

# **The impacts of cultural intelligence and emotional labor on the job satisfaction of luxury hotel employees**

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## **Abstract**

Within luxury hotels targeting multinational segments, frontline service staff are essential to creating unique, personalized experiences for high-value, discerning clientele. Performing emotional labor and utilizing cultural intelligence are key to ensuring exceptional cross-cultural service encounters, but which also create additional pressures for frontline staff. This study aimed to assess the impacts of a comprehensive range of emotional labor and cultural intelligence (CQ) on employees' job satisfaction. Cognitive CQ, motivational CQ, emotive dissonance, and expression of naturally felt emotions were shown to influence job satisfaction. Moreover, the study engaged senior executives from luxury hotels to further discuss the survey results. This approach helped the researchers and practitioners to (re)contextualize the study's key findings, which were used to reflect on managers' understanding of cultural intelligence, emotional labor and job satisfaction. The discussions highlighted how these issues were incorporated in luxury hotels' human resource practices in general and especially during the COVID-19 crisis.

Keywords: Cultural Intelligence; Emotional Labor; Human Resource Management; Job Satisfaction; Luxury Experiences; Service Management

## **Highlights:**

- Studies cultural intelligence (CQ) and emotional labor's (EL) effects on employee satisfaction (JS)
- Identifies relationships between a comprehensive range of CQ and EL factors and JS
- Engages senior executives from luxury hotels to expand discussion of survey results
- Reflects on senior hotel managers' understanding of CQ, EL and JS
- Demonstrates how CQ, EL and JS were incorporated in hotel human resource management strategies and practices

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## 1. Introduction

Frontline service employees are key to reifying the experience of luxury (Lo & Au Yeung, 2020) because their high-quality service interactions are important determinants of guest satisfaction (Padma & Ahn, 2020). Hotels aiming to create luxury experiences therefore require employees to comprehend the unique needs of discerning, high-value clientele through exercising emotional labor (EL). During encounters, service employees are required to show understanding of guests' emotions and to respond with appropriate, empathetic emotional expressions (Lee & Ok, 2015), performing authentic and personalized service to meet guests' unique needs, leading to their satisfaction (Moreo, Woods, Sammons, & Bergman, 2019; Wu & Liang, 2009).

Service employees are expected to display positive emotions and suppress negative ones according to the requirements of specific service encounters (Choi, Mohammad, & Kim, 2019; Gursoy, Boylu, & Avci, 2011). The emotional states of a service employee (i.e. emotive dissonance, emotive effort or expression of naturally felt emotions) can bring positive organizational outcomes. Employees may use corresponding emotional labor strategies (i.e. surface, deep or genuine acting) to fulfil the hotel's desired emotional display requirements in delivering high quality service (Wang, 2020). In service interactions, staff can use surface acting by suppressing their negative felt emotions and display fake positive emotions. They can engage in deep acting by attempting to change their inner feelings to make their internal emotional state conform to the organization's required emotional expressions. Alternatively, genuine acting occurs when employees' felt emotions align with organization's desired emotional display (Chu & Murrmann, 2006). However, frequent emotional labor performances, particularly surface acting, can provoke frustration, discomfort and tension, which negatively affects employees' physical and mental well-being over time (Hochschild, 1983).

Job satisfaction (JS) directs service employees to behave positively and treat customers with care; therefore, it has become essential for ensuring exceptional customer service and organizational performance (Arnett, Laverie, & McLane, 2002). Luxury hotels targeting high-value international segments carefully recruit and frequently train their service employees to perform EL (Wang, 2020), appreciate cultural differences and respond to the needs of guests from diverse cultures (Paparoidamis, Tran, & Leonidou, 2019). However, the intensive pressures of maintaining exceptional service standards and performing EL for a demanding, multi-cultural clientele can undermine employees' job satisfaction. The negative impacts of emotional labor pose severe challenges for luxury hotels seeking to maintain the equilibrium between escalating service demands and employees' JS.

Kwon, Jang and Lee (2019) suggested that upscale hotel employees should adopt surface acting to deliver high quality service and attain JS. In contrast, other authors have argued that authentic and personalized services require deep acting or genuine acting (e.g. Grandey, 2003). In studies of emotional labor in hospitality, researchers have focused primarily on surface and deep acting (Grandey, 2003; Lee, Ok, & Hwang, 2016). Given the differing conclusions regarding the effectiveness and impacts of adopting diverse emotional labor strategies, further research is needed

to better understand the impacts of genuine acting or expression of naturally felt emotions on job satisfaction in luxury hotels.

Furthermore, given the added challenges of cross-cultural interactions in luxury service encounters, cultural intelligence (CQ), the capacity to understand and adapt interactions to accommodate cultural differences, is essential to ensuring the satisfaction of a discerning international clientele. Lam, Cheung and Lugosi (2021) found that luxury hotel guests perceived higher CQ in service employees leading to higher guest satisfaction than those of budget hotels. Thus, luxury hotel staff in general are likely to face higher demand on their CQ, which may create added work-related stress affecting their well-being. Previous studies have focused on the underlying CQ dimensions of frontline employees' service performance in hospitality (e.g. Lam *et al.*, 2021; Paparoidamis *et al.*, 2019). However, to address limitations in existing understanding of employees' emotional management in multinational luxury hotels, greater in-depth knowledge and evaluation is needed of how the utilization of CQ affects service employees' job satisfaction.

In response to gaps in current knowledge, the present study aims to:

1. examine how different dimensions of luxury hotel employees' CQ affect their job satisfaction;
2. assess how different emotional labor dimensions affect the job satisfaction of luxury hotel employees; and
3. extend the practical applicability and transferability of the findings by identifying the views of senior executives from luxury hotels on the survey results, and their conceptions of frontline employees' CQ, EL, JS and their intersections.

The study is unique in assessing a comprehensive range of CQ and EL factors using a carefully-designed quantitative approach. Moreover, the study is unique in generating knowledge by studying employees' CQ, EL and JS in luxury hotel contexts and actively engaging senior executives from the luxury hotels, from which the sample was drawn, to expand the interpretation of the findings. Specifically, this dialogic strategy, adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic, helped the researchers and practitioners to (re)contextualize the study's key results, which were subsequently used to reflect on managements' understanding of CQ, EL and JS, alongside their application in the hotels' human resource practices. Moreover, it generated insights regarding the hotels' human resource responses within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1 Cultural intelligence*

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is defined as an individual's capacity to understand, adapt to and interact in different cultural contexts (Earley, 2002; Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). It is a multi-faceted construct comprising metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral CQ (Earley, Ang, & Tan, 2006). Metacognitive CQ refers to an individual's ability to consciously perceive and purposively identify, analyze and learn the cultural knowledge and norms of others when interacting with people from different cultures (Ang, Van Dyne, & Koh, 2006; Thomas *et al.*, 2015). People with this capability can consciously detect and comprehend subtle cultural nuances (Earley *et al.*, 2006), others' cultural preferences (Ang *et al.*, 2007), and adjust their thinking in cross-cultural encounters (Ang *et al.*, 2007). Hence, it reflects 'higher-order cognitive processes' (Ang *et al.*, 2007, p.338).

Cognitive CQ refers to an individual's general knowledge of cultural norms, values, belief, practices, customs and taboos in different cultural settings (Ang *et al.*, 2006). Individuals mastering

cognitive CQ can identify and keep updating their cultural conceptions, including cross-cultural differences and similarities (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). Motivational CQ is the ability to direct one's effort and energy to learn and function effectively across cultures (Ang *et al.*, 2006). Self-efficacy is the 'central aspect' (Earley *et al.*, 2006, p. 69) of motivational CQ which drives individuals to demonstrate adaptive capabilities (Ang *et al.*, 2007) and cooperative behavior in new cultural environments, benefiting cross-cultural interactions (Chen, Liu, & Portnoy, 2012).

