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# **Presenteeism of hotel employees: interaction effects of empowerment and hardiness**

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## **Presenteeism of hotel employees: Interaction effects of empowerment and hardiness**

### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – This study investigates the two-way interaction effects of empowerment and hardiness on the presenteeism of hotel employees.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Data are collected from 358 hotel employees in Sabah, East Malaysia via a questionnaire survey and analyzed using multiplicative regression analysis.

**Findings** – The results confirm the presence of a two-way interaction effect between empowerment and hardiness on the presenteeism of hotel employees at a significance level of 0.01. Further analysis indicates that the higher the level of hardiness, the greater is its negative effect on the relationship between empowerment and the presenteeism of hotel employees.

**Research limitations / implications** – The survey is cross-sectional and causal relationships among the variables cannot be inferred. The results are gathered from selected hotels and should not be generalized to all hotel employees in Sabah, East Malaysia.

**Practical implications** – The findings challenge the assumption of a positive association between empowerment and presenteeism and demonstrate that different levels of hardiness can influence this relationship. When empowering employees, management staff should also consider the provision of resilience-related training programmes to less hardy employees. This would enable such employees to handle their presenteeism behavior arising from the increased level of empowerment.

**Originality/value** – This study provides the first empirical evidence of a two-way interaction effect of predictors on the presenteeism of hotel employees and could serve to influence mainstream journals in the presenteeism literature. Researchers could apply the analytical approach to examine future studies relating to higher-order effects of predictors on the presenteeism of hotel employees.

**Keywords** Presenteeism; Hardiness; Empowerment; Malaysia

**Paper type** Research paper

## **Presenteeism of hotel employees: Interaction effects of empowerment and hardiness**

### **Introduction**

Given the highly competitive environment in the hospitality industry, management is concerned about maintaining a healthy and happy workforce that can deliver services to meet the expectations of hotel customers. Such services can be very demanding when the job requires employees to present emotions inconsistent with their feelings. For example, putting on a smiling and happy face while dealing with a difficult hotel guest is typically deemed as emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983). When the work of employees involves emotional labor, the occurrence of work-related stress is pertinent (Pizam, 2004). Emotional work is further affected by the cultural values of employees (Eid and Diener, 2009). Job stress in the hospitality industry is well-documented in light of the daily uncertainties of job tasks and meeting the immediate expectations and demands of hotel guests (Zhao and Ghiselli, 2016). Another source of stress for employees is the need to consider the interdependence effects of their decisions and maintaining good team relationships. If stress is not properly managed, it may lead to high employee turnover and an increase in sickness absence. Hemp (2004) suggests that employees who encounter job stress may feel a need to be in control of their job demands and will be inclined to engage in presenteeism behavior as a coping strategy

In the field of organizational behavior, presenteeism is generally described as presenting oneself at work when feeling unwell (Johns, 2010; Jourdain and Vezina, 2014). Feeling unwell can arise from health conditions or high job stress emanating from heavy job demands or threats to job security. Employees engage in presenteeism behavior because they may have (mis)perceived that they can ‘control’ or mitigate their high job stress by spending more time in the workplace. Thus, the basic assumption is that job stress is positively associated with presenteeism behavior (Admasachew and Dawson, 2011; Aronsson and Gustafson, 2005). However, presenteeism is also concerning because such employees’ behavior may limit their ability to be at full efficiency in carrying out their work tasks (Demerouti et al., 2009). For example, the performance of sick employees may suffer as they attempt to produce the same level of outcome as healthy colleagues by expending more time and effort (Cooper, 1998). Similarly, hotel employees will be more likely to take sick leave for longer periods in

the future or may leave the hospitality industry altogether if they are consistently engaging in a high degree of presenteeism. The importance of presenteeism becomes greater if one considers that the productivity of the workforce is a reflection of the strength and sustainability of an organization (Johns, 2010). An understanding of presenteeism enables management to run hotels better and take improved decisions to mitigate the presenteeism behavior of their employees. In addition, an investigation of presenteeism can facilitate our theoretical understanding of the phenomenon in the hospitality industry in view of the stressful working environment. Despite the significance and implications of presenteeism, the literature on the subject in the hospitality industry is very limited. Exceptions are the studies by Chia and Chu (2016) and Cullen and McLaughlin (2006). It is plausible that the slow appreciation of this phenomenon is due to its subjective nature, a lack of awareness, and an absence of an acceptable instrument to measure the construct (Johns, 2010). The existence of presenteeism among hotel employees will potentially result in hotels losing their competitive advantage or becoming less productive in view of the need to please the diverse expectations of multiple parties (Gill et al., 2006). Therefore, an investigation into presenteeism in the hospitality industry may contribute insights to human resource practices that management may implement.

