



Journal of Service Theory and Practice

Motivating service employee creativity: regulatory focus and emotional labour

Zizhen Geng, Caifeng Li, Kejia Bi, Haiping Zheng, Xia Yang,

Article information:

To cite this document:

Zizhen Geng, Caifeng Li, Kejia Bi, Haiping Zheng, Xia Yang, (2018) "Motivating service employee creativity: regulatory focus and emotional labour", Journal of Service Theory and Practice, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-11-2016-0214>

Permanent link to this document:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-11-2016-0214>

Downloaded on: 09 February 2018, At: 12:58 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 74 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:277069 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

Motivating service employee creativity: regulatory focus and emotional labour

Motivating
service
employee
creativity

Zizhen Geng

Business School, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, China

Caifeng Li

School of Management, Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xi'an, China and

College of Economics and Management,

Xi'an University of Posts and Telecommunications, Xi'an, China

Kejia Bi

Business School, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, China and

School of Economics and Management, Xi'an University of Technology,

Xi'an, China, and

Haiping Zheng and Xia Yang

Business School, Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, China

Received 20 November 2016

Revised 12 March 2017

17 May 2017

24 October 2017

7 December 2017

Accepted 7 December 2017

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to advance our understanding of the roles that service employees' responses to high job demands play in service innovation, by examining the effects that service employees' motivational orientation in self-regulation (regulatory focus) and their emotional labour strategy have on their creativity.

Design/methodology/approach – By integrating regulatory focus theory and emotion regulation theory, the authors developed a theoretical model to propose the links between promotion and prevention regulatory foci, different emotional labour strategies and frontline employee creativity. The research hypotheses were tested using hierarchical linear model based on data collected from 304 frontline employees and 72 supervisors in 51 restaurants.

Findings – The results showed that promotion focus was positively related to frontline employee creativity while prevention focus was negatively related to it. In addition, both emotional labour strategies (deep acting and surface acting) mediated the effect of promotion focus on frontline employee creativity. Surface acting mediated the effect of prevention focus on frontline employee creativity.

Originality/value – This is the first research conducted to explain, from a self-regulatory perspective, the influence that is exerted on service employees' service innovation by their responses to high job demands. The findings identify the effects that service employees' promotion focus or prevention focus in self-regulation have on their creativity, and the data unravel the role of emotional labour strategy as the mediating mechanism that explains the influence of regulatory focus on service employee creativity. On the basis of the findings, managerial directions are offered with regard to managing service employees' regulatory focus and emotional labour, with a view to enhancing the creativity and innovation within a service organisation.

Keywords Creativity, Motivation, Service innovation, Regulatory focus, Emotional labour, Frontline service

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Service research and practice reflect a strong consensus that service innovation helps service organisations succeed in a dynamic business environment (e.g. Giannopoulou *et al.*, 2014; Victorino *et al.*, 2005). However, service innovation is not just a result of firms' strategies and



This research was funded by a research grant from the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NNSFC), No. 71402138, and a research grant from the Ministry of Education in China (MOE) Project of Humanities and Social Sciences, No. 17YJA790073.

overall access to resources; more fundamentally, it stems from the creativity of frontline service employees (Coelho and Augusto, 2010; Engen and Magnusson, 2015). While doing their job, service employees gain knowledge that can inspire novel and useful ideas, which in turn, when implemented, can become service innovations (Slatten *et al.*, 2011). However, frontline service employees often experience irregular and inflexible work schedules, demanding and difficult customers, heavy workloads and long work hours (e.g. Hon *et al.*, 2013). In order to cope with high job demands, the employees need to engage in self-regulation – the process of bringing themselves into alignment with certain standards and expectations – by using different motivational orientations (Hyosun and Hyeheyun, 2015; Zhao and Namasivayam, 2013). It is therefore important to understand frontline employees' responses to those job demands, and to answer the question of how to motivate frontline service employees' creativity when they have to cope with high job demands through self-regulation. Because service employee creativity provides the foundation for service firms' innovations (Engen and Magnusson, 2015; Sigala and Kyriakidou, 2015), an examination of the effects that service employees' motivational orientations in self-regulation have on their creativity will engender a more fundamental understanding of how to enhance creativity and innovation in the service industry.

