am encouraged to suggest improvements in the way we do our work.	0.712		4.020(3.972)	3.548(3.793) ***	4.127(3.390) ***
12. I do not need permission to work across boundaries.	0.357		3.442(2.916)***	3.344(3.092)**	3.964(2.930) ***
13. I have input into making decisions that affect my work.	0.680		3.851(3.773)**	3.658(3.851) ***	3.979(3.281) ***
14. I can identify critically the risks and benefits of my decisions.	0.603		3.867(3.831)	3.571(3.813) ***	4.018(3.442) ***

15. I can take initiative to overcome barriers that I face at work.	0.627	3.915(3.903)	3.652(3.898) ***	4.023(3.283) ***
16. I feel free to share ideas in a meeting with senior leadership without fear of negative consequences.	0.656	3.826(3.677)***	3.375(3.439)	3.977(2.517) ***
17. When I raise a work issue with someone above me, the outcome is shared with me.	0.711	3.880(3.739)***	3.556(3.579)	4.049(3.156) ***
18. I am recognized when I work in an empowered way.	0.721	3.846(3.771)**	3.419(3.652) ***	3.935(3.369) ***
19. I am expected to provide a rationale when I communicate a decision that I have made.	0.721	3.857(3.882)	3.455(3.667) ***	3.964(3.504) ***
20. I am encouraged to take thoughtful risks.	0.583	3.717(3.614)***	3.257(3.493) ***	3.829(3.148) ***
Factor2- Employee Empowerment Experience with Manager	0.901	3.965(3.845)	3.662(3.803)	3.961(3.342)
1. My manager always provides access to the resources necessary to perform my job.	0.798	3.997(3.869)***	3.587(3.796) ***	3.979(3.429) ***
2. My manager shares information that is needed for me to perform my job.	0.792	4.093(3.963)***	3.735(3.832)	3.971(3.392) ***
3. My manager does not micro-manage me.	0.222	3.586(3.198)***	3.482(3.723) ***	3.831(3.047) ***
4. My manager asks for honest feedback.	0.799	4.036(3.976)*	3.668(3.805)*	3.922(3.605) **
5. My manager is open to honest feedback.	0.758	4.005(3.929)**	3.741(3.868)*	3.831(3.031) ***
6. My manager generally acts on feedback provided.	0.753	3.933(3.802)***	3.617(3.789)**	3.906(3.169) ***
7. My manager sets a good example of being empowered.	0.811	4.077(3.895)***	3.645(3.852)***	4.057(3.364) ***
8. My manager understands how my work contributes to the company objectives.	0.801	4.014(3.874)***	3.724(3.821)	3.906(3.294) ***
9. My manager trusts me to make the right decisions.	0.771	4.018(3.909)***	3.616(3.714)	3.919(3.395) ***
10. My manager encourages me to ask questions.	0.741	4.020(3.979)	3.571(3.667)	3.800(3.169) ***
11. My manager advises me as needed to enhance my job performance.	0.814	4.107(4.001)***	3.706(3.882)	3.969(3.545) ***