While there is an increasing growth of tourism in Asia, there is little research conducted within the Asian context. This is in spite of the collectivistic culture that can potentially pose challenges to western models in management practices, as in the area of staff empowerment (Ryan, 2015). Gill et al. (2010) comment that empowerment is an under-researched but important factor in the service industry such as in matters relating to career issues (Kong et al., 2016). There is also limited understanding of how varying levels of a particular personality variable influences the responses of the empowered individual to engage in certain behavior such as presenteeism. Furthermore, Wilkinson (1998) observes that the assumption by employers that empowerment is a universal solution in all organisations has resulted in the contingent view of empowerment being overlooked.

In the Malaysian context, empowerment is likely to be perceived by employees as a job stressor since it imposes increased job demands on them in the form of higher workload and work responsibility. Additionally, in a collectivistic culture like Malaysia (Hofstede, 2001), the desire for empowerment is low among employees (Gill et al.,

2010). Being more empowered and reaching decisions in interdependence tasks is likely to be challenging and stressful for employees. They are likely to be relatively more stressed and concerned about the ramifications of their decisions on their colleagues when compared with their counterparts operating in an individualistic culture. Stress derived from increased job demands implies that employees will likely engage in higher presenteeism if the resources (job and personal) available are not sufficient to mitigate the stress. Similarly, hardiness (also known as dispositional resilience) has been considered as influencing an individual's capability to manage the pressures of stressful life situations (Andringa et al., 2016; Jung and Yoon, 2016). This also suggests that individuals possessing high levels of hardiness will be better placed to control their propensity to engage in presenteeism behavior. In the hospitality literature, studies utilizing the hardiness construct have slowly been generating interest as a personal resource that can influence an individual to respond to adverse or stressful situations (Andringa et al., 2016; Jung and Yoon, 2016; Karatepe, 2015; Lu et al., 2016; Zopiatis and Constanti, 2010).

Thus far, the discussion has identified three variables, namely empowerment, hardiness and presenteeism that are potentially associated with the underlying assumption of job stress in the workplace. In this study, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model will be adopted as the conceptual framework (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) to explain the linkages among the variables in the research model. Empowerment will be considered as a job demand in the context of a collectivistic culture and hardiness will be considered as a personal resource. Bakker and Demerouti (2014) suggest that interventions can be applied to stimulate employees and influence individual job outcomes through the reduction of imbalance between personal resource and job demands. It is plausible for empowerment and hardiness to interact and influence the presenteeism behavior of an individual, as explained by JD-R theory. For the hospitality industry, this observation provides the opportunity to consider the three variables in an empirical research model with the aim of investigating the interaction effects of empowerment and hardiness on presenteeism. The findings offer the prospect of contributing to the literature in these ways:

1. The absence of studies relating to the higher-order effects of variables on presenteeism has prompted a call by Johns (2011) for more studies to address this gap. The three variables of interest in the present study have not been

investigated simultaneously in a research model using an interactionist approach. The study, will thus generate insights which inform the literature on presenteeism. The information allows us to understand the conditions under which the relationships between variables change in nature and direction. Additionally, the findings of an interaction effect provide opportunities for making differential predictions on presenteeism.

2. Since the research model has not been reported in the organizational behavior or hospitality fields, the findings should mitigate what Guerrier and Deery (1998, p. 145) have observed to be "...researchers ... primarily engaged in applying mainstream ideas to the hospitality industry".
3. The study is conducted in the context of a collectivistic culture under the conditions of a weak institutional support framework and legal regulations as found in Malaysia. By identifying how the hardiness of employees moderates the relationship between empowerment and presenteeism under these boundary conditions, this research provides insights and guidance for international hotel chains in adapting their human resource practices and policies to the expectations and needs of the host country.
4. Finally, the adoption of empowerment and hardiness under the JD-R framework provides opportunities to apply appropriate interventions that mitigate presenteeism (Demerouti et al., 2011).