According to regulatory focus theory, to cope with job demands, service employees are engaged in self-regulation with two motivation orientations: promotion focus and prevention focus, which determine service employees' strategic inclinations, risk-taking attitudes and cognitive states (Higgins *et al.*, 1997). Thus, we suggest that the two regulatory foci can account for differences in creativity among frontline service employees. Past research has studied the effects that frontline service employees' responses to high job demands exert on their creativity and innovative behaviours. However, those investigations have mostly focused on the impact of the employees' passive responses such as stress (e.g. Geng *et al.*, 2014; Hon *et al.*, 2013; Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhipongs, 2016), emotional exhaustion (e.g. Hur *et al.*, 2016; Shin *et al.*, 2015), and role conflict and role ambiguity (e.g. Coelho *et al.*, 2011; Grobelna, 2015), and have ignored the impact of the employees' active self-regulation on their creativity. That research works over-emphasis on the effects that service employees' passive responses to job demands have on service innovation leads to a generally negative attitude towards high job demands in the service setting (e.g. Grobelna, 2015; Hur *et al.*, 2016; Shin *et al.*, 2015; Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhipongs, 2016). By distinguishing between service employees' promotion and prevention orientations and investigating the effects of those different regulatory foci on employee creativity, the present study expands the theoretical views about the influence that service employees' responses to high job demands exert on their creativity, from a self-regulatory perspective. The results will provide a more complete understanding of the roles that service employees' responses to high job demands play in service innovation, and will help service organisations design HRM programs to enhance service workers' creativity and innovation by paying more attention to the employees' preferred self-regulatory mode.

To better understand the roles that service employees' responses to high job demands play in service innovation, from a self-regulatory perspective, it is important and helpful to delve into the underlying mechanism that transmits the effects of regulatory focus on service employee creativity. In a service setting, frontline employees have to perform emotional labour by regulating their emotions according to the service organisation's emotional display rules (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). Emotion regulation theory proposes that emotional labour is self-regulatory in nature, and employees have two strategies (deep acting and surface acting) that they can use to regulate their displayed emotions. According to regulatory focus theory, a frontline employee's dominant regulatory focus – either promotion focus or prevention focus – determines that person's strategic inclinations in his or her emotion regulation (Crowe and Higgins, 1997). Those strategic

inclinations would subsequently affect frontline employee creativity (Chi and Grandey, 2016). Based on the combined rationales of emotion regulation theory and regulatory focus theory, our study proposes that the regulatory focus of frontline employees predicts their creativity through their emotional labour strategy. Although emotional labour has become one of the most important job demands in today's competitive service industry, our understanding of its impact has still been largely limited to its influence on service employees' psychological well-being, such as their emotional exhaustion and burnout (e.g. Ashforth, 1993; Beal *et al.*, 2006; Chang and Chiu, 2009; Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005), and on their display of external emotions and other-related outcomes, such as affective delivery and customer satisfaction (e.g. Grandey, 2000, 2003; Grayson, 1998; Hennigsthuau *et al.*, 2006). By exploring the mediating effects of emotional labour strategy between service employees' regulatory focus and their creativity, this study will explore the potential roles of emotional labour in service innovation research and practice.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold. First, it empirically examines the effects of promotion and prevention regulatory foci on service employee creativity, in order to advance our understanding about the influence of service employees' responses to high job demands on service innovation from a self-regulatory perspective. Second, this study analyses the emotion regulation mechanism through which regulatory focus affects service employee creativity, in order to identify the role of emotional labour strategy as a possible mediating mechanism that explains the differences in creativity and innovative behaviours among service employees. The combination of emotion regulation theory and regulatory focus theory produces a multiple mediator model, which we tested by using a hierarchical linear model (HLM) on data obtained from 51 restaurants operating at different cities in China. The results of this study may be of interest to service managers who wish to develop diverse HRM programs for service innovation practices. Because creative frontline service employees also have a significant impact on producing superior customer experiences, customer satisfaction, long-term relationships with customers and, thus, organisational performance (Coelho *et al.*, 2011), service organisations may benefit significantly from developing those programs to motivate service employee creativity.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