12. My manager gives reasonable consideration to the suggestions I make for job improvements.	0.824	3.995(3.908)***	3.578(3.780)	3.979(3.444) ***
13. My manager supports my professional development.	0.838	4.026(3.903)***	3.696(3.851)**	4.044(3.392) ***
14. My manager effectively communicates issues that impact me.	0.833	3.996(3.867)***	3.684(3.774)	4.049(3.426) ***
15. My manager encourages me to take initiative to overcome work barriers.	0.794	3.933(3.861)**	3.731(3.864)**	4.104(3.470) ***
16. My manager does not view it negatively when I go to his/her manager.	0.686	3.796(3.674)***	3.617(3.762)**	3.725(2.662) ***
17. My manager gives my suggestions reasonable consideration.	0.839	3.915(3.848)*	3.663(3.760)	3.870(3.608) ***
18. My manager encourages full participation of all members in meetings.	0.719	3.932(3.890)	3.738(3.974)	3.938(3.727) ***
19. My manager generally provides a rationale when rejecting suggestions that I have made.	0.793	3.898(3.808)**	3.635(3.735)*	4.166(3.343) ***
20. My manager listens to me.	0.758	3.919(3.754)***	3.798(3.808)	4.255(3.330) ***
Factor3- Employee Empowerment Experience with Leadership Team	0.961	3.878(3.726)	3.568(3.628)	3.939(3.329)
1. The leadership team openly discusses upcoming changes with employees at all levels when appropriate.	0.687	3.863(3.777)**	3.576(3.664)	3.826(3.210) ***
2. The leadership team does not withhold information that is needed for me to perform my job.	0.305	3.665(3.304)***	3.599(3.641)	3.943(3.268) ***
3. The leadership team asks for honest feedback.	0.808	3.999(3.896)***	3.461(3.614)*	3.813(3.530) ***
4. The leadership team is open to honest feedback.	0.812	4.000(3.837)***	3.591(3.591)	3.938(3.088) ***
5. The leadership team generally acts on feedback provided.	0.782	3.916(3.772)***	3.645(3.660)	3.847(3.081) ***
6. Members of the leadership team are visible to me on a regular basis.	0.701	3.831(3.809)	3.315(3.422)	3.613(3.223) ***
7. The leadership team makes provision for appropriate training for career enhancement at all levels.	0.753	3.919(3.748)***	3.759(3.749)	4.078(3.532) ***
8. The leadership team provides the resources necessary to carry out my	0.790	3.954(3.795)***	3.703(3.693)	4.119(3.491) ***

work.

9. The leadership team leverages the expertise of others at all levels during the decision-making process.	0.735	3.845(3.718)***	3.535(3.650)	4.112(3.514) ***
10. The leadership team encourages decision-making at the lowest appropriate level.	0.665	3.783(3.605)***	3.495(3.592)	4.096(3.348) ***

Note: Mean values of importance and performance were measured on a Likert 5-point scale: for importance: 1, extremely unimportant; 3, neutral; 5, extremely important; and for performance: 1, strongly disagree; 3, neutral; 5, strongly agree.

t-value * = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$

Table3 shows the first dimension was labeled ‘Employee Empowerment Experience with Work Environment’ and included It is acceptable for employees to admit that he doesn’t know something if the information/data are not available and are not expected to be available. This factor showed a reliability coefficient of 0.924. The second factor was ‘Employee Empowerment Experience with Manager’, showing a reliability coefficient of 0.901. The third dimension was labeled ‘Employee Empowerment Experience with Leadership Team’ and showed a reliability coefficient of 0.961.

The results indicated that based on mean values of Malaysia and Thailand the most important factors were related to ‘Employee Empowerment Experience with Manager’ (F2), such as managers encourage employees to take initiative to overcome work barriers. The second and third most important factors were ‘Employee Empowerment Experience with Leadership Team’ (F3) and ‘Employee Empowerment Experience with Work Environment’(F1). In Korean, the most important factors were related to ‘Employee Empowerment Experience with Work Environment’ (F1), such as employees can influence my professional development for career growth. The second and third most important factors were ‘Employee Empowerment Experience with Manager’ (F2) and ‘Employee Empowerment Experience with Leadership Team’ (F3).

4.2. Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA)

For further analysis of different national employee empowerment based on the three factors extracted from the factor analysis, the IPA matrix was constructed separately for each group. The results of the importance–performance analysis were plotted in the IPA grid to graphically compare the importance of attributes of Malaysia, Thailand and Korean with their performance attributes. The four quadrants are constructed based on the mean value of fifty importance items and fifty performance items, respectively. The three grids showed somewhat different configurations for the Malaysia group, the Japanese group and the Korean group.

The grand means are used to divide the grid into four quadrants. Each quadrant of the matrix is named to implicitly indicate the nature of the plots. The first quadrant, “improvement efforts”, represents attributes that need to be improved and it represents attributes of high importance and low performance. Reviewing one’s job tasks and making changes in order to better perform one’s job or making one’s work more useful. The second quadrant is named “efficacy in empowerment”. It represents attributes of high importance and high performance. Demonstrating conscientiousness and skill in performing one’s job tasks and responsibilities. Attributes with low importance and low performance are included in the third quadrant, “low empowerment”. The last quadrant,

named “task allocation”, contains attributes of low importance but high performance. To what extent are there tensions between responsible autonomy and the objectives for effective performance set by senior managers. The information gained from the plotting of the results may reveal weaknesses and strengths of a national culture.