### **Literature review and hypotheses development**

The JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) has been extensively applied in studies analysing stress and motivation (e.g., Bakker et al., 2007; Nahrgang et al., 2011). The JD-R model is used to explain how resources (job and personal) can facilitate work engagement and performance when employees face high job demands. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004, p. 296) define "...job demands as those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical and/or psychological (i.e., cognitive or emotional) effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs". Making decisions under pressure, or dealing with demanding hotel guests, as well as worrying about the effects of interdependent decisions on colleagues, are examples of job demands.

The resources side of the JD-R model comprises both job and personal resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). These resources can buffer or lessen the effect of job demands and their associated costs (physical and psychological) as well as stimulate personal growth and development (Demerouti et al., 2001). There are two independent psychological processes provided by the JD-R model, namely the motivational process and the health impairment process. The health impairment process relates to persistently high job demands that cause stress and health-related issues. The motivational process relates to resources that can mitigate the adverse impacts of job demands on stress levels. The JD-R model has helped to explain the linkages between antecedents and outcome in various professions including those employed in customer-oriented services (Bakker et al., 2003). For example, Lu et al. (2016) observe that work engagement may boost job satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Similarly, the model can be employed to provide the rationale for the conceptual relationship between empowerment and presenteeism as moderated by the hardiness of hotel employees in the hospitality industry.

#### *Relationship between empowerment and presenteeism*

Presenteeism is a topical variable in the organizational behavior literature and has been associated with productivity loss (Hemp, 2004). A work-related factor affecting presenteeism is empowerment (Johns, 2010). Theoretically, empowered employees are knowledgeable workers (Ayupp and Chung, 2010) and therefore, will be given greater responsibilities and wider job scope. Empowering employees has been considered a viable means to facilitate greater discretion and decision-making by management (Spreitzer, 1995) and has been associated with enhanced performance on the basis of making more timely decisions on the job. However, empowerment may not necessarily be helpful to employees. Being empowered can also create stress due to role ambiguity in relation to responsibilities to both colleagues and hotel guests (Akgunduz, 2015). Therefore, the pressure on empowered employees to make interdependent decisions and feel obligated to attend work when encountering high job demands increases their level of job stress and consequently result in greater presenteeism (Johns, 2011).

Employees in a collectivistic culture tend to value team effort and joint responsibility (Hofstede, 2001), with group decisions being preferred over individual decisions (De Mooij, 2004). This suggests that employees in collectivistic cultures tend



to harbor a low desire for empowerment (Gill et al., 2010; Magnini et al., 2013). This is different from employees in individualistic cultures where the desire for individuality (Bochner, 1994) implies that empowerment would be embraced as a means of enabling differentiation and separation from others (Magnini et al., 2013). Thus, in a collectivistic society like Malaysia, where joint-decisions are the norm, empowered hotel employees are likely to feel the stress of making interdependent decisions unilaterally (Lyu et al., 2016). As in other Asian countries, job stress is not perceived as an illness that forces employees to be absent since an absence culture is not viewed sympathetically (Harrison et al., 2000). Therefore, it is plausible for stressed employees to engage in presenteeism behavior as a coping strategy (Hemp, 2004).

Based on the foregoing, empowerment is viewed as a job demand in the organization's work system that increases employees' effort. When empowerment is applied to emotional aspects of work, it tends to be perceived as an intensification of control by management. This perception renders the decision-making process more, rather than less, stressful. Additionally, the interdependence of job tasks makes the stressful effect more pronounced in a collectivistic culture. Such feelings are consistent with the rationale of the health impairment process in JD-R theory.

#### *Relationship between hardiness and presenteeism*

Maddi (2005) describes hardiness as psychological resilience employed by individuals to meet their daily job demands and life pressures. Hardy employees tend to approach their job demands vigorously and feel that they can manage them successfully. They are inclined to interpret their job stress as a part of normal job routines and view stressful situations as meaningful and worthy. This positive approach to the high job demands that cause significant job stress is similar to the 'control' concept of work engagement (Bakker and Sanz-Vergel, 2013). Recent studies have reported the buffering effect of hardiness on the various negative consequences of stress (Jung and Yoon, 2016; McCalister et al., 2006).

Hardy employees use adaptive coping strategies including a problem-focus strategy (Cash and Gardner, 2011) and develop social networks for support to better manage job stress (McCalister et al., 2006). Maddi et al. (2002) have reported that hardiness contributes to the continuation and improvement of performance, morale, and health under significantly stressful situations.