Behavioral CQ reflects one's ability to exhibit appropriate behaviors towards people from diverse cultures (Ang *et al.*, 2007; MacNab & Worthley, 2012) through observable verbal (language, speech or conversational styles) and non-verbal (physical gestures or facial expressions) cues (Earley *et al.*, 2006). Individuals possessing high behavioral CQ can enact suitable behavioral repertoires in diverse cultural contexts (Bücker, Furrer, Poutsma, & Buyens, 2014).

A truly culturally intelligent individual is "The Cultural Chameleon" (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004, p.96) who possesses high levels of all four CQ components (metacognitive, cognitive, motivational and behavioral) and is able to mobilize them simultaneously in culturally diverse situations (Earley & Peterson, 2004). However, the "Chameleon" is viewed as a minority only and people usually are "a hybrid of two or more of the types", which Earley and Mosakowski (2004) conceive as a series of ideal types. Specifically, "The Local" with very low level of CQ, "The Analyst" with high metacognitive- and cognitive-CQ, "The Confident" with high motivational CQ or "The Mimic" with high behavioral CQ (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004, p.96).

### *2.2.1 Cultural intelligence and job satisfaction*

Thomas *et al.* (2015) suggested that CQ is highly relevant to global hospitality because hotel employees are expected to possess and exert different dimensions of cultural capability for effective communication with guests from diverse cultures. Moreover, luxury hotel customers regard service employees' authentic and personalized service performances as essential components of luxury experiences (Lo & Au Yeung, 2020; Wall, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011). According to Hong Kong Tourism Board Research (2019), international tourists in Hong Kong are more willing to choose to stay in luxury hotels. This implies that luxury hotel employees have higher chances of interacting with customers from diverse cultures. More importantly, Lam *et al.* (2021) found positive relationships between frontline employees' perceived CQ and guests' satisfaction. Hence, the management of luxury hotels elevate the requirements of employees' cultural capabilities to meet the high service quality expectations of their customers. Frontline service employees' CQ, therefore, becomes particularly important in creating luxury hospitality experiences. Service employees with metacognitive CQ can observe and identify cultural nuances and differences among guests with different cultural backgrounds, and respond effectively to unexpected behaviors (Bücker *et al.*, 2014). Combining with their cognitive CQ in luxury hospitality contexts, service employees can use their integrated cultural experiences and knowledge to refine their interactions with guests, showing understanding towards guest' needs and wants. Moreover, they can fulfill them empathetically and sensitively, bringing positive cross-cultural interactions and experience to hotel guests and service staff, thereby potentially contributing to employees' satisfaction. The relationship between employees' CQ and job satisfaction was confirmed in studies outside of hospitality and tourism (AlMazrouei & Zacca, 2021; Fata, Zabihi Zazoly, Gholami, & Hazrati, 2017; Takdir, Syah, & Anindita, 2020), which stresses the merits of examining these relationships in luxury hospitality.

Several studies demonstrated the positive effects of motivational CQ, for example on property sales performance (Chen *et al.*, 2012), service quality (Paparoidamis *et al.*, 2019) and task performance among individuals (Presbitero, 2017). These findings emphasized the important role of motivational CQ for service employees and organizations. Motivational CQ has the potential to boost hotel service employees' confidence and energy, thereby proactively and professionally engaging in intercultural service encounters (Lam & Cheung, 2018; Paparoidamis *et al.*, 2019). Similarly, with their behavioral CQ, hotel service staff can perform culturally appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviors corresponding to cultural cues from guests in service encounters. Lam *et al.* (2021) found that culturally intelligent service employees showing understanding and demonstrating verbal and non-verbal behaviors congruent with guests' cultures can lead to higher levels of guest satisfaction. Arguably, cultural intelligence can enhance personalized services and yield positive experiential outcomes for hotel guests. However, it is worth noting that: a) extant CQ literature relevant to services emphasized motivational CQ, the CQ of leaders/managers and organizational outcomes; and b) because luxury hotel guests desire quality interactions with service employees, hotel managers may intensify requirements of cultural capabilities among them. Hence, service employees may need to routinely exercise their CQ in cross-cultural service interactions in luxury hospitality contexts. However, it remains unclear whether and how this impacts on job satisfaction among frontline staff. AlMazrouei and Zacca (2021) recently found a positive CQ – job satisfaction relationship from a sample of expatriate managers in the United Arab Emirates. The key question arises as to whether these CQ capabilities can positively influence the job satisfaction of luxury hotel frontline staff working in intercultural settings. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1a: Luxury hotel service employees' metacognitive CQ is likely to have a positive influence on job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1b: Luxury hotel service employees' cognitive CQ is likely to have a positive influence on job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1c: Luxury hotel service employees' motivational CQ is likely to have a positive influence on job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1d: Luxury hotel service employees' behavioral CQ is likely to have a positive influence on job satisfaction.

## 2.2 Emotional labor

Hochschild (1983) defined emotional labor as a job task requiring one to adjust emotional expression to conform to organizational display rules. In service settings, frontline employees are required to control their inner feelings, adjust their outward behaviors and express emotions congruent with organizationally prescribed job demands (Chu, Baker, & Murrmann, 2012; Chu & Murrmann, 2006). Service employees hide or suppress their negative emotions and strive to exhibit positive ones to influence customers' perception of service quality (Chu & Murrmann, 2006) and meet customers' needs (Lee & Ok, 2014), the demands of which are expected to be amplified in luxury settings. Emotive dissonance and emotive effort are the two emotional labor dimensions commonly adopted in empirical studies (Chu *et al.*, 2012; Gursoy *et al.*, 2011). Emotive dissonance indicates the incongruence of one's inner feelings or felt emotions and expressed emotions (Diefendorff, Croyle, & Gosserand, 2005). This approach reflects the use of a surface acting strategy. Emotive effort refers to employees' exertion in changing their inner feelings and behaviors to display appropriate emotions during customer interactions (Chu *et al.*, 2012;

Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005). It reflects the concept of deep acting because employees need more effort to exhibit the most appropriate and desirable emotions at work (Chu & Murrmann, 2006). Diefendorff *et al.* (2005) proffered the third emotional labor dimension, expression of naturally felt emotions. This refers to the state when a service employee's positive emotions are congruent with an organization's display rules (Chu & Murrmann, 2006), which helps to exhibit desirable emotions to customers effortlessly in service encounters. When performing service-related tasks, service employees may deploy various emotional labor strategies, namely surface acting, deep acting and genuine acting and exhibit or experience emotive dissonance, emotive effort and expression of naturally felt emotions (Kruml & Geddes, 2000) respectively.

### 2.2.1 Emotional labor and job satisfaction

Displaying desired emotions is an integral part of service interactions. Service staff may simply fake their feelings or perform emotional displays and exhibit behaviors by changing their verbal and non-verbal expressions superficially (Chu & Murrmann, 2006; Lu, Shih, & Chen, 2013) to conform to guests' feelings and emotions, resulting in different levels of emotional dissonance over time (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). Numerous studies indicated that prolonged surface acting leads to emotive dissonance, which provokes dysfunctional emotional and psychological reactions including stress, burnout, inauthenticity (Lee & Ok, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2016), physical depletion and fatigue (Jung & Yoon, 2014).

