THE ROLE OF GRIT IN ENHANCING JOB PERFORMANCE OF FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES: THE MODERATING ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL TENURE

Minseong Kim, Jungmin Lee and Jihye Kim

ABSTRACT
This study investigates the role of grit in a work setting as well as interrelationships among work-related constructs among frontline employees of hotels. Based on the framework of grit and work-related constructs, this study proposes and tests a model that attempts to understand the dynamic relationship among the two dimensions of grit, customer orientation, job satisfaction, and job performance, with an emphasis on the moderating role of organizational tenure. The results indicate that consistency of interest significantly influences customer orientation, whereas perseverance of effort significantly affects job satisfaction. Job performance is significantly influenced by customer orientation and job satisfaction. The paths from perseverance of effort to customer orientation, from perseverance of effort to job satisfaction, and from consistency of interest to job satisfaction are significantly moderated by organizational tenure.

Keywords: Grit; customer orientation; job satisfaction; job performance; frontline employee; hotel
INTRODUCTION

The hotel industry relies heavily on employees to deliver high quality services to customers. Based on the nature of the labor-intensive industry, the service quality of hotel companies is dependent on the capability and skill of their employees when they interact with customers in the service delivery process. However, compared to other industries, the hotel industry has encountered an increase in dissatisfaction and a decrease of task performance among employees due to particular aspects of its working environment, such as long working hours and relatively low pay as well as emotional labor (Chiang & Jang, 2008). In addition, hotel employees need to develop job skills, knowledge, intelligence, and time management ability to adapt to policy and technology changes as well as customers’ needs and wants (Lee, 2016). Without passion and perseverance, therefore, hotel employees may feel a sense of defeat because of the limited opportunities for advancement or perceptions of low status from working in the hotel industry.

Responding to the issues of the hotel industry, this study emphasizes the influence of grit, which is an individual’s passion and perseverance when pursuing long-term goals (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007), on hotel employees. An individual with a high degree of grit works with consistent interest and effort, even when the individual faces challenges such as plateaus, adversity, and failure (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Although challenges or disappointments may make others give up or explore other options, an individual with grit stays the course (Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015). For example, star performers in painting, academia, law, investment banking, and medicine cited grit as more important than talent (Duckworth et al., 2007).

The influence of grit on long-term orientation (e.g., continuous career development in the hotel industry) needs to be applied to the context of hotel employment because employee turnover is a serious issue for many hotel companies worldwide (Kim, Kim, Koo, & Cannon, 2017). This problem requires hotel managers to hire and train new staff frequently to maintain a standardized quality of service (Yang, 2008). However, prior research has focused on the influences of organizational factors (e.g., salary and organization-level regulations) and relationships with a leader (e.g., leader-member exchange) on job performance and/or turnover intention among hotel employees (Chang & Teng, 2017; Chuang, Yin, & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2009; Li, Sanders, & Frenkel, 2012). These extrinsic factors may fail to account for individual differences among hotel employees and can be easily influenced by their circumstances (Chuang et al., 2009). More seriously, extrinsic factors are only able to motivate hotel employees to enhance job performance without enhancements in actual job satisfaction and passion with career development (Wong, Siu, & Tsang, 1999). In light of this, the current study emphasizes the innate characteristics of hotel employees based on extant education literature by investigating the effect of grit on work-related variables (i.e., customer orientation, job satisfaction, and job performance) in the hotel employment context. Compared to intrinsic factors (e.g., personality traits and internal motivation), which are not directly related to the working setting, this application is relevant to the current study because
performing tasks in a work setting involves “learning,” including understanding the job and being trained on how to perform the job as well as how to improve job performance (Wong & Ladkin, 2008).

The hotel business requires frontline employees’ effort and interest when interacting with customers, which affects a hotel’s service quality (Karatepe, Uludag, Menevis, Hadzimehmedagic, & Baddar, 2006). Compared to those working in the back of the house (e.g., accounting, human resources, maintenance, and marketing), frontline employees’ behaviors directly lead to customers’ positive and/or negative perceptions of a hotel (Karatepe, 2013). If a frontline employee does not make enough effort to provide a standardized quality of service, service failure may happen, and the hotel may lose its competitive edge. Thus, hotel managers need to understand how to enhance their employees’ intrinsic learning motivation (i.e., grit) and work-related drivers (i.e., customer orientation and job satisfaction) to improve job performance. Previous research has suggested that understanding hotel employees’ customer orientation and job satisfaction can be critical to improving their performance (Karatepe et al., 2006; Tajeddini, 2010), as customer orientation is fundamental to the service industry. Customer orientation and job satisfaction have been proposed as significant mediators between a hotel employee’s intrinsic factors (e.g., personality, personal value, and motivation) and job performance (Jayaweera, 2015; Lundberg, Gudmundson, & Andersson, 2009).

