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The role of ethical leadership in mitigating migrant workers' perceived social exclusion and promoting their well-being: The case of the hotel industry in Japan

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The role of ethical leadership in mitigating migrant workers' perceived social exclusion and promoting their well-being: The case of the hotel industry in Japan

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Abstract

With the growth in the number of migrant hospitality workers in many nations, the way they are treated in a workplace becomes pivotal for workplace ethics, teamwork, and organisational performance. Targeting migrant workers in the hospitality industry in Japan, this ongoing study will investigate the role of ethical leadership in mitigating the effects of migrant workers' perceived social exclusion on their psychological well-being. The results will contribute to enhance our understanding of the study of employee well-being and leadership in terms of how ethical leadership helps to mitigate the sense of social exclusion perceived by migrant workers, and how it fosters improvement of their well-being at work. The study also provides hospitality managers with insights into how certain types of leadership play a role to promote an inclusive workplace for migrant workers, which maximise the benefits from them as well as attracting and retaining talented workers in a long term.

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1. Introduction

The development of tourism has become one of the major strategies for the nation's economic growth in Japan. In 2019, the country welcomed a record number of international tourists, reaching 32 million. Although the recent pandemic has restricted tourist flows from overseas, Japan has set the target of international visitors for 60 million by 2030 (The Japan Times, 2021). In contrast to the growth of inbound tourism, the industry struggles with labour shortages, which are caused by an aging population, low birth rate, and high employee turnover. As the industry heavily relies on human involvement to create and deliver service products, this issue constitutes an impediment to responding to growing demand.

Addressing this issue, the Japanese government introduced policies and practices supporting the industry to attract workers from overseas. Since the launch of a short-term skilled visa program, the number of migrant workers reached 1.7 million in 2020, and 13% of them joined the tourism and hospitality sector (The Japan Times, 2020). However, with limited experience and knowledge in integrating migrant workers in a traditionally homogeneous workplace, many hospitality organisations in Japan seem to be struggling to effectively integrate these workers into the current workforce.

To gain full benefits from the recruitment of migrant workers, mitigating their perception of social exclusion and fostering their psychological well-being at work is crucial. However, workplace discrimination and inequality towards migrant workers has long been evident in the Japanese hospitality industry (e.g., Osumi, 2019; Shibata, 2020). Previous studies suggest that organisational efforts to decrease migrant workers' perception of social exclusion can improve their psychological well-being at work (García-Rodríguez et al., 2020). As such, organisations strive to develop various organisational cultures and climates to create a more inclusive workplace, such as a diversity climate (Quratulain & Al-Hawari, 2021) or an inclusive climate (Shore et al., 2018). However, to reap benefits from these efforts, strong leadership support is crucial.

Considering that social exclusion is closely linked to ethical practices in a workplace (Tei-Tominaga & Nakanishi, 2018), ethical leadership is particularly important. However, extant studies provide an overview of how ethical leadership influences the relationship between migrant workers' perceived social exclusion and their psychological well-being indicators at work, such as subjective job stress, job dissatisfaction, job disengagement, and organisational disloyalty. This gap is notable, as identification of the effectiveness of a certain type of leadership in reducing employees perceived social exclusion would help organisations to better train their managers, create a more inclusive work environment, and benefit from the growth of migrant workers in their workplace. To address the gap, this ongoing study seeks to examine how ethical leadership mitigates the effects of social exclusion, perceived by migrant workers, on their psychological well-being indicators (Hitlan et al., 2006; O'Reilly et al., 2015; O'Reilly & Banki, 2016; Scott et al., 2014).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social exclusion

Social exclusion is defined as a multidimensional, relational process of progressive social disengagement, one having interrelated negative consequences for the quality of life and well-being of the individual as well as for the quality of society in terms of social cohesion (Böhnke and Silver (2014). A lack of participation in society, experience of being disregarded or rejected by others, being disrespected quality of life and well-being of individuals and disadvantage with respect to material resources, economic participation and personal growth are all associated with the concept of social exclusion (Labonté et al., 2011; Mwilambwe-Tshilobo & Spreng, 2021; United Nations, 2016). Furthermore, socially excluded populations are often exposed to poor working conditions because of personal attributes such as race and ethnicity (United Nations, 2016). Logically, migrants have more potential to experience social exclusion than locals.