Conversely, when using deep acting, an employee may use different approaches including imagination or recalling past positive experiences (Chu & Murrmann, 2006) to modify his/her emotional and behavioral expressions and make his/her internal emotional state consistent with the organization's display rules (Chu & Murrmann, 2006; Kim, Yoo, Lee, & Kim, 2012) and customers' emotional states (Lee & Ok, 2014). Arguably, the level of an employee's effort in each service encounter depends on his/her own emotions, the organization's emotional display rules, and the nature of the encounter. Deep acting noticeably supports employees to present sincere emotions to customers, and to appreciate customers' perspectives (Lee *et al.*, 2016). Thus, service staffs' positive emotional transformation (Grandey, 2003; Lee *et al.*, 2016) makes customers perceive employees' sincerity and good faith (Grandey, 2003; Kim *et al.*, 2012), and it heightens employees' sense of professional efficacy, personal accomplishment (Lee & Ok, 2012), and job satisfaction (Chen *et al.*, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2016).

Gabriel, Daniels, Diefendorff and Greguras (2015) argued that employees experiencing expression of naturally felt emotions are 'non-actors' because they have the liberty to express their true emotions professionally (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005) without regulating them to match organizational requirements. This emotional state implies the use of genuine acting. Diefendorff *et al.* (2005) suggested that employees who seek positive emotions and value positive interactions are more likely to display spontaneously felt emotions at work. Two studies identified the impact of genuine expressions on job burnout and job satisfaction (Kim, Gilbreath, David & Kim, 2019; Lee & Chelladurai, 2018).

Diefendorff *et al.* (2005) proffered that the nature and duration of service encounters affected service employees' performed emotional labor. They may directly follow the script by faking the required emotions in routine interactions, but display natural emotions or regulate their inner feelings and emotional expression in non-routine service interaction. Similarly, the longer the service encounter, the more emotional expressions are expected to be involved, and the more likely that the employees will engage in deep acting, thereby reducing the possibility to use surface acting

(Brotheridge & Lee, 2003). Kim (2008) opined that employees experiencing negative emotions are less likely to modify their true feelings to fulfil their roles in service encounters at all times (Kim, 2008), reflecting that hotel service staff may exert different emotional labor strategies in routine and non-routine, short and long service interactions throughout a day. Thus, all three forms of emotional labor are scrutinized simultaneously in this study.

The mainstream findings of emotive dissonance and emotive effort in emotional labor studies have suggested connections with service staff's job satisfaction; and, as previously stated, further investigation on both emotional dimensions is needed. In addition to the need to consider expressions of naturally felt emotions, which have received insufficient attention in past research, it is important to scrutinize the impacts of multiple dimensions of emotional labor on job satisfaction in luxury hotel work contexts. Consequently, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 2a: Luxury hotel service employees' emotive dissonance is likely to have negative influence on job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2b: Luxury hotel service employees' emotive effort is likely to have positive influence on job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2c: Luxury hotel service employees' expression of naturally felt emotions is likely to have positive influence on job satisfaction.

### **3. Methods**

#### *3.1 Sample and data collection*

This study adopted a purposive, criterion sampling approach for selecting frontline service staff (Patton, 2015); the key inclusion criteria being employment in a luxury property, in a service role involving contact with international customers. However, the study was conducted during a global pandemic, and the sampling strategy therefore also reflected safety and convenience considerations, so data collection was limited to accessible properties in Hong Kong. Following Walls *et al.* (2011), luxury hotels were defined as four- and five-star full-service properties. Luxury hotels usually provide upscale guestroom amenities and well-established hotel facilities (including food and beverage, health, IT and business), which are one of the major indicators adopted by the Hong Kong Tourism Board to classify luxury (four- and five-star) and budget (three- and lower-star) hotels (HKTB, 2020).

The Hong Kong Hotels Association (HKHA), established in 1961, is a well-recognized body representing the collective views of well-established member hotels and promoting greater internationalism of the industry (Hong Kong Hotels Association, 2021). Consequently, the authors referred to its membership directory, a reliable database, to identify and approach luxury hotel General Managers via email. The purpose and significance of the study, and assurances of confidentiality, were included with a copy of the survey instrument. The hotels' human resources departments agreed to assist with the distribution of paper-based questionnaires to their service employees, whose positions involved interacting with customers from different cultures in their routine work. In addition, as previously stated, the respondents were asked to indicate their current position in the filtering question, to assure the sample included insights from a range of staff engaged in cross-cultural service interactions. 737 frontline hotel employees completed the questionnaire. 66 responses were deleted due to incomplete answers, potential outliers, or because they were filled in by back-of-house staff. 671 valid responses from 8 luxury hotels (four four-star

and four five-star) used for further statistical analysis. Among the 8 participating hotels, 7 of them were part of large international corporate brands and one was an independent property.

### *3.2 Measures and instrument development*

The study employed a self-administered survey to explore frontline employees' cultural intelligence and emotional labor, and the impacts on their job satisfaction in luxury hotels. The survey instrument comprised five sections. In section 1, two filtering questions were designed to identify respondents who held a frontline service position. Sections 2, 3 and 4 encompassed questions to evaluate employees' CQ, EL and JS based on the question stems of cross-cultural service encounters. Finally, section 5 collected respondents' demographic information such as age, gender, years of employment in the current hotel and total years of industry experience.

The respondents were asked to rate their CQ, EL and JS on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The measurement scales adopted in this study were refined and modified with question stems to conform to the cross-cultural hospitality context. The first exogenous variable, CQ, was measured using the 12 items developed by the Cultural Intelligence Center (Ang *et al.*, 2007). Its authors cross-validated the instrument in the USA and Singapore across samples and times, and yielded relatively good reliability with consistent Cronbach's alpha for the four CQ dimensions (USA/Singapore): metacognitive CQ ( $\alpha = 0.76/0.70$ ); cognitive CQ ( $\alpha = 0.80/0.88$ ); motivational CQ ( $\alpha = 0.79/0.75$ ); and behavioral CQ ( $\alpha = 0.82/0.87$ ). Moreover, discriminant validity was demonstrated between the four CQ factors in both samples (USA/Singapore): the average variance extracted (AVE) of each factor (0.41-0.48/0.38-0.58) exceeded the squared correlation (0.17-0.40/0.07-0.30).

The second exogenous variable, EL, was evaluated using the Hospitality Emotional Labor Scale (HELs) (14 items) developed by Chu and Murrmann (2006) for emotive dissonance ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ) and emotive effort ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ) and the scale (3 items) developed by Diefendorff *et al.* (2005) for expressions of naturally felt emotions ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ). Both scales were cross-validated by the original authors in studies conducted in the USA. Discriminant validity was also achieved via performing  $\chi^2$  difference test in both scales.

The endogenous variable, JS, was measured using 2 items from Román and Munuera's (2005) study. A pilot test was conducted with a sample of 50 hotel frontline employees to assess the questionnaire's reliability and validity while ensuring the accuracy and clarity of the wording. All respondents could complete the questionnaire smoothly, but a few minor modifications were made to some statements to ensure clarity.

### *3.3 Reflective interviews with luxury hotel executives*

Following the completion of the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected senior management of the participating hotels. The aim was not to generate a representative overview of Hong Kong's entire senior management population. Rather, the primary purpose of the interviews was to extend and enhance our analysis by capturing their perceptions and interpretations of the survey results. This reflective exercise helped to translate the results for senior hotel executives, while helping the researchers to appreciate practitioners' understanding and application of frontline employees' CQ, EL, JS and their relationships. These discussions were also used to explore the implications of these employee attributes and the impacts of COVID-19 on their human resources management practices.



Four senior executives, two males and two females, representing 6 participating hotels (Director of Human Resources, Director of Rooms, General Manager, and President of a luxury hotel chain) accepted the interview invitation. The interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes each, digitally recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis was used to identify their responses to the results, including how these reflected their knowledge, perceptions and experiences in practice.