Since the level of an individual’s grit influences his or her achievement and performance (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), this study proposes a conceptual framework that presents grit as a work-related intrinsic factor affecting perceptions among hotel employees that ultimately enhance their job performance. Accordingly, this study posits that grit may enhance hotel employees’ job performance through customer orientation and job satisfaction. In addition, prior research supports the notion that employees’ perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors toward their job depend on situational factors, such as employment status (e.g., Cho & Johanson, 2008 for part-time vs full-time), generational differences (e.g., Kim, Kim, Han, & Holland, 2016 for Gen X vs Gen Y), and organizational tenure (Quiñones, Ford, & Teachout, 1995 for years of work experience). Therefore, a better understanding of the moderating effect of situational factors on the relationship between a hotel employee’s grit and work-related constructs is also needed.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Grit**

Duckworth (2016) defined grit as consisting of two constructs: passion and perseverance. People with grit know what they care about and what they would like to pursue in their life (i.e., passion). Once they discover their long-term goals, they work hard to achieve them and refuse to give up even in the face of adversity (i.e., perseverance). The combination of these two factors is the key to success. Hence, in the work setting, grit can motivate employees to push
themselves to work even though they are pulled into their work naturally (Menges, Tussing, Wihler, & Grant, 2017). Duckworth (2016) noted examples of extremely successful individuals, such as Einstein, and argued that these individuals had both passion and perseverance. Duckworth et al. (2007) also emphasized that examining both factors together is more predictive than looking at each factor separately. However, there is still an ongoing discussion about this. For example, when grit is divided into two separate constructs (such as passion and perseverance), several researchers have found that perseverance is more predictive of behavioral and psychological outcomes than passion (e.g., Bowman, Hill, Denson, & Bronkema, 2015; Datu, Valdez, & King, 2016). On the other hand, Jachimowicz, Wihler, and Galinsky (2017) concluded that both passion and perseverance explain employees’ job performance if passion is measured in terms of meeting a desired level of passion, rather than in terms as an absolute. However, the common notion of both streams of research is that grit provides employees with a significant reason for effort to perform their work-related duties well (Menges et al., 2017). In particular, frontline employees encounter and handle the unexpected needs and wants of their customers based on individual differences. If there is uncertainty about a job-related task, employees’ purpose for learning may increase their persistence and diligence on the task (Yeager et al., 2014). However, if the employees are less interested in the task, they may consider learning the task as meaningless in spite of the unsure working situation. Therefore, this study argues that two aspects of grit are essential in the hotel context due to the aforementioned characteristics.

Grit has gained much attention from researchers because it is deemed as successful as other traditional predictors of retention or performance, such as one’s intelligence scores or the Big Five personality traits (Duckworth et al., 2007). Eskreis-Winkler, Shulman, Beal, and Duckworth (2014) found that grit explains job retention, military retention, marriage longevity, and high school graduation outcomes better than other cognitive or psychological predictors. This is because grit leads individuals to keep their jobs as well as to pursue further education and to not withdraw from challenging training programs no matter whether they succeed and regardless of psychological states, such as achievement or disappointment (Larkin, O’Connor, & Williams, 2016). Duckworth (2016) even argued that without perseverance, neither innate ability nor talent lead to success, as it is just unrealized potential. Although more empirical studies are still needed to determine if grit is more predictive than other cognitive or psychological predictors (see Ion, Mindu, & Gorbănescu, 2017), it seems that many scholars have begun to pay attention to the role of non-cognitive factors — including grit — as much as cognitive factors. For example, gritty employees may be less distracted by their short-term goals and less discouraged by setbacks and failures they encounter in the workplace without any cognition of negative outcomes, that is, they already form high levels of belief in their capabilities (Credé, Tynan, & Harms, 2017).

In spite of the potential impact of grit on employees’ performance, many empirical studies, particularly in the field of education, have examined the association between grit and other psychological and behavioral outcomes.
According to a recent meta-analysis (Credé et al., 2017), grit is positively associated with individuals’ high school and college GPAs, school or military retention, and persistence with their current college or employer. Although the effect size is fairly modest (correlation coefficients around 0.15), it is still noteworthy that grit is consistently and positively associated with many educational outcomes. However, only a few studies address the association between grit and job-related outcomes and focus on the retention of novice teachers in low-income school districts (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014) or the job performance of employees in a technology company (Jachimowicz et al., 2017). In particular, in the hotel industry, which suffers from employee turnover, the role of grit must be significant because it helps frontline employees stay with their organization even when facing setbacks and adversity generated by interactions with customers. More specifically, the employees feel pressured to maintain and exceed expectations of the customers in the service delivery process. Grit may help the employees to deal with this type of stress and facilitate uninterrupted productivity and smooth functioning (Lee, Sridhar, Henderson, & Palmatier, 2012).

Customer Orientation
Customer orientation is defined as “an employee’s tendency or predisposition to meet customer needs in an on-the-job context” (Brown, Mowen, Donavan, & Licata, 2002, p. 111). Customer orientation emphasizes discovering and satisfying the needs of customers while keeping the customers’ best interest in mind (Saxe & Weitz, 1982). Customer orientation leads to short-term outcomes (e.g., sales) and ultimately results in long-term results (e.g., customer loyalty) (Donavan, Brown, & Mowen, 2004). Thus, it is important for hotel companies to create a customer-oriented culture in a competitive hospitality market.