Migrants often experience the loss of social connections to their home country, isolation at the migration destination and struggle with establishing social relationships in the new community (Marinucci & Riva, 2021; Yakushko et al., 2008). Thus, they are vulnerable to exclusionary threats, including social alienation, inequality, and discrimination (Marinucci & Riva, 2021; Schmitt et al., 2014). This vulnerability can be more salient in a workplace context. In fact, in Japan, workplace discrimination and inequality towards migrant workers in the hospitality industry has often been publicised (e.g., Osumi, 2019; Shibata, 2020). Furthermore, a previous study suggests that migrant workers' exclusionary experience profoundly impacts their psychological well-being at work, such as high job stress, job dissatisfaction, and poor performance (e.g., Baum et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2016; Miminoshvili & Černe, 2021; Zopiatis et al., 2014). That is, many hospitality organisations in Japan are not maximising the benefits from their migrant workers. This issue is crucial for labour-intensive hospitality industry, particularly for those countries suffering from ongoing labour shortages.

Addressing this issue, some hospitality organisations put their effort into improving the work environment for migrant workers. For instance, García-Rodríguez et al. (2020) found that perceived diversity management in the workplace significantly influenced migrant hotel employees' job satisfaction and organisational commitment in the Canary Islands, Spain. Similarly, Kim et al. (2016) found that organisational support positively influenced Chinese restaurant workers' sociocultural adjustment, and job and life satisfaction in South Korea. These studies illustrate that organisations can reduce employees' sense of social exclusion by developing policies, practices, and various types of organisational climates, such as diversity climate (Quratulain & Al-Hawari, 2021) or inclusive climate (Shore et al., 2018). However, their effort is not fully realised without strong leadership support.
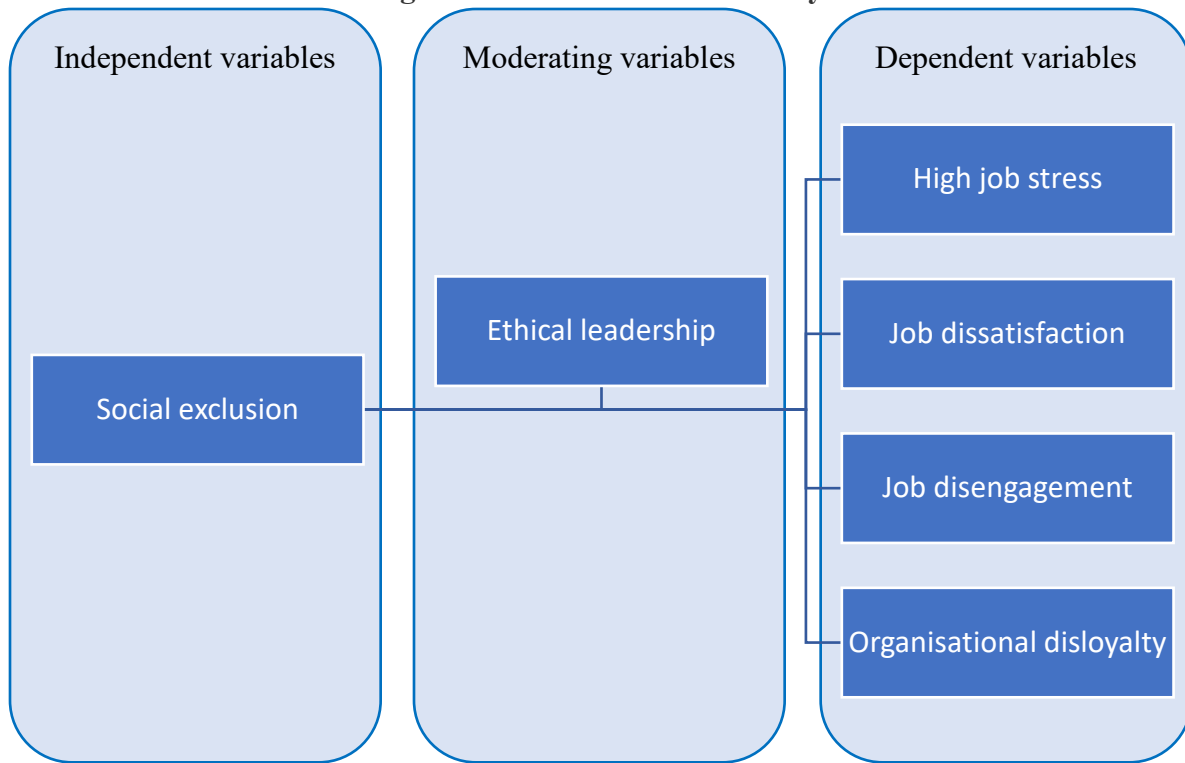
2.2. Leadership

Leadership influences organisational outcomes, and positively and negatively affects employee well-being, performance, and job stress (Schwepker & Dimitriou, 2021). Leadership in this context also relates to the socialisation and integration of migrant workers within the

organisation and the improvement of their working experience (Kim et al., 2016; Knollenberg et al., 2021). In the hospitality literature, various leadership types emphasise different attributes of leadership, such as transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2021; Pearce et al., 2003) or servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Northouse, 2021). Among these different types of leadership, this study specifically examines the role of ethical leadership.