## 4. Data analysis and results

### 4.1 Respondent profiles

Table 1 presents the survey respondents' demographic profiles. Male and female employees accounted for 45.9% and 53.4% respectively. The respondents were mostly young with around 60% of the respondents aged between 18 and 35 years. The respondents in general were formally educated to high school level or above, with 336 (50.1%) and 258 (38.5%) of the respondents having completed secondary/high school level and college/university/postgraduate level education respectively. The respondents mainly worked in three major operational departments: front office (29.4%), housekeeping (31.6%), and food and beverage (32%). Employees holding junior positions accounted for 66%, followed by supervisors (20.7%) and managers (13.3%). Regarding employment in the current hotel, 3 years or fewer, 4 to 9 years, and 10 years or above accounted for 53.8%, 27.8% and 17.9% respectively. 35.5% had 1 to 5 years, 25% had 6 to 10 years and 30% had over 11 years of total industry experience.

**Table 1.** Respondents' profile

	<i>N</i> = 671	Percent		<i>N</i> = 671	Percent
<i>Gender</i>			<i>Country of Origin</i>		
Male	308	45.9	Hong Kong	560	84.0
Female	358	53.4	Mainland China	78	11.7
Missing	5	0.7	Other parts of Asia	23	3.5
<i>Age</i>			Europe	2	0.3
18-25	142	21.2	America	1	0.1
26-35	265	39.5	South Pacific	1	0.1
36-45	149	22.2	Others	2	0.3
46-55	87	13.0	<i>Education</i>		
56 or above	23	3.4	Less than secondary/high school	72	10.7
Missing	5	0.7	Secondary/high school	336	50.1
<i>Position</i>			College/university	252	37.6
Junior	443	66.0	Postgraduate	6	0.9
Supervisor	139	20.7	Missing	5	0.7
Manager	89	13.3	<i>Employment length</i>		
<i>Department</i>			Less than 1 year	175	26.1
Front Office	197	29.4	1-3 years	186	27.7
Housekeeping	212	31.6	4-6 years	131	19.5
Food & Beverage	215	32.0	7-9 years	56	8.3
Others	47	7.0	10 years or above	120	18.0
<i>Hotel star rating</i>			Missing	3	0.4
4-star	346	51.6	<i>Total industry experience</i>		
5-star	325	48.4	Less than 1 year	59	8.8
			1-5 years	238	35.5
			6-10 years	168	25.0
			11-15 years	74	11.0
			16 years or above	128	19.1
			Missing	4	0.6

#### 4.2 Measurement model and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed using AMOS 25 to evaluate how well the individual measurement items represented the corresponding latent variable (Hair Jr., Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014). The measurement model comprised 8 constructs and 31 measurement items. Table 2 shows the factor loadings of the manifest variables of the respective latent variables ranged between 0.511 and 0.920, well above the threshold of 0.5 and significant at  $p < .001$  (Hair *et al.*, 2014), representing acceptable reliability of each item in measuring the respective construct (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Table 3 shows that the composite reliabilities exceeded 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2014) and the  $\alpha$  coefficients were above the cut-off point of 0.7 (Kline, 1999) demonstrating a high level of internal consistency in each construct. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) were in general higher than 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2014) supporting the convergent validity of the measurement scales.

Discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing the AVE values of each construct with the squared correlation of the paired construct (Hair *et al.*, 2014) and the pairwise correlation (Kline, 2005). Table 3 indicates that the AVE for each pair of constructs was greater than the squared correlation estimate suggested by Hair *et al.* (2014), and the pairwise correlations of the manifest variables were well below 0.85 (Kline, 2005). Moreover, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was used as a criterion to assess discriminant validity of the constructs in this study. The results in Table 4 show that the HTMT value for each pair of the construct was far below the threshold of 0.9 (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015), lending support for discriminant validity. Finally, the results of the CFA model demonstrated good fit with the data based on the Goodness-of-fit indices ( $\chi^2 = 1176.454$ ,  $df = 400$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.941$ ,  $TLI = 0.929$ ,  $CFI = 0.939$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.054$ ) from the confirmatory factor analysis.

Additionally, CFA was performed to compare a model with a single latent factor to the 8-factor model used in this study. When the single latent factor fits the data well, a substantial amount of common method bias has emerged (Mossholder, Bennett, Kemery, & Wesolowski, 1998). Following this approach, all 31 measurement items were loaded on a single factor and received a very poor fit to the data with  $\chi^2 = 6887.397$ ,  $df = 428$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 16.092$ ,  $TLI = .445$ ,  $CFI = .489$ ,  $RMSEA = .150$ . A  $\chi^2$  difference test corroborated that the 8-factor model was much better than the single factor model,  $\Delta \chi^2(28) = 5710.943$ ,  $p < .001$ . Thus, common method variance was not seen as a problem in this study.

**Table 2.** Confirmatory factor analysis: Items and loadings.

Construct and scale item	Standardized loading	t-value	Mean (SD)
<b>Cultural intelligence (CQ)</b>			
Metacognitive CQ (MC)			
MC1: I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use.	.670	16.428	5.81 (.80)
MC2: I adjust my cultural knowledge when the culture of a guest is unfamiliar to me.	.802	19.305	5.65 (.91)
MC3: I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge.	.798	NA	5.66 (.82)
Cognitive CQ (COG)			
COG1: I generally know the language they use.	.549	13.569	5.51 (.90)
COG2: I generally know the values and beliefs in their own culture	.824	19.500	5.35 (.92)
COG3: I generally know the basic rules for expressing body language in their own culture.	.818	NA	5.45 (.91)
Motivational CQ (MOT)			
MOT1: I enjoy the interaction with them.	.789	19.508	5.77 (.85)
MOT2: I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture	.830	NA	5.58 (.86)

that is new to me.

Behavioural CQ (BEH)

BEH1: I change my verbal behavior (e.g. accent, tone) when situation requires. .699 18.548 5.54 (1.08)

BEH2: I vary the rate and use pause/silence of my speaking when situation requires. .830 22.768 5.77 (.88)

BEH3: I change my body language (e.g. posture, gesture) when situation requires. .893 25.761 5.78 (.89)

BEH4: I alter my facial expressions when situation requires. .790 NA 5.68 (.95)

**Emotional labor (EL)**

Emotive dissonance (ED)

ED1: I fake a good mood to them. .511 13.629 5.36 (1.41)

ED2: I fake the emotions I show when dealing with them. .823 NA 4.12 (1.67)

ED3: I put on a mask in order to express the right emotions for my job. .877 32.572 4.34 (1.72)

ED4: I behave in a way that differs from how I really feel. .891 28.077 4.06 (1.60)

ED5: I put on an act in order to deal with them in an appropriate way. .817 24.439 4.51 (1.68)

ED6: My interactions with customers are very robotic. .656 18.213 3.46 (1.62)

ED7: I display emotions that I am not actually feeling. .819 24.514 3.96 (1.58)

ED8: I have to cover up my true feelings when dealing with them. .674 18.579 4.37 (1.60)

Emotive effort (EE)

EE1: I try to change my actual feelings to match those that I must express to them. .549 13.656 5.10 (1.23)

EE2: I attempt to create certain emotions in myself that present the image my company desires. .567 11.318 5.13 (1.26)

EE3: I try to express the feeling that I really feel to them. .594 NA 5.02 (1.23)

EE4: I try to actually experience the emotions that I must show to them. .748 19.068 5.00 (1.13)

EE5: I call up the feelings I need to show to them. .834 14.504 5.16 (1.13)

EE6: I have to concentrate more on my behavior when I display an emotion that I don't actually feel. .640 12.313 5.37 (1.08)

Expression of naturally felt emotions (EN)

EN1: The emotions I express to them are genuine. .920 NA 5.27 (1.05)

EN2: The emotions I show to them come naturally. .912 35.497 5.33 (1.02)

EN3: The emotions I show to them match what I truly feel. .832 30.365 5.13 (1.15)

**Job satisfaction (JS)**

JS1: I am satisfied with my performance. .869 NA 5.69 (.88)

JS2: Generally speaking, I am very satisfied with this job. .823 15.129 5.55 (1.06)

Note: All factor loadings are significant at  $p < .001$ . Parameter is fixed at 1.0 for the maximum-likelihood estimation. Hence, the  $t$ -value was not obtained for those fixed to 1 for identification purposes.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics, composite reliabilities, correlations, and square correlations.