This situation is consistent with JD-R theory which suggests that job and personal resources provide the motivation for hardy employees to meet their work-related goals (Karatepe, 2015) when they are confronted with highly challenging job demands (Bakker, 2011). The high level of hardiness may motivate empowered employees to have greater control over their perceived stress and work with commitment to alleviate the stressful stimuli, resulting in a lowering of presenteeism (Jung and Yoon, 2015).

*Interaction effect between empowerment and hardiness on presenteeism*

According to the JD-R model, a balance between job demands (i. e., high empowerment) and resources (i.e., high hardiness), will result in high work engagement and an absence of stress (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). In the current study, the hardiness of hotel employees may cause them to respond and help buffer their stress, thus promoting work engagement (Karatepe and Karadas, 2015). These hardy employees are likely to be capable of controlling and resolving situations more quickly and may see a reduced need to engage in presenteeism. As such, the lowering of stress is likely to result in a lowering of presenteeism.

In contrast, empowered but less hardy employees may be overwhelmed by job stress and feel a sense of loss of control. Consistent with the rationale of the JD-R processes, the tension arising from the imbalance of job demands (e.g., high empowerment) and resources (e.g., low personal resource of a low level of hardiness) is likely to cause stress among hotel employees. They may be consciously analyzing their decisions and harboring feelings of perceived loss of control in difficult and stressful situations. Their low level of hardiness does not instill them with the confidence and perseverance to engage in risk-taking behavior or positive work engagement when encountering stressful situations (Karatepe, 2105). While they may attend work when experiencing high job stress, there is a loss of control. As a result, they are likely to resort to a higher degree of presenteeism in an attempt to gain control.

Thus far, the discussion argues that if two employees have similar perceptions of empowerment but both possess varying levels of hardiness, the hardier employee is more likely to respond to any work barriers by attempting to control and overcome them. When compared with the less hardy employee, the hardier employee is likely to be more successful in such attempts, and eventually lower his or her degree of

presenteeism. The discussion, therefore, suggests that the presenteeism of hotel employees can be affected by the interaction between their perceived levels of empowerment and hardiness. It has been further reasoned that the negative effect on the empowerment-presenteeism relationship will be greater as the level of hardiness increases. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Empowerment interacts with hardiness to affect the presenteeism of hotel employees.*
- H2: The greater the level of hardiness, the greater is its negative effect on the relationship between empowerment and the presenteeism of hotel employees.*

It has been argued above that the nature of the relationship between empowerment and presenteeism varies as a function of hardiness. Hypothesis *H2* is proposed as a buffering interaction between the two continuous variables of empowerment and hardiness on presenteeism in which the moderator variable (hardiness) lessens the effect of empowerment on the presenteeism of hotel employees (Cohen et al., 2003). The buffering interaction pattern "... is driven by the specific nature of the concepts analysed..." and holds "...potential because (it is) ... likely to challenge existing theory" (Andersson et al., 2014; p. 1065).

## **Methodology**

### *Research site and participants*

The data were part of a larger questionnaire survey conducted on the determinants of individual outcomes. The respondents were a representative sample of hotel employees in Sabah, East Malaysia. Sabah was selected as the research site in view of its growing tourism industry which is a mainstay of the local economy. In addition, local knowledge and contacts of one of the authors working in the hospitality industry facilitated the collection of data from a purposive, convenience sample. The human resource departments of fourteen hotels were contacted to distribute the questionnaires. Five hundred white-collar employees were selected because they were generally better educated and competent to complete the questionnaire which is in the English Language.

The average number of employees in each organization was 100. There were 358 usable questionnaires in the final analysis. Follow-up discussion with the human

resource staff of the different hotels revealed that the possible reasons for the missing 142 anonymous questionnaires related to prospective respondents changing vocations out of the hospitality industry and leaving the workforce due to personal reasons or retirement. There were 208 females and 150 males in the usable sample. The age group for the sample respondents was rather dispersed, with 174 (48.6%) of the respondents aged 30 and below. The high response rate could be due to the educational level of the respondents with 77.9% being tertiary degree holders.

### *Variables*

This study investigates the individual perception of three variables, namely, empowerment, hardiness and presenteeism. In the context of their working environment, empowerment and hardiness are both perceived by the respondents and how they react to these variables is reflected in their perceived presenteeism behavior.