In a service setting, Brown et al. (2002) identified two dimensions of customer orientation: (1) needs, and (2) enjoyment. Based on the conceptualization of customer orientation from Saxe and Weitz’s (1982) work, Brown et al. (2002) defined the needs dimension as an employee’s beliefs about his or her ability to satisfy customers. The enjoyment dimension is related to the degree to which serving and interacting with customers is intrinsically enjoyable for employees. These two components are associated with a frontline employee’s motivation and ability to serve customers by satisfying their needs. A frontline employee’s customer orientation can be positively or negatively influenced by external factors (e.g., participatory decision-making and rewards) and/or internal factors (e.g., motivation, personality, and personal values) (Kelly, 1992; Kim, 2011). However, internal factors can help employees to consistently achieve high-quality creativity, orientation, and performance because external factors are easily influenced by external situations (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Job Satisfaction
Job satisfaction is defined as an employee’s general affective evaluation, or positive emotional reaction to his or her job (Kim, Leong, & Lee, 2005; Oshagbemi, 2000).
In the field of human resources, it has been believed that “an organization has a responsibility to provide employees with jobs that are challenging and intrinsically rewarding” (Robbins, 2001, p. 82). When a company is committed to improving its employees’ job satisfaction, the company can receive long-term benefits from the employees (e.g., productivity, retention, and loyalty) (Hsiao, Ma, & Auld, 2017; Jerome & Kleiner, 1995; Kim et al. 2005; Kim, Knutson, & Choi, 2016). Previous research has shown that an employee’s job satisfaction leads to an increase in trust toward his or her organization and a decrease in turnover intention (Gil, 2008; Nadiri & Tanova, 2010). Particularly in the hospitality context, employees with a high level of job satisfaction are more likely to treat consumers with the utmost respect (Kim et al., 2005). With the important role of customer contact in building customer relationships, job satisfaction is considered a primary concern for hotel companies relying on a loyal clientele (Arnett, Laverie, & McLane, 2002). In addition, if a frontline employee in a hotel is dissatisfied with his or her job, the employee is more likely to leave the hotel for another position.

**Job Performance**

Job performance is defined as employees’ activities and behaviors that contribute to an organization’s goals, recognized as part of the job and controlled by an employee (Jeong & Lam, 2016; Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). Job performance is considered a desirable outcome because it is linked to discipline decisions and rewards (Goodwin, Groth, & Frenkel, 2011). Job performance, particularly in the context of the service industry, refers to both intangible service delivery (e.g., emotional display and interpersonal behavior) and tangible service delivery (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990). These two aspects of job performance are critical in the customer service context because customers perceive employees’ behaviors and actions as the most essential aspects of their organization’s service quality (Goodwin et al., 2011). Job performance is central to customers’ service experience and is related to their favorable evaluation of an organization (Tsai & Huang, 2002). Hence, an employee’s job performance depends on the customer’s service expectations because the employee’s behaviors may be particularly functional in accomplishing desirable customer consequences (Lee, Kim, Kim, & Kim, 2017).

Frontline employees are expected to deal with customers in a polite and reactive manner because customer satisfaction and quality perceptions depend heavily on the service delivery actions of employees (Lee, Nam, Park, & Lee, 2006). Also, to provide a customer’s expected level of service, frontline employees are required to be responsive when interacting with customers (Li et al., 2012). Thus, frontline employees are encouraged and trained to deliver seamless, quality service (Lee et al., 2017; Schneider & Bowen, 2010). Frontline employees in a hotel with high-quality job performance are more likely to successfully respond to customer requests and problems. Also, they tend to frequently go out of their way to help coworkers as well as customers (Schneider & Bowen, 2010). This action relates to high-quality job performance regarding employees’
discretionary behaviors to serve customers that extend beyond their formal role requirement (Goodwin et al., 2011). Therefore, it is critical to identify how frontline employees’ job performance is enhanced.

**RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES**

*The Relationships between Grit and Customer Orientation/Job Satisfaction*

Grit and its influences on students’ attitudinal and behavioral outcomes have been examined in education literature (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Reed, Pritschet, & Cutton, 2013; Wolters & Hussain, 2015). For example, an individual who has higher levels of grit is expected to show greater persistence when pursuing his or her goals in spite of distractions or setbacks (Wolters & Hussain, 2015). Prior research has examined the influence of grit on student outcomes such as achievement level, retention, engagement, and probability of graduation (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Strayhorn, 2013; Wolters & Hussain, 2015). However, the current study emphasizes the role grit plays in translating a frontline employee’s intrinsic factors into desirable outcomes. In the human resources field, effort and interest have become significant in the work setting and are driven by a company’s desire to manage its job-related goals among employees (McClean & Collins, 2011). An empirical study in Japan showed that people with grit are more engaged with their job (Suzuki, Tamesue, Asahi, & Ishikawa, 2015). Drawing on a frontline employee’s grit and applying it to the hotel context, this study emphasizes the impact of grit on job satisfaction and customer orientation, which, in turn, enhances job performance. Based on these points, this study puts forth the following hypotheses:

- **H11**: Perseverance of effort has a positive influence on customer orientation.
- **H12**: Consistency of interest has a positive influence on customer orientation.
- **H21**: Perseverance of effort has a positive influence on job satisfaction.
- **H22**: Consistency of interest has a positive influence on job satisfaction.