	Mean (Std dev.)	Alpha	AVE	MC	COG	MOT	BEH	ED	EE	EN	JS
CQ: MC	5.71 (.72)	.799	.58	<b>.802<sup>a</sup></b>	.602 <sup>b</sup>	.666	.536	-.113	.208	.272	.377
CQ: COG	5.43 (.76)	.769	.55	.362 <sup>c</sup>	<b>.781</b>	.653	.494	-.032	.310	.310	.426
CQ: MOT	5.68 (.78)	.791	.66	.444	.427	<b>.792</b>	.682	-.094	.266	.324	.487
CQ: BEH	5.69 (.81)	.871	.65	.287	.244	.465	<b>.880</b>	-.041	.293	.300	.397
EL: ED	4.27 (1.30)	.921	.59	.013	.001	.009	.002	<b>.918</b>	.310	-.233	-.152
EL: EE	5.13 (.87)	.817	.45	.043	.096	.068	.086	.096	<b>.821</b>	.374	.256
EL: EN	5.24 (.99)	.915	.79	.074	.096	.105	.090	.054	.140	<b>.919</b>	.386
JS	5.62 (.90)	.825	.72	.142	.181	.237	.158	.023	.066	.149	<b>.835</b>

Goodness-of-fit statistics:  $\chi^2 = 1176.454$ ,  $df = 400$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.941$ , TLI = .929, CFI = .939, RMSEA = .054.

Note: Alpha = Cronbach's alpha; AVE = average variance extracted; MC = Metacognitive CQ; COG = Cognitive CQ; MOT = Motivational CQ; BEH = Behavioral CQ; ED = Emotive Dissonance; EE = Emotive Effort; EN = Expression of Naturally Felt Emotions; JS = Job Satisfaction. All correlations among study variables are significant at  $p < .001$ .

<sup>a</sup> Composite reliabilities are shown along the diagonal line in bold.

<sup>b</sup> Correlations are shown above the diagonal line.

<sup>c</sup> Squared correlations are shown below the diagonal line.

**Table 4.** HTMT results.

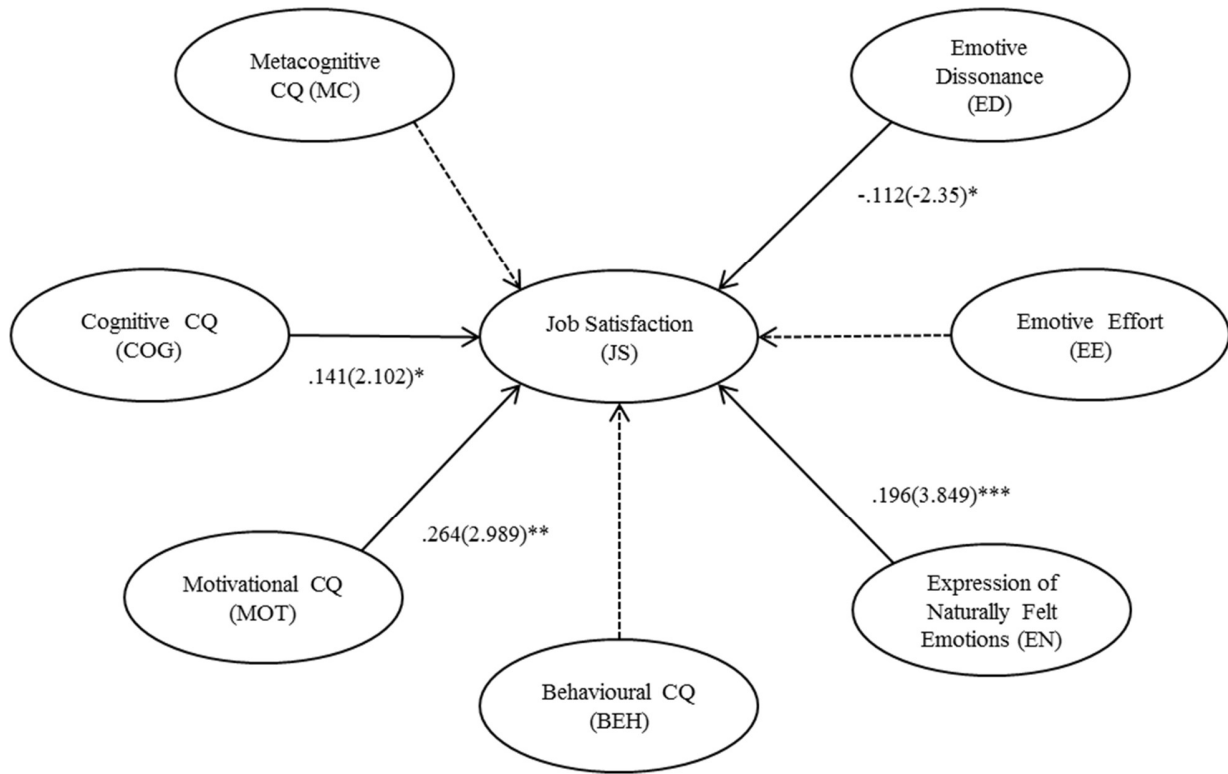
	MC	COG	MOT	BEH	ED	EE	EN	JS
CQ: MC								
CQ: COG	.608							
CQ: MOT	.668	.658						
CQ: BEH	.538	.498	.683					
EL: ED	-.112	-.032	.584	-.040				
EL: EE	.200	.301	.256	.282	.295			
EL: EN	.272	.313	.324	.300	-.230	.360		
JS	.378	.430	.487	.398	-.150	.247	.386	

MC = Metacognitive CQ; COG = Cognitive CQ; MOT = Motivational CQ; BEH = Behavioral CQ; ED = Emotive Dissonance; EE = Emotive Effort; EN = Expression of Naturally Felt Emotions; JS = Job Satisfaction.

#### 4.3 Structural model estimation and hypotheses testing

Once the full CFA model was confirmed to be acceptable, the structural model was estimated accordingly. The values of fit indices ( $\chi^2 = 1296.674$ ,  $df = 412$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.147$ ,  $TLI = 0.921$ ,  $CFI = 0.930$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.057$ ) completely conformed to the threshold of  $\chi^2/df$  less than 5 (Marsh & Hocevar, 1985), CFI and TLI above 0.9 (Hair *et al.*, 2014), and RMSEA close to 0.05 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993), supporting the fit of the proposed structural model shown in Figure 1. The maximum likelihood procedure was used to assess the parameter estimates. Figure 1 also presents the path coefficients between the first-order latent factors of CQ, EL and JS. For cultural intelligence, the path coefficients between COG and JS ( $\beta = .141$ ,  $t = 2.102$ ), MOT and JS ( $\beta = .264$ ,  $t = 2.989$ ) were significant, supporting Hypotheses 1b and 1c. For emotional labor, ED and JS ( $\beta = -.112$ ,  $t = -2.35$ ), and EN and JS ( $\beta = .196$ ,  $t = 3.849$ ) were also significant, supporting Hypotheses 2a and 2c. Cultural intelligence and emotional labor altogether explained approximately 26.7% of the total variance in JS of frontline service employees. Interestingly, this study found no direct effect of MC, BEH and EE on JS, hence, Hypotheses 1a, 1d and 2b were not supported.