The responses to the various variables were measured using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The adopted empowerment construct was a 17-item instrument from Spreitzer (1995). The validity and internal reliability of this instrument had been confirmed in numerous studies (e.g., Nuthall, 1995; Rogers et al., 2010). The hardiness construct was measured by using the six-item instrument in the study by Cole et al. (2006) and which had a reported internal reliability value of 0.76. Presenteeism was measured using the adopted self-reported six-item instrument from Gilbreath and Frew (2008). This instrument had been utilized by Gilbreath and Karimi (2012) who reported an internal reliability value of 0.91.

### *Analytical approach*

In the current study, the respondents operate within the same legal work regulations and possess similar collectivistic culture and values, as the general population. As reported in Table I, there is an absence of any statistical difference in the variables of presenteeism, empowerment and hardiness in the sample population when two different age groups are compared. These considerations provide an assumption of population homogeneity and facilitate the application of regression analysis. Carte and Russell (2003) have commented that only differential prediction is appropriately tested with moderated multiple regression. Therefore, the hypotheses for the current study are tested using the multiple regression equation where the dependent variable (i.e.,

presenteeism) is regressed against the two independent variables of hardiness and empowerment. The focus of this approach is on the significance of the two-way interaction term.

## Results

Table I shows the *t*-tests applied to determine any potential differences in variable means between respondents aged 30 years and younger, and those respondents above 30 years old. Generally, the results suggest that the two age groups do not have different priorities and expectations with respect to these three variables. This observation may enable hotels to be more efficient in their management as they now have insights to any potential generational issues relating to the behavior and motivational aspects of their staff.

Insert Table I here
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Following the recommendations for a sample size of more than 350, no item in the instruments for measuring the three respective variables is dropped in the final analysis as the factor loading for every item meets the threshold value of 0.30 (Hair et al., 2014). The responses of all items in each variable are computed to form a mean score. A high mean score denotes a high level of the particular variable. Similarly, a low mean score will denote a low level of the particular variable. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis indicate a good model fit ( $\chi^2 = 1756.56$ ,  $df = 374$ ,  $p < 0.0001$ ,  $GFI = 0.91$ ,  $CFI = 0.93$ ,  $RSMEA = 0.0605$ ,  $NFI = 0.97$ ,  $NNI = 0.94$ ). Although the  $\chi^2$  statistic does not support an adequate fit, this statistic is not necessarily a good indicator in view of the large sample size in the present study (Hair et al., 2014). The other indices are in line with acceptable guidelines for reaching the conclusion of a reasonably good model fit (Hair et al., 2014).

The descriptive statistics for the variables are reported in Table II. For the three variables, both of their respective acceptable levels of 0.70 (Cronbach alpha values) for internal reliability and 0.60 (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy) for construct validity have been met (Pallant, 2007). Table III presents the correlation of the variables. As the correlation values are less than 0.70, multicollinearity should not be an issue (Pedhazur and Kerlinger, 1982).

Insert Tables II, III and IV here

Table IV displays the regression results of the study. Equation B contains the additional two-way interaction term of hardiness and empowerment when compared with Equation A. The statistically significant interaction term ( $t$ -value = - 4.81 at  $p < 0.01$ ) in Equation B provides support Hypothesis *H1*. Equation B also shows a slightly larger variance ( $R^2$ ) than Equation A. The small increase in variance is due to the inclusion of the two-way interaction term and accounts for 5.75% of the presenteeism of hotel employees (Jaccard et al., 1990).

The multiplicative approach, as applied in Chia and Chu (2016), is adopted to compute the partial derivative of Equation B over  $X_1$  (empowerment). This results in Equation C below:

$$\partial Y/\partial X_1 = 1.28 - 0.22 X_2 \quad \text{---} \quad \text{Equation C}$$

In Equation C, the effect of empowerment on presenteeism is a function of the level of hardiness ( $X_2$ ). When  $\partial Y/\partial X_1$  in Equation C is set to zero,  $X_2$  will have a value of 5.82. This value denotes the inflection point. As the value is within the range of observable values for  $X_2$ , it will be possible to interpret the results of Equation C (Chia, 1995). When  $X_2$  is below the value of 5.82, Equation C will be positive. When  $X_2$  is more than 5.82, Equation C will be negative. The graph in Figure 1 depicts Equation C.

Insert Figure1 here

The graph shows that as  $X_2$  increases, the slope of the partial derivative for Equation C is decreasingly positive before the inflection point. After the inflection point, the slope is increasingly negative when  $X_2$  increases. This change of direction indicates that over the range of levels of hardiness, empowerment has a contingent effect on the presenteeism variable.