*Korschun, Bhattacharya, and Swain (2014) found that if frontline employees are more oriented to customers, they will perform their duty well because of a heightened desire to meet the needs of customers. Also, if employees link their self-concept to their customers, they may consider the success of the customers their own (Bagozzi, Verbeke, Berg, Rietdijk, & Dietvorst, 2012). Hence, this study expects frontline employees who are oriented to customers to meet and even exceed their job performance expectations. When the primary task of*
frontline employees is to serve customers’ needs, employees with higher levels of customer orientation perform better in the work setting. This is because customer-oriented employees tend to enjoy their task of serving customers, meaning that frontline employees with higher degrees of customer orientation are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs than others (Donavan et al., 2004). Furthermore, Bagozzi et al. (2012) found that employees who are oriented to customers are more likely to be highly knowledgeable about their products so they can be well-prepared to effectively make sales. Based on the above discussion, this study proposes that:

**H31:** Customer orientation has a positive influence on job satisfaction.

**H32:** Customer orientation has a positive influence on job performance.

**The Relationships between Job Satisfaction and Job Performance**

Job satisfaction is considered a significant factor that influences the behavioral intentions of employees (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000); thus, it has been commonly used in the context of human resource management (Lee, Song, Lee, Lee, & Bernhard, 2013; Yavas, Karatepe, & Babakus, 2013). In general, satisfied employees are more likely to deliver better service, resulting in enhanced job performance (Donavan et al., 2004; Lee et al., 2013; Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Taylor, 2007). From the perspective of social exchange theory, if employees receive tangible and/or intangible benefits from their job (e.g., pleasure, enjoyment, and satisfaction), they will be more likely to engage in reciprocal behaviors for their organization (Hoffman & Ingram, 1992). In addition, Lee et al. (2013) suggested that job satisfaction is related to kinder behavior as well as a better attitudes toward customers. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

**H4:** Job satisfaction has a positive influence on job performance.

**The Moderating Role of Organizational Tenure**

In this study, organizational tenure is defined as the length of employment in a hotel (Ng & Feldman, 2011). Prior research has used organizational tenure as a quantitative indicator of work experience because employees can improve and become more knowledgeable about work skills by performing their tasks for additional years (Sturman, 2003). In addition, employees with more years of employment tend to acquire greater amounts of human (Becker, 1964) and social capital (Burt, 1992). For example, regarding human capital, if employees stay with a company longer, they will gain greater knowledge about their tasks and thus can find greater enjoyment in their assigned tasks (Boğan & Dedeoğlu, 2017; Ng & Feldman, 2010). Similarly, it is arguable that the relationship between human capital (e.g., effort and interest) and job satisfaction will be moderated by employees’ years of work experience. In the case of social capital, actual and potential resources are retrieved from social networks developed by employees (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). For example, employees who work in a
company longer are more likely to develop strong social links with customers as well as colleagues (Ng & Feldman, 2011). Cultivated connections with customers may encourage employees to be more consistently oriented to customers in terms of their effort and interest in dealing with customers. Although organizational tenure has been employed as a moderator in the organizational behavior arena (Ng & Feldman, 2011; Sturman, 2003), few studies have investigated how organizational tenure moderates the influences of grit on work-related constructs in the frontline employee context. Based on this notion, this study assumes that the causal relationship between the dimensions of grit and customer orientation as well as job satisfaction will be stronger for frontline employees who have longer organizational tenures. Therefore, the proposed research hypotheses are as follows:

\[ H5_1: \text{Organizational tenure moderates the influence of perseverance of effort on job satisfaction.} \]

\[ H5_2: \text{Organizational tenure moderates the influence of consistency of interest on job satisfaction.} \]

\[ H5_3: \text{Organizational tenure moderates the influence of perseverance of effort on customer orientation.} \]

\[ H5_4: \text{Organizational tenure moderates the influence of consistency of interest on customer orientation.} \]

**METHOD**

*Sampling*

The data sample consisted of 311 frontline employees (e.g., from front office department and food and beverage department) working at eight five-star hotels located in Seoul, South Korea between March and April 2017. These hotels employ a well-structured human resource program and management system (Lee, Choi, Moon, & Babin, 2014). Hence, the hotels meet the diversified needs of their employees. As a hotel’s representative in delivering service, the frontline employee’s face-to-face and/or voice-to-voice interactions with customers distinguish the hotel’s service quality from competitors (Suan & Nasurdin, 2014). Based on the Official Korean Tourism Organization’s “Hotels in Korea,” the lead author contacted each five-star hotel’s director of human resources and explained the objective of this research. After the directors of the eight hotels agreed to participate, 350 copies of the questionnaire were delivered to directors and then distributed to frontline employees.

This study used Brown et al.’s (2002) survey procedure to minimize bias and maximize privacy. The completed surveys were placed in sealed envelopes and returned directly to the lead author. The 21 Rooms Division Managers supervising frontline employees were also sent a survey through e-mail. Each manager was asked to evaluate their frontline employees based on their performance in
the previous year. The survey was then directly sent to the lead author and matched to the respective employee questionnaires. Out of the 350 questionnaires delivered, 311 fully matched frontline employee-manager responses were coded and analyzed for further data analysis (i.e., an effective response rate of 88.9%).

**Research Variables**

This study involved four research variables: (1) grit, (2) customer needs, (3) job satisfaction, and (4) job performance, which were measured on 7-point Likert-type scales from “1 = strongly disagree” to “7 = strongly agree.” These variables were developed and validated in previous studies.