Ethical leadership emphasises a leader's ethical behaviour, and promotes the appropriate behaviour in personal and interpersonal actions to employees (Brown et al., 2005). It is a type of leadership demonstrating normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and promoting such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making (Brown et al., 2005). Previous study suggests that ethical leadership positively affects followers' perceptions of leader interactional fairness, ethical behaviour, and occupational well-being (Bedi et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2005; Li et al., 2013). Furthermore, strong ethical leadership creates positive impacts on job satisfaction (Benevene et al., 2018), job engagement through customer-oriented service (Dimitriou & Schwepker, 2019), job stress (Schwepker & Dimitriou, 2021), and organisational belongingness and identification (Walumbwa et al., 2011).

In the hospitality industry, social exclusion of migrant workers is a critical ethical issue. Furthermore, considering the active recruitment of migrant workers and the increasing number of ethical scandals, examining the role of leadership in mitigating such an issue is important. However, only limited study has examined the role of ethical leadership in the relationship between social exclusion and its effects on migrant workers' psychological well-being. To address this gap, this study investigates how ethical leadership contribute to mitigating the effects of social exclusion, both perceived by migrant workers, on their psychological well-being indicators (see figure 1).

Figure1. Framework of the study

Independent variables	Moderating variables	Dependent variables
Social exclusion	Ethical leadership	High job stress
		Job dissatisfaction
		Job disengagement
		Organisational disloyalty

3. Methodology

We were about to start data collection at the time when we submitted this working paper. Thus, the description below is a research plan for collecting and analysing the data.

The study employs an electronic survey to collect data from 400 migrant workers working at hotels in Japan. The survey will be used to test the suggested theoretical relationships depicted in Figure 1. All items on the survey questionnaire are based on established scales. The questionnaire includes demographic variables, items of perceived social exclusion (Miminoshvili & Černe, 2021), items of ethical leadership scale (Brown et al., 2005) and items of impacts on psychological well-being (Hitlan et al., 2006; O'Reilly et al., 2015; O'Reilly & Banki, 2016; Scott et al., 2014).

The sample is restricted to international students who work in Japanese hotels in part-time roles for two reasons. First, this group of migrant workers, in comparison to other groups of migrants (e.g., skilled migrants), is the largest of those who work in the hospitality industry in Japan (e.g., 102,755 out of 202,913 migrant workers in the hospitality industry in Japan in 2020, which is more than 50%) (Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare, 2020). Second, as they work during college or university, the tenure of migrant workers in this group is relatively similar, compared to other groups (e.g., skilled migrants, such as expatriate managers, or trainees who have a varying degree of working experience in Japanese hotels.). These two aspects of the sample help us better to generalise about targeted migrant workers' perception of social exclusion as well as its effects on outcome variables. Convenience sampling techniques will be adopted by using the

online survey companies in Japan. The collected data will be organised and analysed by using SPSS version 27.

4. Results

We were about to start data collection at the time when we submitted this working paper. We plan to present preliminary findings in the full paper.

5. Discussion and Implications

The hospitality industry in many nations suffering from labour shortages, such as Japan, are urged to rely on migrant workers to supply their workforce. Organisational success over the next decades largely depends on how they effectively and successfully integrate migrant workers into their current workforce. To fully benefit from the efforts of migrant workers, it is crucial to mitigate their perceptions of social exclusion and improve their psychological well-being at work. While an extant study suggests that organisational efforts to promote an inclusive workplace environment address this issue, their effort is not fully realised without strong leadership support. As the issue of social exclusion is strongly associated with ethical workplace practices, this study seeks to examine how ethical leadership mitigates the effects of social exclusion, both perceived by migrant workers, on their psychological well-being (Hitlan et al., 2006; O'Reilly et al., 2015; O'Reilly & Banki, 2016; Scott et al., 2014).

The findings of our study contribute to the body of knowledge on employee well-being and leadership literature in terms of how ethical leadership, a type of leadership focusing on ethical practices at work, facilitates to mitigate the sense of social exclusion perceived by migrant workers, and how it contributes to improving their well-being at work. In terms of practice, the study provides an insight into how hospitality managers in Japan, and other nations experiencing the similar situation, both at organisational and department levels, develop and promote inclusive workplace for migrant workers, which helps effectively introduce migrant workers into the current workforce, attract and retain talented workers, and benefit from them to take competitive advantages.

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