These interpretations suggest that the association between empowerment and presenteeism will be negatively affected as the level of hardiness increases. Therefore, support for Hypothesis *H2* is provided by these evidence. The results permit the following observations to demonstrate the consistency of the theoretical discussion regarding the relationships between the variables in the research model:

- The interaction term has an effect size of 5.75%. This effect size is deemed as small (Bosco et al., 2015) and therefore, care should be taken when interpreting the impact of the interaction in the context of the research site as well as the generalizability of these results. Nonetheless, the analysis helps pinpoint the significant role of the interaction term in explaining presenteeism.
- For hotel employees, the association between their empowerment and presenteeism is non-monotonic when their levels of hardiness are considered simultaneously. The results show that under conditions of increasing level of hardiness after the point of inflection, the effects on the association between empowerment and presenteeism are also increasingly negative. Similarly, the results show that the positive influence of empowerment on presenteeism will be increasingly larger when the levels of hardiness become decreasingly smaller before the point of inflection.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

### *Conclusions*

The results of this study are consistent with the theoretical discussion and support the hypotheses that have been proposed for testing. The careful interpretation of empirical results – in addition to statistical significance – provides a more informed test of the interaction effect of empowerment and hardiness. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of presenteeism in the hospitality industry in an Asian context. Likewise, the investigation of presenteeism using an interactionist approach and applied to hotel employees in a non-western country is a distinguishing feature of this study. No empirical evidence has been reported on similar research in the wider literature.

In light of the stressful work environment which can contribute to the presenteeism of hotel employees, management is likely to better understand the specific conditions in which personality traits can moderate the relationship between

empowerment and presenteeism. In addition, the practical recommendations of developmental training programmes can be adapted by management to address presenteeism.

While the variables have been separately examined in the mainstream management literature, they have not been simultaneously investigated in a single research model before. Therefore, the findings constitute a novel contribution to the hospitality industry literature and will hopefully inform management in other sectors. The findings add to a growing, albeit limited list of empirical contributions, and complement the heavy reliance on theoretical notions to develop understandings of presenteeism. The study provides human resource managers and hotel employees with evidence that it will be possible to respond to one's understanding of presenteeism if the effects of its determinants are appropriately studied. This can be achieved by changing one's perception and by developing policies and procedures aimed directly at decreasing the presenteeism of employees in the workplace.

#### *Managerial implications*

First, within the JD-R framework, this study provides empirical evidence on the interaction effect of empowerment and hardiness on the presenteeism of hotel employees. The buffering interaction effect (Cohen et al., 2003) is likely to modify the employees' perceptions of what they would normally do in relation to increased empowerment. For example, when the level of hardiness is not considered, responding to demanding and conflicting decisions would have been more stressful to the empowered employees. The role conflict arising from being empowered creates role stress and negatively affects the performance of hospitality employees (Akgunduz, 2015). Therefore, managements should find the results useful as they may improve the overall performance of their hotels.

Second, while Cullen and McLaughlin's (2006) call for the need to "... uncover possible solutions to an unconstructive and unhelpful practice that appears to have become embedded in the culture of the Irish hotel industry" (p. 515), the results of the present study have contributed insights to presenteeism in an Asian context. The findings should assist the management of international hotels in western economies who are considering their human resource practices when expanding their operations into Asia.



Third, the study has demonstrated that considering empowerment from a contingent perspective is more useful and is consistent with the views of Fock et al. (2011) and Wilkinson (1998). While Fulford and Enz (1995) have indicated that some hotel groups such as Guest Quarter Suite Hotels, Omni Group of Hotels and The Westin, have implicitly accepted the positive usefulness of empowerment philosophies and implemented such ideas for their employees, the findings suggest that this assumption may not necessarily be appropriate, at least in the context of Malaysia. It is suggested that when management intends to empower their staff, a consideration of the contingent nature level of empowerment on individual-level outcome (e.g., presenteeism) over the range of the level of personality traits (e.g., hardiness) would be helpful.

Fourth, the results suggest that less hardy employees may feel the increased stress arising from being empowered and may resort to a higher degree of presenteeism. In contrast, hardier employees who are empowered will be in a position to handle the increased responsibilities and respond to the increased stress with greater resilience and this results in a lowering of presenteeism. An awareness of the findings enables human resource personnel to provide support and regulations to mitigate the negative effects of empowerment so that presenteeism does not overwhelm both perceived positive effects and the stress of employees is not overly increased (Chiang et al., 2010). Similarly, such actions can enhance the performance of less hardy employees as well as reduce their potential for experiencing job burnout (Zopiatis and Constanti, 2010).