Hair *et al.* (2014) suggested that all variables in the model meeting the univariate requirement reveals that departure from multivariate normality is inconsequential although it does not guarantee multivariate normality. The univariate skewness values (-1.352 to 0.32) and univariate kurtosis values (-0.965 to 3.133) of the variables in this study did not show substantial departure from normality according to Kline's (2005) suggestion. However, after deleting potential outliers and referring to Mahalanobis' D-squared values, the multivariate kurtosis was found to be 382.854, indicating the data were non-normally distributed. Bootstrapping is a viable option to deal with non-normality in SEM (Hancock & Liu, 2012), so a bootstrap on 5000 samples using maximum likelihood estimator with 95% confidence level was performed. The results in Table 5 show that the parameter estimates derived from the structural model fall within the lower and upper bounds of the bootstrap sample, and the bootstrapped standard errors are slightly higher than the original ones (0 to 0.037) with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals, thus supporting the results derived from the estimation of the structural model.



**Figure 1.** Structural model and path coefficients (*t*-values).

Model fit:  $\chi^2 = 1296.674$ ,  $df = 412$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.147$ , TLI = 0.921, CFI = 0.930, RMSEA = 0.057

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; Dotted lines indicate non-significant paths ( $p > .05$ ).

**Table 5.** Results for bootstrapping

Parameter	Estimate	S.E.	Lower	Upper	Bootstrapped S.E.	<i>P</i> values
Job satisfaction ← Cognitive CQ	.141	.066	.004	.290	.074	.045
Job satisfaction ← Motivational CQ	.264	.092	.039	.516	.129	.023
Job satisfaction ← Emotive dissonance	-.112	.025	-.210	-.021	.025	.015
Job satisfaction ← Expression of naturally felt emotions	.196	.038	.070	.316	.044	.003

## 5. Discussion, implications and recommendations

### 5.1 Relative impacts of employees' cultural intelligence on job satisfaction

Among the four dimensions of CQ, cognitive and motivational CQ of frontline employees were positively related to their job satisfaction; metacognitive and behavioral CQ did not have any significant impact. The insignificant impact of employees' metacognitive and behavioral CQ on their JS is contrary to their positive influence on the task performance of managers of international companies identified elsewhere (Ang *et al.*, 2007; Magnusson, Westjoen, Semenov, Randrianasolo, & Zdravkovic, 2013). Metacognitive CQ relates to one's higher-order mental capability and analytic skills to monitor his/her cognitive and affective states, and to regulate the cultural interaction with people from different cultures (Ang *et al.*, 2007; Thomas *et al.*, 2015). The positive metacognitive CQ-task performance relationship reported in both studies (Ang *et al.*,

2007; Magnusson *et al.*, 2013) implies that metacognitive CQ is an important requirement expected for performing management-level practices in international business settings. However, it may be relatively difficult for frontline service employees to master and operationalize in the international hospitality context. This may, in part be explained by the intensive nature of performative hospitality work, which affords limited space and time for deep reflection and strategization implied by metacognitive CQ (Earley *et al.*, 2006). Despite this, all four senior hotel executives recognized metacognitive CQ to be an important capability for frontline employees to understand the cultural nuances of different guests. As the General Manager emphasized:

*The fundamental (role) of frontline staff is to serve guests from diverse cultures with sincerity and right attitude. By doing so, it will bring guest authentic experience and business success to the hotel.*

Even so, requiring frontline employees to recognize and analyze cultural information in service interactions may create stress for them because they may not possess sufficient cultural knowledge, cultural awareness or analytical skills to support them to exert metacognitive CQ in numerous cross-cultural service encounters. This may help to explain why it did not support their job satisfaction. As the Director of Rooms opined:

*Metacognitive CQ may bring the rank and file frontline staff stress and confusions as it requires them to have deeper thought towards culturally disparate customers.*

In a highly interactive luxury hospitality context, behavioral CQ is the most observable CQ component from which customers can immediately identify how good a service employee recognizes and respects their culture, leading to positive or negative experiences, and satisfaction towards the hotel. The insignificant impact of behavioral CQ on job satisfaction aligns with that on cultural adjustment (Jyoti & Kour, 2015). The finding also surprised the senior hotel executives, except for the hotel group President, as they regarded behavioral CQ highly important for frontline employees. Earley (2002) opined that acquiring a new language is essential for cultural adjustment because language reveals subtleties of one's culture. Plausibly, the lack of competence of service employees in language acquisition might inhibit them to professionally perform culturally appropriate behaviors, thereby affecting their job satisfaction. All four informants stated that their hotels provided training to teach employees elementary foreign languages and relevant customer service skills; scripts were also provided to facilitate culturally diverse interactions. The approach adopted by the luxury hotels implied a requirement of culturally congruent behaviors imposed on frontline employees, which may explain the insignificant behavioral CQ-job satisfaction relationship. The hotel group President further explicated:

*Performing culturally appropriate behaviors is the major part of their daily routine to which it is the skillset expected to the service employees. They must do that.*

The positive impact of cognitive CQ and motivational CQ on JS matches with the positive findings of both CQ dimensions on personal capabilities (Ang *et al.*, 2007; Paparoidamis *et al.*,

2019), with which the four senior hoteliers agreed unanimously. When service employees possess knowledge of different cultural norms and practices, and can exert them in cross-cultural service encounters, they may feel a sense of achievement and satisfaction, particularly when they receive compliments from managers for their professional service performance.

The present study found that motivational CQ was the highest predictive factor affecting employees' JS. Motivational CQ drives service employees to learn and understand others' cultures, and to adjust their way of expression and behavior according to different cultural settings (Lam *et al.*, 2021). Arguably, their devoted energy and effort reflected their self-efficacy and the satisfaction they gained from demonstrating their cultural capabilities in cross-cultural service encounters. The senior managers emphasized that service staff were better motivated when they received acknowledgement and compliments from guests and hotel management, which further intensified the positive impact of motivational CQ on their JS. The hotel group President believed that motivational CQ was the most important CQ dimension, and she further indicated that:

*Motivational CQ of service employees can drive themselves to engage in their job more, so that they could deliver the service level we need them to do, from which they feel a sense of pride.*

The findings related to CQ echoed those of Earley & Mosakowski (2004), who argued that people usually possess some facets of CQ only. The results also revealed that the service employees in this study corresponded more to their "Confident" type; and more partially to the "Analyst" (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004), who could utilize motivational CQ and cognitive CQ relatively well in service encounters enacted in the multicultural hospitality context, resulting in job satisfaction. Furthermore, the findings suggested that the hotel management should strengthen service employees' metacognitive and behavioral CQ to tackle cross-cultural service interactions for heightened sense of job satisfaction.

### *5.2 Relative impacts of employees' emotional labor on job satisfaction*

The findings regarding emotional labor in this study reflected Grandey's (2003, p. 87) point that 'both surface and deep acting involve acting out the role'. The three emotional states, emotive dissonance (ED), emotive effort (EE), and expression of naturally felt emotions (EN) demonstrated different levels of influence on employees' job satisfaction. The negative ED-JS association in this study conforms to previous studies (e.g., Lee *et al.*, 2016; Walsh & Bartikowski, 2013). The international luxury hospitality setting is highly interactive and fast-paced, and organizations commonly require junior service employees to follow display rules to exhibit positive emotions and suppress the negative ones without considering employees' actual feelings (Lee & Ok, 2015). In addition to these sectoral and employee factors, frequent engagement in short and repetitive service encounters may drive service staff to fake outward expressions. Prolonged ED and continued faking can make service employees feel like lying, which is detrimental to their emotional and psychological health (e.g., Choi *et al.*, 2019; Wang, 2020). All four informants agreed about the negative effects of ED on employees' JS because employees adopting surface acting need to frequently shuffle between their personal emotions and 'professional' emotions (i.e., those aligned with emotional display rules) when performing daily routine. Thus, they disapproved of service employees using *surface acting* in any service encounters. The hotel group President reiterated that:

*Customers nowadays are well-educated, and they are looking for authentic service and sincere staff. Staff with emotional dissonance using surface acting show the least of engagement and unsuitability towards their job, and we would rather want them to leave.*

The insignificant emotive effort-job satisfaction relationship in this study matches with previous findings (Kim *et al.*, 2019; Walsh & Bartikowski, 2013). Deep acting needs frontline employees' effort to transform their felt emotions congruent with an organization's desired emotional and behavioral display (Lee & Ok, 2014), so expending emotive effort relentlessly may intensify their stress at work (Jung & Yoon, 2014). Service employees' JS may be diminished in the process if they repeatedly utilize their EE in routine interactions. The senior hotel executives opined that the insignificant influence of EE might be explained by the employees' actual feelings not being aligned with emotional display rules and guests' emotions. Despite how hard a frontline employee might attempt to feel like a customer and react positively in a service encounter, customers may still feel that the service was inauthentic, which affects perceptions of service quality.