Grit (i.e., consistent interest and trait-level perseverance for long-term goals) was measured with two dimensions from the studies of Duckworth et al. (2007) and Duckworth and Quinn (2009), including perseverance of effort (eight items) and consistency of interest (four items). The studies developed the grit scale through six independent studies to overcome individual differences in personality traits, IQ, age, and intensity of effort according to a situation. The scales were focused on the consistency of long-term goals of individuals for appropriately measuring the grit construct (Duckworth et al., 2007).

To assess customer orientation (i.e., the predisposition or tendency of an employee to meet customer needs in a work context), five indicators were used from Brown et al.’s (2002) work.

Job satisfaction (i.e., the extent to which an employee feels negatively or positively about a job) was measured with five indicators from Kim et al.’s (2005) study.

The job performance construct (i.e., behaviors recognized by a formal reward system and part of the job requirements description) was measured with five indicators adopted from Yang, Mossholder, and Peng (2009) work from a managerial perspective. The list of research variables and relevant indicators is presented in Table 2.

**RESULTS**

*Sample Characteristics*

As shown in Table 1, more than half of the participants were men (60.5%) and in their 20s (52.4%). Approximately three-fifths (57.2%) of the respondents graduated from a two-year college, followed by university degree holders (30.2%).

*Reliability and Validity of Measurement*

The measures used in the survey were subject to reliability and validity analyses. This study used Cronbach’s alpha coefficients to assess the reliabilities of each construct (i.e., perseverance of effort = 0.879; consistency of interest = 0.890; customer orientation = 0.772; job satisfaction = 0.812; and job performance = 0.835). According to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), if a coefficient exceeds
0.70, it is considered acceptable in the social science field. Then, to test validity, all measures were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) employing AMOS 22.0 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1992). Six items whose standardized factor loadings were lower than 0.40 were deleted from further analyses (e.g., structural equation modeling (SEM)) to maintain an acceptable level of convergent and discriminant validity.

As shown in Table 2, the CFA results suggest good fits: $\chi^2 = 477.179$, $df = 179$ ($\chi^2/df = 2.666$), $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.924, IFI = 0.925, TLI = 0.911, RMSEA = 0.073 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The standardized factor loadings of all measures exceeded 0.40 ($p < 0.01$), passing an acceptable level of convergent validity, after the purification procedures. This study checked discriminant validity by comparing the proportion of variance extracted (AVE) in each construct to the square of each coefficient, which represents its correlation with other latent variables (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The AVEs in all constructs exceeded the respective squared correlation estimate, showing evidence of discriminant validity (see Table 3).

To test for common method variance (CMV), this study used Harman’s one-factor test (Bauer, Falk, & Hammerschmidt, 2006). This test was done by comparing the proposed model’s chi-square and degree of freedom (i.e., multidimensional model) against those of a single-factor model. If the proposed model’s chi-square and degree of freedom are worse than those of the single-factor model, it reflects evidence of CMV (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992; Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). The single-factor model yielded $\chi^2 = 2,040.434$ with $df = 189$ (compared with $\chi^2 = 477.179$ and $df = 179$ for the five-dimensional measurement model). The proposed model’s chi-square and degree of freedom are much better than those of the single-factor model, suggesting that CMV might not be a serious threat to this study.

### Table 1. Demographic Analysis of Respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variables</th>
<th>$n$ = 311</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20s</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30s</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40s</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50s and above</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate school</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2. Overall Measurement Model Resulting from CFA.\(^{a}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs and Items</th>
<th>Standardized Factor Loadings</th>
<th>(t)-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perseverance of effort ((\alpha = 0.879))</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have achieved a goal that took years of work.(^{c})</td>
<td>0.771</td>
<td>Fixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a hard worker.</td>
<td>0.819</td>
<td>14.967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whenever I do something, I put all my effort into it.</td>
<td>0.862</td>
<td>15.814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I finish whatever I begin.</td>
<td>0.759</td>
<td>13.722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have overcome setbacks to conquer an important challenge.(^{b})</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am diligent.(^{b})</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get things done that need to be done, even when I don’t feel like doing them.(^{b})</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setbacks don’t discourage me.</td>
<td>0.640</td>
<td>11.305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consistency of interest ((\alpha = 0.890))</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I set a goal and do not pursue a different one.(^{c})</td>
<td>0.849</td>
<td>Fixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not change my interests from year to year.</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>19.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New ideas and projects do not distract me from previous ones.</td>
<td>0.838</td>
<td>17.581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not become interest in new pursuits every few months.</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td>14.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer orientation ((\alpha = 0.772))</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it easy to smile at each of my customers.(^{c})</td>
<td>0.864</td>
<td>Fixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It comes naturally to have empathy for my customers.</td>
<td>0.468</td>
<td>7.368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy responding quickly to my customers’ requests.</td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>11.489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get satisfaction from making my customers happy.</td>
<td>0.923</td>
<td>11.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I really enjoy serving my customers.(^{b})</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job satisfaction ((\alpha = 0.812))</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I consider my job pleasant.(^{c})</td>
<td>0.864</td>
<td>Fixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job.</td>
<td>0.831</td>
<td>18.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I definitely like my work.</td>
<td>0.693</td>
<td>13.768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My job is pretty interesting.</td>
<td>0.489</td>
<td>8.872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find real enjoyment in my work.(^{b})</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job performance ((\alpha = 0.835))</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performs his/her job well.(^{c})</td>
<td>0.782</td>
<td>Fixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequately completes assigned duties.</td>
<td>0.903</td>
<td>18.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfills responsibilities specified in job description.</td>
<td>0.916</td>
<td>18.375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performs tasks that are expected of him/her.(^{b})</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets formal performance requirements of the job.</td>
<td>0.422</td>
<td>7.417</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
\(\chi^2 = 477.179, \text{df} = 179 (\chi^2/\text{df} = 2.666), p < 0.001, \text{CFI} = 0.924, \text{IFI} = 0.925, \text{TLI} = 0.911, \text{RMSEA} = 0.073.\)

\(^{b}\)Items were deleted during confirmatory factor analysis.