Fifth, as a personal resource in the JD-R model, hardiness can be developed through interventions as it has been proven to be malleable (Demerouti et al., 2011; Luthans et al., 2006). Maddi (2002) suggests that hardiness can be increased through training, increasing employees' engagement with people and events in their lives, and by promoting the idea that effort leads to positive outcomes. Management can also consider more stringent selection process which includes a consideration of the resilience level of prospective employees. The suggested selection and training activities may result in a higher cost of operations. However, such expenditures can be justified in terms of increasing employees' psychological resources as well as developing their psychological capital to mitigate presenteeism behavior (Karatepe and Karadas, 2015; Tuna et al., 2016).

Lastly, in the Malaysian context, increasing empowerment conveys a different meaning and serves to add stress instead of serving as a means of demonstrating trust in employees. Management can support employees with suitable training to ensure the success of the empowerment process. Given the globalization of the hospitality industry, an awareness of how empowerment is perceived in a collectivistic society would be very relevant to developing human resource and training policies. Transformational leadership can be adopted to encourage open communication between management and lower-level employees to overcome cultural barriers (Patiar and Wang, 2016).

### *Theoretical implications*

The adopted self-reported presenteeism instrument variable devised by Gilbreath and Frew (2008) has revealed high validity and internal reliability coefficients in the present study. The research demonstrates the suitability of the instrument in a non-Western country as well as its applicability in a hospitality context. Therefore, it is hoped that the instrument can be adopted in future studies in an international context, and generate information to augment existing understandings of presenteeism in the hospitality discipline as well as in the organizational behavior literature more widely.

Cohen et al. (2003) comment that specifying relevant interaction effects is at the heart of theory in the social sciences and this will contribute to the maturity and sophistication of a field of study (Aguinis et al., 2001). The interaction effect in this study implies that it is fitting to consider both empowerment and hardiness simultaneously when investigating presenteeism behavior. As the determinants of presenteeism are associated with both personality characteristics and features of job design, it will be appropriate to adopt the interactionist approach to generate evidence regarding presenteeism in future research. The findings of the present investigation result in these four contributions:

1. Our perception of the boundaries where empowerment may have a contingent effect on presenteeism is expanded.
2. The findings have enhanced our understanding of the relationships among the variables of interest in this study. These findings respond to the call by Johns (2011) to adopt an interactionist approach in the analysis of individual-level and organizational-level variables on presenteeism;

3. The explicit consideration of empowerment and hardiness as antecedents of presenteeism is in line with the calls by Dew et al. (2005) and Sanderson et al. (2007) to expand the limited literature on predictors of presenteeism;
4. The extant literature mainly focuses on the main-order effects of predictors on presenteeism. By considering moderators on main-order relationships, the current study has widened this direction of theory development for presenteeism.

The observation of a buffering interaction effect in this study questions the assumption of a positive association between empowerment and presenteeism. In contrast, it demonstrates that a high level of hardiness can influence the nature and direction of this relationship. This observation constitutes a contribution to the presenteeism literature in that our theoretical understanding of the association between empowerment and presenteeism is changed when a moderator is considered. The implication of this is that it would be useful for researchers to state the type of interactions they are expecting when conducting moderated studies in the hospitality area in order to benefit from the correct identification of outcomes to advance theory.

#### *Limitations and future research*

The cross-sectional nature of the data implies that it is not possible to infer causal relationships among the variables in the research model although the theoretical discussion on the temporal relations among the variables does serve to mitigate this limitation. To overcome this limitation, longitudinal studies and case study style research, as suggested by Chia and Koh (2007), may be adopted in future investigations to generate evidence which complements the present findings.