Expression of naturally felt emotions was the only emotional state that brought significant and positive influence on employees' JS in this study. This result echoed Grandey's (2003) argument that employees' EN conforming to organizational display rules could really feel satisfied at work. Gabriel *et al.* (2015) further suggested that employees using EN in service interactions possessed a positive disposition and low awareness of display rules, so they did not need to feign or suppress emotions and regulate inner feelings. In other words, without using ED or EE, frontline employees can comply with company's display rules, attain a heightened sense of guest satisfaction and job satisfaction by merely displaying their true emotions in service interactions. The executives agreed that EN was a desirable emotional state that service employees of luxury hotels should express in any guest interaction. The general manager gave a succinct but revealing reflection of this in the interview:

*Service staff with EN are ideal hospitality person. If guests experience the authenticity of service, they will forgive you even though the service has some flaws.*

### *5.3 Job satisfaction and human resource management (in the time of crisis)*

The senior luxury hotel executives unanimously recognized the importance of employees' JS. This response echoed the opinion that employees' job satisfaction was a key determinant of their attitudes and behaviors in workplace (Lu *et al.*, 2013), and a prerequisite for service excellence (Arnett *et al.*, 2002). The four practitioners generally held similar opinions that frontline employees' satisfaction can lead to positive personal outcomes (e.g., better well-being, greater confidence), professional outcomes (e.g., quality guest service, higher guest satisfaction, higher guest loyalty), and financial outcomes (e.g., lower training cost, increased repeated business).

The stringent measures taken by governments during the outbreak of COVID-19, including lockdowns, global travel alerts and restrictions on social gatherings had severely and adversely affected hotel businesses in Hong Kong, particularly five-star properties, with sharp decline in revenues and single digit occupancy rates (Liu, 2020). To respond to these challenges, hotel



operators attempted to control expenses and reduce loss through personnel adjustment, ranging from encouraging unpaid leave to initiating redundancies.

Despite the high uncertainty and difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the executives mentioned that their hotels had no plans to lay off their employees and they further ascertained the significance of employees' JS in their hotels. Remarkably, both the Director of Rooms and the hotel group President shared a highly similar opinion:

*Employees' job satisfaction is still the top priority of our hotel even under the shadow of COVID-19.*

According to the informants, keeping open communications with employees was of great importance, especially the decision and implementation of contingent company policy corresponding to the severe impacts of COVID-19. All six hotels in this study unavoidably adopted the measure of unpaid leave to relieve the hotel's financial burden. Before any measure came into effect, they explained the challenges of the hotel to all employees and ensured the distributive and procedural justice of arrangements. For example, according to the General Manager, their hotel implemented unpaid leave corresponding to the seniority of the position. The Director of Human Resources shared that they only used the unpaid leave policy for less than two months and the measure was ceased when the Hong Kong Government announced the employment support scheme. The Director of Human Resources highlighted a crucial point:

*Job security is the most critical factor to employees' well-being nowadays which should be included (as a factor) in job satisfaction.*

Responding to the pandemic effectively, beyond reassigning employees into different job functions to support other departments' operation, the informants' hotels provided different types of training, for example in computing and language skills for employees who normally could not attend. This proactive and developmental approach could help streamline their operations during pandemic crises and also deepen employees' understanding of the jobs of other departments and colleagues; and, more importantly, helped create more respect among colleagues. Employees could develop different job skills, create new job opportunities and enhance their sense of job security.

The nearly paralyzed ecology of the entire hospitality and tourism sector has affected employees' emotions and confidence in their career development and even the hospitality industry. To show understanding and care towards employees, three informants implemented different platforms to strengthen connections with staff. These included small group discussions to allow employees to relieve their negative emotions, and corporate social responsibility activities to serve the community, particularly underprivileged groups. As the hotel group President emphasized:

*Employees are important asset to whom we have invested a lot in their growth. We need to keep them active and involved, otherwise they will look for other hotel groups or industries.*

#### 5.4 Managerial implications

Uniquely, the present study attempted to capture professional insights from experienced senior executives of luxury hotels to further complement the research findings and reflect their views on employees' CQ, EL and JS. Moreover, their reflections were used to explore how luxury hotels supported their employees during the adverse situation created by COVID-19. This helped to re-contextualize the findings for those executives and highlight the need to strengthen service staff's CQ and EL to prepare for the recovery from the worldwide lockdown. Furthermore, engaging practitioners in the interpretation of empirical results helped to appreciate how these stakeholders may interpret key findings, including how it can challenge embedded attitudes. The findings of this study stress the need for luxury hotels to recognize the impacts of different dimensions of cultural intelligence and emotional labor on employees' JS, because their satisfaction can directly influence quality customer service (Arnett *et al.*, 2002).

Consistent with Lam and Cheung's (2018) findings that frontline employees of luxury hotels generally possess capabilities across the four CQ dimensions, hotel management may not appreciate the relevant meanings and effects. Understanding the interrelationship among the four CQ dimensions, for example, that cognitive CQ supports one to exercise metacognitive CQ in multicultural contexts (Ang & Van Dyne, 2008), is also deemed important for hotel managers as they expect their staff to interact with culturally diverse customers during unexpected incidents or complaints. Hence, luxury hotel managers may need to develop a comprehensive and effective employee development strategy, involving techniques such as coaching, mentoring, cross-training, job shadowing, job rotation or online employee development activities with an aim of encouraging frontline employees to learn to actively demonstrate behaviors congruent with guests' culture with confidence. This suggests a more extensive approach as these activities extend beyond using established human resource strategies such as providing language skills training.

Hotel management may reinforce employees' cognitive CQ by enhancing their cultural knowledge and behaviors, thereby underpinning the development of their metacognitive CQ and prompting frontline staff to appreciate and refine culturally sensitive service interactions. It was interesting to capture the executives' views on how their hotels attempted to maintain or even reinforce training efforts and resources during COVID-19. Such investment in staff development can equip their employees to support business recovery; but, more importantly, such initiatives can enhance their affective links with the company and their job satisfaction. In the same developmental spirit, luxury hotel managers may invite different experienced travel experts to share their cultural knowledge and practices (e.g. norms, values, beliefs, taboos), and personal experiences of certain cultures, particularly those representing major market segments for the hotel. Hotel management can try to cultivate cognitive CQ and higher-order metacognitive CQ capabilities in employees by using problem-solving exercises and critical incident case studies to help them suspend judgement and adapt to cross-cultural service interactions (Presbitero, 2017). With the support of consolidated metacognitive CQ and cognitive CQ, motivational CQ may also be strengthened to exert further positive influence on service employees' JS and drive them to exhibit with confidence culturally appropriate behaviors in multicultural hospitality settings.