4.2.1 Importance–Performance Analysis in Malaysia

The importance-performance plot of the 50 items of employee empowerment is shown in Figure 1. Most of items were found in the second quadrant “efficacy in empowerment”. Generally speaking, employees perceived employee empowerment as quite important and believed that employee empowerment with work environment, managers and leadership team did perform really well. However, the mean values for the perceived importance/performance of 13 items including F1.1, F1.2, F1.4-6, F1.10, F1.11, F1.14, F1.15, F1.19, F2.10, F2.18, F3.6 were not statistically different ($p > 0.05$, see Table 2) from the grand mean values for the perceived importance/performance. Hence, only F1.3, F1.7-9, F1.13, F1.16-18, F1.20, F2.1-2, F2.4-9, F2.11-17, F2.19-20, F3.1, F3.3-5, F3.7-10 were located in the second quadrant “efficacy in empowerment”. Thus, employees perceived items relating to employee empowerment as very important, and they indicated that the firms performed well in many of these aspects.

The findings of this study are consistent with the results of previous research, such as Martilla and James (1977). Employee empowerment in Malaysia was located in the second quadrant “efficacy in empowerment”. According to Martilla and James (1977) view of importance–performance analysis, hotel managers manage these attributes (F1.3, F1.7-9, F1.13, F1.16-18, F1.20, F2.1-2, F2.4-9, F2.11-17, F2.19-20, F3.1, F3.3-5, F3.7-10) well and should maintain the level of effort and performance.

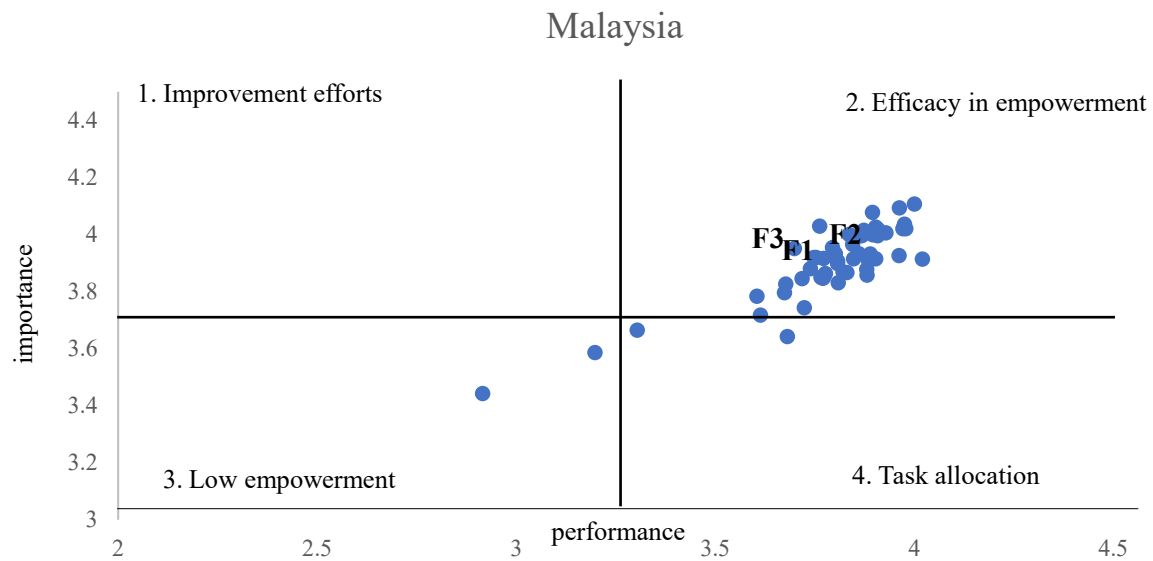


Fig 1. Importance–Performance Analysis for Malaysia

Note: F1, Employee Empowerment Experience with Work Environment;
 F2, Employee Empowerment Experience with Manager;
 F3, Employee Empowerment Experience with Leadership Team.