In the current study, various procedural methods as suggested by Podsakoff et al. (2003) have been adopted to reduce the concern of common method bias. Since empowerment, hardiness, and presenteeism are a part of a broader study, they are deliberately intermixed with other variables in the survey questionnaire. In this way, any perceived direct connections between the variables by the respondents can be reduced. Concerns that using only self-reported data may cause the relationships among the variables to be overestimated could be allayed, as it had been argued that such an effect might not materialize (Conway and Lance, 2010). It is also contended that self-

reported measures are appropriate in the present study because the views of respondents are good representations of their respective perceived levels of empowerment, hardiness, and presenteeism. The assurance of anonymity to the respondents offered confidentiality and provided the nearest approximations of associations among the variables (Fox and Spector, 1999). Furthermore, the questionnaire indicated that the questions did not contain any right or wrong answers. This helped to reduce some of the concerns relating to social desirability bias. In all, the adoption of various procedural methods and the presence of acceptable reliability and validity statistics of the respective variables indicate that substantial method effects have been overcome (Conway and Lance, 2010).

The two-way interaction effect of hardiness and empowerment on presenteeism provides insights to the assumed empowerment-presenteeism relationship. However, the small size effect of the interaction limits the generalization of the results. Perhaps future studies on presenteeism can be conducted in the hotel industry as well as in other industries so as to generate additional evidence to complement the results of this investigation. Furthermore, the current interactionist approach will facilitate an examination of the consequences of presenteeism in a three-way interaction study (Gul and Chia, 1994). An opportunity exists for an investigation that considers the effect of hardiness, empowerment and presenteeism on outcomes including job satisfaction and performance of hotel employees.

The findings of this study are based on the hotel industry in a developing country where a collectivistic culture and weak employment legislation prevails. These findings should not be generalised and assumed to be applicable to other countries where differences in culture and employment frameworks exist. Therefore, it is suggested that future research be performed in other countries so as to enhance understandings of presenteeism in the hospitality literature. Future research might also examine middle levels of culture (Chen et al., 2012), namely industry, occupational and corporate cultures, an area that has been subject to less research. For example, a comparative study between white-collar employees and blue-collar employees can shed light on how the degree of presenteeism may vary between these two categories of employees. The information thus generated would help management to develop more relevant human resource practices to benefit each category.

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**TABLE I**Results of *t*-test of the difference in variable means between the two age groups

Variables	All respondents (N=358)	30 years old and below (N=174)	Above 30 years old (N=184)	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Presenteeism (standard deviation)	3.58 (1.38)	3.67 (1.36)	3.50 (1.40)	1.14	0.2535
Empowerment (standard deviation)	4.96 (0.92)	4.96 (0.87)	4.96 (0.96)	0.03	0.9739
Hardiness (standard deviation)	5.28 (1.17)	5.17 (1.06)	5.37 (1.25)	0.11	0.1054

**Table II**  
Descriptive statistics (n=358)

Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	Range	Cronbach alpha coefficient	KMO value
Presenteeism	3.58	1.38	1.00-7.00	0.92	0.90
Empowerment	4.96	0.92	1.00-7.00	0.93	0.92
Hardiness	5.28	1.17	1.00-7.00	0.94	0.89

**Table III**  
Correlation matrix of the variables

Variables	Presenteeism	Empowerment	Hardiness
Presenteeism	1.00	0.06 ( $p=0.2734$ )	-0.07 ( $p=0.1858$ )
Empowerment		1.00	0.55 ( $p<0.0001$ )
Hardiness			1.00

**Table IV**

Results of multiple regression analysis with presenteeism (Y)  
as the dependent variable (n=358)

Variables	Equation A Regression coefficient (Standard Error) <i>t</i> -value	Equation B Regression coefficient (Standard Error) <i>t</i> -value
Empowerment (X <sub>1</sub> )	0.21 (0.09) <i>t</i> = 2.20 <i>p</i> = 0.0285	1.28 (0.24) <i>t</i> = 5.31 <i>p</i> < 0.0001
Hardiness (X <sub>2</sub> )	-0.17 (0.07) <i>t</i> = -2.32 <i>p</i> = 0.0207	0.85 (0.22) <i>t</i> = 3.78 <i>p</i> = 0.0002
Interaction between Empowerment (X <sub>1</sub> ) and Hardiness (X <sub>2</sub> )	—	-0.22 (0.04) <i>t</i> = -4.81 <i>p</i> < 0.0001
Variance ( <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> )	1.83%	7.58%
Change in variance ( <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> ) (Due to inclusion of interaction term in Equation B)	—	5.75%
<i>F</i> -value	3.31 <i>p</i> = 0.0377	10.06 <i>p</i> < 0.0001

**Figure 1**

Graph showing the effects of hardiness ( $X_2$ ) on the relationship between empowerment ( $X_1$ ) and presenteeism ( $Y$ )

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