\(^{c}\)Items were fixed at 1.0 during confirmatory factor analysis.
Tests of Model Fit Indices

Using AMOS 22.0, the proposed model was tested by a covariance matrix. The model fit indices demonstrate that the model fits the data well: $\chi^2 = 487.282$, $df = 181$ ($\chi^2/df = 2.692$), $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.922, IFI = 0.923, TLI = 0.910, RMSEA = 0.074. Maximum likelihood estimates (MLE) for the model’s parameters are indicated in Fig. 1 and Table 4.
Tests of Hypotheses

The results showed that consistency of interest significantly influenced customer orientation (coefficient = 0.333, t-value = 4.389, p < 0.01), whereas perseverance of effort did not (coefficient = 0.100, n.s.). Therefore, only H12 was supported. H21 and H22 posited that perseverance of effort and consistency of interest would affect job satisfaction. The result showed that perseverance of effort significantly affected job satisfaction (coefficient = 0.469, t-value = 6.638, p < 0.01), whereas consistency of interest did not significantly influence job satisfaction (coefficient = 0.101, n.s.). Thus, only H21 was supported.

The results showed that customer orientation significantly affected job performance (coefficient = 0.085, t-value = 2.269, p < 0.05), whereas customer orientation did not significantly influence job satisfaction (coefficient = 0.081, n.s.). Therefore, only H32 was supported. H4 posited that job satisfaction would affect job performance. The results showed that job satisfaction significantly influenced job performance (coefficient = 0.910, t-value = 14.700, p < 0.01), supporting H4.

### Table 4. Standardized Structural Estimates.a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
<th>Low Group</th>
<th>High Group</th>
<th>Standardized Estimates (t-value)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 311)</td>
<td>(n = 196)</td>
<td>(n = 115)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standardized Estimates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 311)</td>
<td>(n = 196)</td>
<td>(n = 115)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H11</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>0.221**</td>
<td>0.500**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.402)</td>
<td>(2.528)</td>
<td>(3.306)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H12</td>
<td>0.333**</td>
<td>0.195*</td>
<td>0.500**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.389)</td>
<td>(2.037)</td>
<td>(3.306)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H21</td>
<td>0.469**</td>
<td>0.296**</td>
<td>0.583**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.638)</td>
<td>(3.544)</td>
<td>(5.314)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H22</td>
<td>0.101</td>
<td>0.334**</td>
<td>0.996</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.472)</td>
<td>(4.070)</td>
<td>(1.515)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H31</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>0.226**</td>
<td>0.157</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.311)</td>
<td>(3.066)</td>
<td>(1.515)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H32</td>
<td>0.085*</td>
<td>0.040</td>
<td>0.096</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.269)</td>
<td>(0.798)</td>
<td>(1.588)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>0.910**</td>
<td>0.945**</td>
<td>0.893**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(14.700)</td>
<td>(10.897)</td>
<td>(9.389)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Endogenous Variables SMC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer orientation</td>
<td>0.155</td>
<td>0.134</td>
<td>0.247</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job satisfaction</td>
<td>0.311</td>
<td>0.449</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job performance</td>
<td>0.873</td>
<td>0.928</td>
<td>0.794</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *χ² = 487.282, df = 181 (χ²/df = 2.692), p < 0.001, CFI = 0.922, IFI = 0.923, TLI = 0.910, RMSEA = 0.074.
**p < 0.01, *p < 0.05.
To test the moderating roles of organizational tenure on the influences of grit on customer orientation and job satisfaction ($H5_1$ to $H5_4$), this study used a multi-group approach based on a chi-square difference test suggested by Jöreskog and Sörbom (1993). Following the process of Jang, Kim, and Lee (2015) work to verify the moderating effect, the samples were divided into two groups (i.e., high and low) based on the respondents’ mean scores on years of work experience ($mean = 5.34$). The constrained model was set to equal the two groups compared to the unconstrained model, allowing all coefficients to differ between the two groups (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). The chi-square value is always lower for the general model because the model is nested within the general model with one degree of freedom less than the constrained model. Chi-square differences (i.e., $3.84$ at $p < 0.05$ level) show the hypotheses of the moderating effect are significantly supported (Homburg & Giering, 2001). The findings revealed three significant differences in the hypothetical relationships between the high and low organizational tenure groups (see Table 5): perseverance of effort to customer orientation ($\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 4.206, p < 0.05$); perseverance of effort to job satisfaction ($\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 6.277, p < 0.05$); and consistency of interest to job satisfaction ($\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 9.023, p < 0.01$), thus supporting $H5_1$, $H5_3$, and $H5_4$.