4.2.2 Importance–Performance Analysis in Thailand

The importance-performance plot of the 50 items of employee empowerment is shown in Figure 2. Most of items were found in the fourth quadrant “task allocation”. In this quadrant, employees didn’t perceive employee empowerment as quite important but believed that employee empowerment with work environment, managers and leadership team did perform really well. However, the mean values for the perceived importance/performance of 22 items including F1.1, F1.8-9, F1.16, F1.17, F2.2, F2.8-12, F2.17-18, F2.20, F3.1-2, F3.4-10 were not statistically different ($p > 0.05$, see Table 2) from the grand mean values for the perceived importance/performance. Hence, only F1.1-2, F1.4, F1.6-7, F1.11, F1.13-15, F1.18-20, F2.1, F2.13-14, F2.16, F2.19, F3.3 were located in the fourth quadrant “task allocation”. Thus, employees didn’t perceived items relating to employee empowerment as very important, but they felt the firms performed well in many of these aspects.

The findings of this study are consistent with the results of previous research, such as Martilla and James (1977). Employee empowerment in Malaysia was located in the second quadrant “efficacy in empowerment”. According to Martilla and James (1977) view of importance–performance analysis, hotel managers can reallocate their resources and efforts to other attributes.

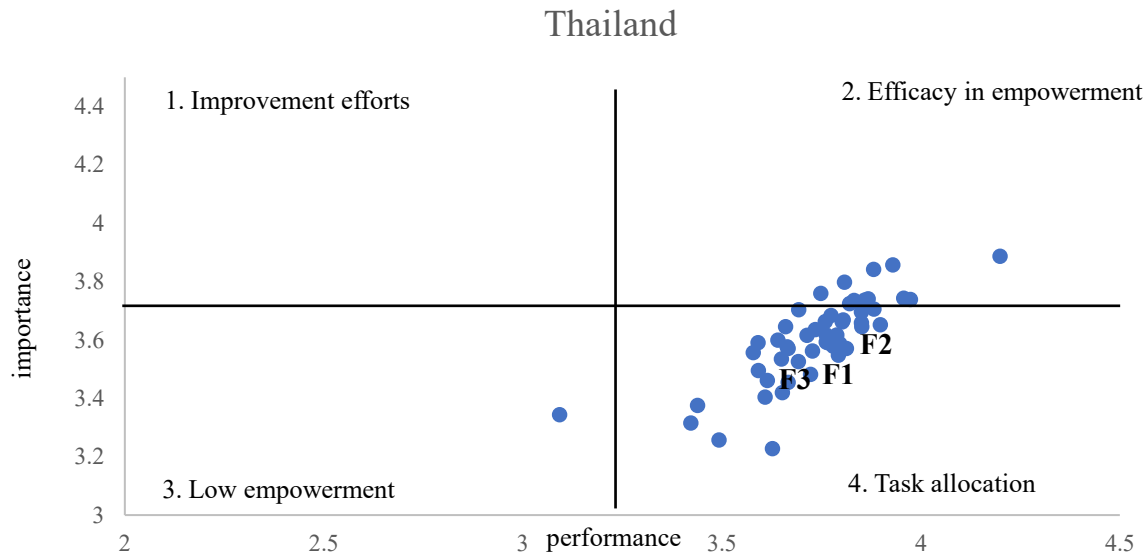


Fig 2. Importance–Performance Analysis for Thailand

Note: F1, Employee Empowerment Experience with Work Environment;
 F2, Employee Empowerment Experience with Manager;
 F3, Employee Empowerment Experience with Leadership Team.

4.2.3 Importance–Performance Analysis in Korean

The importance-performance plot of the 50 items of employee empowerment is shown in Figure 3. Some of items (F1.6, F1.16, F1.17, F1.20, F2.3, F2.5, F2.6, F2.10, F3.1, F3.4, F3.5) and factors 1-3 were found in the first quadrant “improvement efforts”. Generally speaking, employees perceived employee empowerment as quite important and believed that employee empowerment with work environment, managers and leadership team did not perform really well. However, the mean values for the perceived importance/performance of all items were statistically different ($p < 0.01$, see Table 2) from the grand mean values for the perceived importance/performance. Some items were found in the second quadrant “efficacy in empowerment”, such as F1.2, F1.3, F1.4, F1.5, F1.7, F1.8, F1.9, F1.10, F1.11, F1.12, F1.13, F1.14, F1.15, F1.18, F1.19, F2.1, F2.2, F2.4, F2.7, F2.8, F2.9, F2.11-13, F2.15-20, F3.2, F3.3, F3.7-10. However, the mean values for the perceived importance/performance of all items were statistically different ($p < 0.001$, see Table 2) from the grand mean values for the perceived importance/performance. Thus, employees perceived items relating to employee empowerment as very important, but they indicated that the hotels didn’t perform well in many of these aspects.