Beyond CQ, it is essential to stress that, in a demanding luxury service context, an unsatisfied employee may not display appropriate emotional states when dealing with customers (Gursoy *et al.*, 2011), resorting to *surface acting*. This study highlighted that expression of naturally felt emotions (EN) was the only emotional state leading to employees' JS. This suggests that hospitality practitioners, especially within luxury hotels, should rethink their approach towards

the emotional requirements imposed on frontline employees and nurture their EN instead. For example, hospitality managers should reflect on the recruitment of individuals with the capabilities of soft skills such as EN, to better fit the need of the luxury hotels to provide personalized genuine hospitality services to hotel guests. Reinforcing that frontline staff are highly valued by the organization is vital. Human resources management strategies can help to embed a culture of hospitableness as well as promoting a sense of employees' belonging and job satisfaction.

Showing empathy, encouragement and understanding to employees' wellbeing is a primary responsibility of hotel management. Allowing employees to feel empathy and support from management is important too. In other words, extending empathy and care to others may also help promote affective relationships. Senior practitioners in this study pointed to taking the lead in organizing activities that served a wider local community and mobilizing their staff to participate. By joining community services, employees engage themselves with people from different (age, family and ethnic) backgrounds, sensitizing them towards others' needs, thereby triggering empathy. According to Supanti and Butcher's (2019) study analyzing corporate social responsibility (CSR) participation to foster meaningful work and helping behavior, CSR engagement has a strong effect on helping behavior as well as building a quality workforce and workplace. Through CSR activities, organizational members can gain a sense of satisfaction and pride outside the work setting. These initiatives can help hotel managers identify and develop 'satisfied culturally intelligent non-actors', which, may arouse EN among the frontline staff who participated voluntarily to the activities. Through organizing socially productive externally oriented activities, hotel managers may be able to build a more motivated workforce with high morale and job satisfaction.

### *5.5 Theoretical implications*

This study provides four key contributions to knowledge regarding the effects of cultural intelligence and emotional labor on employees' job satisfaction in luxury hospitality contexts. First, different from studies which focused on particular dimensions of CQ (e.g., Lorenz, Ramsey, Tariq, & Morrell, 2016; Paparoidamis *et al.*, 2019; Lam *et al.*, 2021) and EL (e.g. Choi *et al.*, 2019; Kwon *et al.*, 2019; Wang, 2020), this study tested all dimensions of CQ and EL of service employees in relation to JS, thus providing a comprehensive picture of how each CQ dimension and emotional state affects frontline employees' JS.

Second, it is possible to assume that CQ is a broad-based asset in any multicultural service context. Challenging such an assertion, the findings of this study identified that only cognitive and motivational CQ had positive effect on luxury hotel employees' job satisfaction, but contrary to Ang *et al.*, (2007) and Magnusson *et al.* (2013), metacognitive and behavioral CQ had insignificant effects. Cultural differences between service providers and customers complicate a multicultural environment (Frías-Jamilena, Sabiote-Ortiz, Martín-Santana, & Beerli-Palacio, 2018a). In considering Lorenz *et al.*'s (2016) notion that perceived cultural difference between an employee and hotel guest might prevent service staff from adapting in an intercultural context, there is a need to further assess the impacts of each CQ dimension alone, and in combination, on work performances. This can help to isolate those features that have greater positive influence and thus warrant further investment in human resource development.

Third, the present study suggests that expression of naturally felt emotions (EN) was the only emotional state that had a direct positive effect on JS and that emotive effort (EE) had an insignificant effect. The significant finding regarding EN demonstrates its importance for

hospitality, especially luxury hotels. Employees' JS and EN can trigger authentic customer oriented behaviors, helping to enact luxury experiences, which will have a positive feedback effect on their job satisfaction. This study finding is consistent with Herzberg's (1966) motivation hygiene theory, which suggests that the performance of tasks that individuals truly enjoy can reinforce job satisfaction.

Fourth, the insignificant effect of EE on JS in this study suggests the need to re-examine whether EE has a positive effect on job satisfaction among all hotel employees (Chu *et al.*, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2016). The finding also implies that EE or a *deep acting* strategy after all is an acting technique (Chu *et al.*, 2012), which may bring customers a sense of authenticity and satisfaction but simultaneously create emotional stress for employees in service interactions. Thus, this approach is not desirable for service employees in luxury hospitality settings where numerous culturally diverse service encounters are enacted.

### *5.6 Limitations and implications for future research*

The targeted sampling of frontline hotel employees from a handful of luxury hotels in Hong Kong limits possibilities for generalization. Future research may replicate the current study to service staff in other types of hotels (e.g. three-star hotel) or other geographic areas. Such sampling strategies provide opportunities for cross-cultural comparisons, as well as comparisons of frontline employees' CQ, EL and JS across different hotel categories. Furthermore, guest satisfaction can also be incorporated to the model by aggregating the score matched between guests and staff. Previous tourism studies investigated the role of tourists' CQ in tourist destination (Frías-Jamilena *et al.*, 2018a; Frías-Jamilena, Sabiote-Ortiz, Martín-Santana, & Beerli-Palacio, 2018b). To open a new line of CQ studies in the hospitality industry, future research may study the role of the CQ of hotel guests in service outcomes, such as perceived service quality, and brand loyalty, which are highly important to hospitality firms and employees.

The cross-sectional design of this study also presents limitations, while pointing to new areas of research. As the sample data were collected from respondents at a particular point in time, the findings may be different if the data collection was conducted at other times, so the causal relationship proposed in this study should be inferred with caution. Thus, future studies can use longitudinal research designs with the support of hospitality practitioners, so that researchers can collect multiple measures to account for temporal changes.

Future qualitative studies capturing frontline employees' experiences and attitudes towards acquiring and utilizing CQ, and performing EL jobs in multicultural hospitality settings can be attempted. This can expand our understanding of their consequences beyond job satisfaction, including how they translate into areas such as their professional and personal identities. Examining such issues can help to understand the wider consequences of frontline service work within and beyond hospitality.

Finally, the study used interviews with senior luxury hotel executives to help them (re)contextualize the results and to use them to reflect on their practices. The small sample involved may limit the transferability of the findings. Nevertheless, the same dialogic practice with key stakeholders (e.g. hotel guests, senior executives, managers) can be used to enhance the findings of future studies. These engagement activities can help researchers and practitioners to better appreciate the limits of their understanding of phenomena, including how research findings reflect and translate into practice.

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## **Appendix**

### **Questions for the semi-structured interview to the senior hotel executives**

#### **About job satisfaction:**

- What is the significance of employee's job satisfaction to your hotel? Has the significance reduced since the pandemic of Covid-19?

#### **About cultural intelligence:**

- Are the results related to the influence of each component of CQ on frontline service employees' JS expected and reasonable from luxury hotel management's perspective?
- To what extent the hotel management view cultural capabilities, such as CQ, as an important attribute for frontline service employees? Has it used as recruitment and selection criteria?
- Regardless of the results from the study, which dimension(s) of CQ of frontline service employees are important to the hotel and the guests?

#### **About emotional labor:**

- Are the results related to the influence of each component of EL on frontline service employees' JS expected and reasonable from luxury hotel management's perspective?
- Which emotional labor strategies are commonly adopted by frontline service employees based on your observation?
- Which emotional strategy has the hotel management encouraged service employees to use in order to meet the service standard? Has the hotel implemented any training to support the use of the EL strategy?

#### **Overall view:**

- According to the results from the study, in what way do you think cultural intelligent staff using genuine acting in service interactions can bring benefits to their job satisfaction?
- Do you think the enhancement of service employees' CQ while encouraging them to adopt genuine acting strategy can differentiate your hotel further from other rivals? What could the hotel do to make it happen?