Specifically, the path from perseverance of effort to the customer orientation of the low group was significant (coefficient = $0.221$, $t$-value = $2.258$, $p < 0.05$), whereas the path for the high group was not significant (coefficient = $-0.007$, n.s.). In addition, the path from consistency of interest to job satisfaction was significant (coefficient = $0.334$, $t$-value = $4.070$, $p < 0.01$), whereas the path for the high group was not significant and even negative (coefficient = $-0.090$, n.s.). Finally, the path from perseverance of effort to job satisfaction was significant in both groups, but larger for the high group relationship (coefficient = $0.583$, $t$-value = $5.314$, $p < 0.01$) than for the low group (coefficient = $0.296$, $t$-value = $3.544$, $p < 0.01$) (see Figs. 2 and 3).

### Table 5. Chi-square Difference Tests.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Chi-square Statistic</th>
<th>Chi-square Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unconstrained model</td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 774.584$, $df = 362$</td>
<td>$\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 4.206$, $p &lt; 0.05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H5_1$ Perseverance of effort $\rightarrow$ Customer orientation</td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 778.790$, $df = 363$</td>
<td>$\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 4.206$, $p &lt; 0.05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H5_2$ Consistency of interest $\rightarrow$ Customer orientation</td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 774.633$, $df = 363$</td>
<td>$\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 0.049$, n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H5_3$ Perseverance of effort $\rightarrow$ Job satisfaction</td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 780.861$, $df = 363$</td>
<td>$\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 6.277$, $p &lt; 0.05$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H5_4$ Consistency of interest $\rightarrow$ Job satisfaction</td>
<td>$\chi^2 = 783.607$, $df = 363$</td>
<td>$\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 9.023$, $p &lt; 0.01$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The path was constrained to be equal across the two groups.*
Consistency of Interest

Perseverance of Effort

Customer Orientation

GRIT

0.221* (2.258)

0.195* (2.037)

0.296** (3.544)

0.334** (4.070)

0.226* (3.066)

R² = 0.134

0.040 (0.798)

R² = 0.928

Job Performance

0.945** (10.897)

R² = 0.449

Fig. 2. Estimates of Structural Model with Low Organizational Tenure Group. Notes: **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05; standardized coefficient (t-value); solid line: significant path; dotted line: insignificant path; bold line: significantly different path between two groups.

Consistency of Interest

Perseverance of Effort

Customer Orientation

GRIT

-0.007 (-0.075)

0.500** (3.306)

0.583** (3.514)

-0.090 (-0.797)

0.226* (3.066)

R² = 0.134

0.040 (0.798)

R² = 0.928

Job Performance

0.945** (10.897)

R² = 0.449

Fig. 3. Estimates of Structural Model with High Organizational Tenure Group. Notes: **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05; standardized coefficient (t-value); solid line: significant path; dotted line: insignificant path; bold line: significantly difference path between two groups.
DISCUSSION

The aim of this study is to develop and explore the influences of two dimensions of grit with an emphasis on the hotel industry in South Korea. Jayaweera (2015) and Lundberg et al. (2009) suggested that understanding an employee’s potential intrinsic factors may not only better explain his or her degree of work attitude and job performance, but also help to develop a more effective approach to human resource management. To do so, this study integrates two dimensions of grit from prior literature in the field of education to hypothesize that grit positively and hierarchically leads to enhanced job performance through customer orientation and job satisfaction. Prior research has found that grit tends to make individuals employ enjoyment when encountering a particular obstacle related to their task and trying to resolve it (Bowman et al., 2015). Consistent with extant literature, the findings of this study also suggest that frontline employees are more oriented to customers when they are satisfied with their job and demonstrate a consistency of interest and perseverance of effort. This study also implies that organizational tenure plays a critical moderating role in understanding the influences of the two dimensions of grit on customer orientation and job satisfaction. Grit has been studied as a core determinant of students’ retention as well as academic success and performance in spite of difficult circumstances (Duckworth et al., 2007; Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014). Since an employee must be educated and trained to perform his or her task appropriately and well, grit may be an important predictor of work-related constructs. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing hospitality literature and provides practical implications for human resource management in a hotel context.

IMPLICATIONS

This research provides important contributions to the hospitality literature. First, this study adds to the existing literature in hospitality human resource management by exploring the role of grit among frontline employees in the hotel context. Previous studies have focused on work motivation and/or personality as drivers of employees’ attitudes, behaviors, and performances (Jayaweera, 2015; Lundberg et al., 2009). However, internal constructs tend to be easily influenced by work settings and other potential factors (e.g., work climate) and grit is more stable and long-term oriented compared to other internal factors (Wright, 2001). To fill the research gap, this study emphasizes the role of grit in job-related outcomes based on the education fields by examining the association between grit and academic retention/achievement (Credé et al., 2017). The effect of grit can vary depending on the nature of a job. In particular, it is not yet clear whether and how grit works when a job requires social interaction and attentiveness to customers, as in the hospitality industry. To our knowledge, this study can be a starting point to demonstrate whether and how grit influences job-related outcomes for frontline employees in the hotel industry.