The findings of this study are consistent with the results of previous research, such as Martilla and James (1977). Employee empowerment in Korean was located in the first quadrant “improvement efforts” and the second quadrant “efficacy in empowerment”. According to Martilla and James (1977) view of importance–performance analysis, hotel managers manage these attributes (F1.2, F1.3, F1.4, F1.5, F1.7, F1.8, F1.9, F1.10, F1.11, F1.13, F1.14, F1.15, F1.18, F1.19, F2.1, F2.2, F2.4, F2.7, F2.8, F2.9, F2.11-13, F2.15-20, F3.2, F3.3, F3.7-10) well and should maintain the level of effort and performance, but some of attributes (F1.1, F1.6, F1.12, F1.16, F1.17, F1.20, F2.3, F2.5, F2.6, F2.10, F3.1, F3.4, F3.5) should be allocated more resources to improve performance.

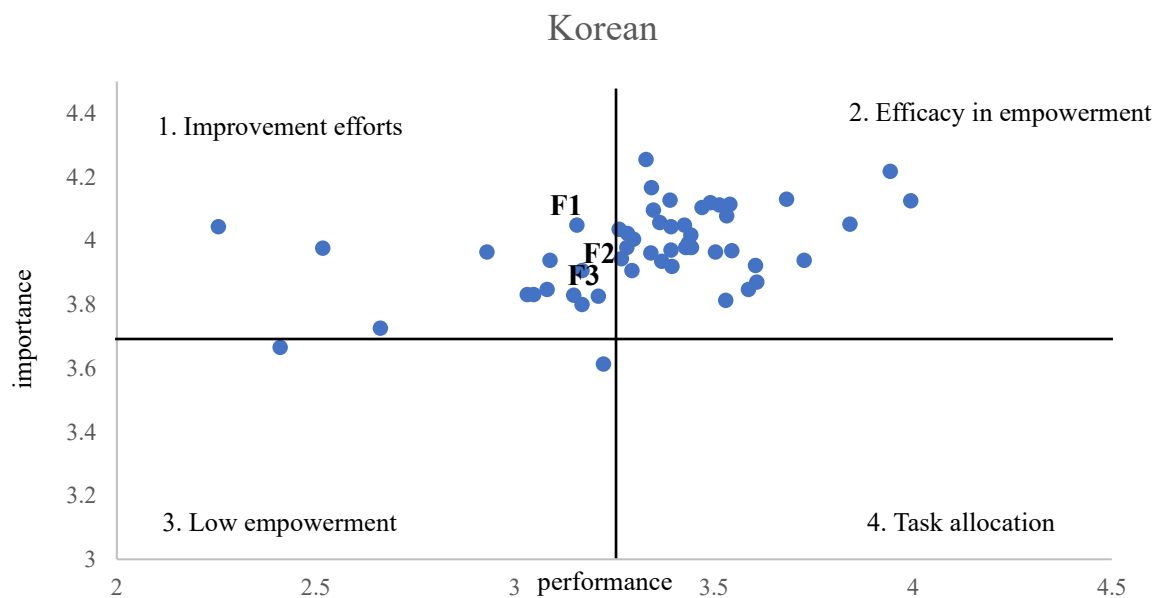


Fig 3. Importance–Performance Analysis for Korean

Note: F1, Employee Empowerment Experience with Work Environment;

F2, Employee Empowerment Experience with Manager;

F3, Employee Empowerment Experience with Leadership Team.