Second, by expanding on prior studies (Bowman et al., 2015; Datu et al., 2016), this study shows that the passion and perseverance constructs are
differently related to customer orientation and job satisfaction depending on years of work experience (i.e., organizational tenure). Organizational tenure has been viewed as one of the most significant moderators in the human resource management field (Ng & Feldman, 2010/2011). Thus, the application of organizational tenure to the hotel context is a good start for establishing and maintaining hotel companies’ long-term competitiveness, which heavily relies on their human resources (Arnett et al., 2002). In the hotel industry, maintaining a talented employee and enhancing an employee’s job performance are considered an effective approach (i.e., retention) (Karatepe, 2013; Karatepe et al., 2006). This research provides an update to the existing literature on Suzuki et al.’s (2015) work by determining the distinct influences of the two dimensions of grit on customer orientation and job satisfaction and the moderating effects of organizational tenure on each association. Finally, this study examines the role of grit in a non-Western culture. Although grit has been widely studied in Western culture, its generalizability in a non-Western culture is still uncertain (Suzuki et al., 2015). Responding to this research gap, this study adds to the literature by investigating the role of grit in job-related outcomes among hotel employees in an Asian context.

In the hospitality industry, employees’ customer orientation and job performance are considered two of the most essential components for differentiating a hotel company from its competitors. This is because frontline employees who exhibit high levels of customer orientation and job performance can deliver better service, which is likely to affect customer confidence and loyalty as well as word-of-mouth recommendations. Thus, this study considers these constructs outcomes of frontline employees’ grit. Interestingly, this study demonstrated that two distinct dimensions of grit play independent roles in establishing and influencing customer orientation and job satisfaction among frontline employees. The first practical implication is that hotel managers need to recognize and understand their frontline employees’ efforts and interest and grit’s relationship with the employees’ tasks and/or duties. By linking this improved understanding to frontline employees’ grit (i.e., efforts and interest), hotel companies could bolster their employees’ work-related responses. For example, developing frontline employees’ customer orientation could empower them to make their own decisions when dealing with customers, provide employees with positive feedback on their contributions to the hotel’s competitiveness, and design work tasks that are stimulating and meaningful. These enable frontline employees to feel a stronger consistency of interest toward their task and/or duty, thus making them more oriented to customers. This study also focused on the role of perseverance of effort in increasing job satisfaction among frontline employees. The second managerial suggestion would be to determine frontline employees’ long-term vision (e.g., three to five years) for themselves within the hotel company. The hotel’s long-term goals may enhance each frontline employee’s efforts and abilities to achieve the hotel company’s goals as well. However, hotel managers should also occasionally check on how much of a long-term goal has been achieved (e.g., every six months or each year). For instance, if a frontline employee’s long-term goal is to become a director of the hotel’s rooms division, the hotel might inform
the employee of what he or she needs to improve in terms of job responsibilities and achievement for promotion on an annual basis. In short, hotel managers need to recognize the personal long-term goals and short-term achievements of each employee to increase job satisfaction, which will ultimately enhance their job performance.

The empirical findings of this study suggest that customer-oriented frontline employees will exhibit enhanced job performance because they are placed in a high-customer-contact position in a hotel. Although employees may be similarly trained and experienced in a work setting, it is unlikely that all employees will react and perform equally in the same position. Thus, when recruiting and assigning employees to a specific position, hotel managers need to refer to each employee’s level of interest in dealing with customers because consistency of interest leads to customer orientation. Thus, if hotel managers fail to adequately measure the degree of frontline employees’ interest, the hotel may not only lose their frontline employees, but also customers due to the low quality of service. Thus, if possible, hotel managers should combine frontline employees’ interest with customer-contact tasks to make the employees more oriented to customer needs. Hotel managers also need to consider that job satisfaction is developed by perseverance of effort among frontline employees. In particular, the role of job satisfaction is important in enhancing frontline employees’ job performance. If a frontline employee perceives himself or herself to be a hard worker, he or she is more likely to be satisfied with the job. Thus, hotel managers may consider an employee’s personality traits to increase the level of job satisfaction when recruiting and assigning a customer-contact position.

Finally, hotel managers need to recognize the moderating role of work experience on the relationship between grit and job-related outcomes as the influences of effort and interest on customer orientation and job satisfaction are different depending on organizational tenure among frontline employees. For example, hotel managers may need to help relatively new employees (i.e., less than five years of work experience) to maintain high levels of interest in and efforts to perform an assigned task by offering more learning and training programs. On the other hand, hotel managers may need to maintain their skilled employees’ level of effort by providing them with more short- and long-term goals than the new employees are given.

Limitations and Future Research

As with all empirical research, there are limitations that should be considered when determining the generalizability of these results outside of the current context of the Korean hotel industry. First, although this research relied on employees’ internal factors, the interrelationship as depicted in the proposed model might be influenced by Korean cultural perceptions among employees. Therefore, future research needs to address cultural differences between countries (e.g., Asian hotel employees vs Western hotel employees). Second, a long-term investigation is needed to ascertain the enhancement of an employee’s job performance. Hence, longitudinal research is needed to confirm the influences of
grit, customer orientation, and job satisfaction on job performance in the context of the hotel industry. Third, this research did not empirically investigate differences among hotel employees in terms of gender, age, or education level. Since hotel employees may perceive customer orientation and job satisfaction differently depending on their demographic characteristics, differences might exist among those groups. Therefore, future studies should conduct multi-group analyses to examine any significant differences among employee groups.

REFERENCES


The Role of Grit in Enhancing Job Performance of Frontline Employees