5. Discussion for Implication

5.1. Training for Professional Career Development

Applying IPA, the perceived empowerment experience of hotel employees in Malaysia, regardless of whether working-environment level, supervisor level or leadership team level - is generally considered important and shows a high degree of performance, so they are concentrated in the second quadrant, "Efficacy in

Empowerment." The research data shows that Malaysian hotel workers perceived significant difference in empowerment experience and performance concentrated in supervisors and the leadership teams. For example, employees expected supervisors to support professional development in their careers, but supervisors did not fully support them in their jobs. Or there may have been negative views.

Compared with workers in other countries, employees of Malaysian hotels from low uncertainty avoidance cultures didn't feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations (Hofstede, 2001; Yang and Wong, 2012). Employees of Malaysian hotels hoped that the leadership team would provide professional training for career development of employees at all levels and listen to the voices of employees, communicate fully, and provide information needed to do their work. This study suggests that supervisors of Malaysian hotel employees could provide support and training for the professional career development of employees, listen to employees, communicate thoroughly, establish transparent career promotion paths, facilitate employees to clearly understand the functions and goals to be achieved at each stage, and understand what professional training programs the hotel provides. When employees sense the support and dedication of the hotel, they feel job satisfaction and are more willing to contribute their performance to the hotel.

5.2. Reallocating Resources to Innovation or Human Resource Management Areas

Applying IPA again, the perceived sense of empowerment of hotel workers in Thailand, regardless of whether their level is workers, supervisors or the leadership team, is that performance is more important (compared to Malaysian and South Korean employees who both felt that the importance of empowerment is greater than performance), placing them in the fourth quadrant "Task Allocation." The research shows that compared with other countries, Thailand cultures that are high in dynamic externality and societal cynicism dimensions tend to be more collectivist, hierarchical and quite diverse in religious backgrounds (Bond et al.,2004). Hotel employees in Thailand feel that employee empowerment is less important mainly because regardless of whether the working environment is supervisors or leadership teams, they have already demonstrated empowerment.

It is worth mentioning that the only sentiment that Thai hotel workers attribute the greatest importance to but are not empowered to express is: "I don't need permission to work across borders." That is to say employees expect to be able to freely cross work boundaries. This may be because Thai hotels tend to be more specialized, and the service process is divided into different parts where each employee performs his or her own duties and applies professional efficiency in order to achieve synergy of the overall

organization.

Significant differences in the degree of emphasis and performance of Thai hotel employees are concentrated at the level of the work environment and the level of supervisors. For example, supervisors have a slightly longer power reach, employees are encouraged to participate in decision making, make recommendations to improve work procedures and may judge the risk of decision making. Employee empowerment measures have been implemented in Thai hotel management. So employees have lowered their degree of attention. This study suggests that Thai hotel managers could reallocate resources to other areas, such as innovation or human resource management, so that overall organizational resources may be better used.

5.3. Giving Employees for Freedom to Make Decisions

Applying IPA, the perceived empowerment experience of Korean hotel employees is generally considered to be important regardless of whether their level is workers, supervisors or the leadership team, but performance is relatively weak, so they are concentrated in the first quadrant, "Improvement Efforts." The research shows that Korean hotel workers feel it is very important, however their performance is weak. Compared to other countries, employees of Korean hotels from high uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to minimize the managing risk by standard operating procedures, job responsibility, and task-orientation management (Hofstede, 2001; Yang and Wong, 2012).

Korean hotel workers are more fearful of authority, when facing senior management, they don't dare express contrary opinions, are concerned about negative consequences and are not able to freely express their thoughts. Furthermore, they must obtain the approval of their supervisor before they can cross the boundaries of their range of responsibilities. If they receive unusable information, they will admit that their acceptance is low. This study suggests that Korean hotel supervisors could give employees for freedom to make decisions, whether that is within the scope of their work or crossing boundaries to assist a coworker. Only when employees are given more discretion, will they be willing to take on responsibility, share creative ideas, and proactively solve problems even if they encounter setbacks in the process.

6. Limitations

This study has two limitations. First, though this study investigates employee empowerment in Malaysia, Thailand, and South Korea at a large scale, the limited context in Asia may weaken the universality of the empirical findings, suggesting that future research should broaden the scope of the study. Another limitation is that this

study did not address the issue of cultural diversity within a country. For example, there may differences in corporate culture between large and small hotels within a country, and more subtle differences were not considered in this research study. Future studies that address these limitations may increase the value of the current findings.

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