Service employee creativity and service innovation

Creativity is defined as the generation of novel and useful ideas (Amabile *et al.*, 1996, Gong *et al.*, 2009). Innovation refers to the implementation of creative ideas (Hertog *et al.*, 2010). Thus, creativity is generally regarded to be a necessary (but not sufficient) factor enabling innovation, or the first step in the innovation process (Amabile *et al.*, 1996). In the service industry, the innovation process is often regarded as being less formalized than it is in the manufacturing industry (e.g. Engen and Magnusson, 2015). Although macro-level factors such as a firm's strategy, access to resources, knowledge management and inter-organisational relationships have been studied as the drivers of service innovation (e.g. Eisingerich *et al.*, 2009; Gebauer *et al.*, 2011; Halinen *et al.*, 2014; Storey and Kahn, 2010), scholars tend to emphasise the role of service employee creativity as the individual-level foundation of service innovation (e.g. Engen and Magnusson, 2015; Lages and Piercy, 2012; Melton and Hartline, 2010; Sundbo and Gallouj, 2000). For instance, Sundbo and Gallouj (2000) demonstrated that service innovation is fundamentally a renewal of human behaviour. Engen and Magnusson (2015) pointed out that the customer-employee interaction is central to service innovation.

As boundary workers, frontline service employees frequently face customers with heterogeneous needs (Agnihotri *et al.*, 2014) and occupy a privileged position from which to collect first-hand information about those needs. That position affords opportunities for frontline employees to delight customers in unconventional ways (Engen and Magnusson, 2015). There is

no one-size-fits-all template with which frontline employees can satisfy customers' needs and solve customers' problems (Coelho and Augusto, 2010). Creative service employees are more likely to develop customised solutions to customer problems, using creativity to retain customers through different means and channels, and crafting their service in a way that meets the specific needs of each customer (Geng *et al.*, 2014; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2015; Wang and Netemeyer, 2004). Hence, service employee creativity involves the generation of novel and useful ideas in service encounters. Accordingly, we adopt Wang and Netemeyer's (2004) operationalization of service employee creativity and define the construct as the extent of novel and useful ideas generated by a service employee. Those ideas are considered novel if they differ uniquely from other ideas currently available. They are perceived as useful if they have the potential to be of direct or indirect value to the service organisation (Coelho *et al.*, 2016).

Because service innovation refers to the development of a new service, and that involves implementation of novel ideas at the organisational level (Grave *et al.*, 2009), service employee creativity is a first step in the innovation process of a service organisation (Engen and Magnusson, 2015). In order to explore how service organisations can enhance service innovation, it is essential to have some understanding of the characteristics of frontline employees' work styles (Amabile *et al.*, 1996; Mumford, 2003). Frontline employees are frequently exposed to excessive working hours, demanding customers, a high workload and the requirement that they perform emotional labour (Hon *et al.*, 2013; Hyosun and Hyeheun, 2015). Hence, understanding the effects that service employees' responses to job demands have on their creativity may help to further develop service innovation research and practice.

Effects of different regulatory foci on service employee creativity

Frontline service employees may respond negatively to high job demands. Sometimes they even snap and deliberately sabotage their service (Kraak *et al.*, 2017). Current service innovation research tends to explore the roles that service employees' passive responses to job demands have in influencing the employees' creativity and innovative behaviours. Job stress, emotional exhaustion, role conflict and role ambiguity induced by high job demands have been examined as the determinants of service employee creativity (e.g. Coelho *et al.*, 2011; Geng *et al.*, 2014; Grobelna, 2015; Hur *et al.*, 2016; Shin *et al.*, 2015; Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016). Most of those studies reported the negative effects that service employees' responses to job demands had on their creativity (e.g. Grobelna, 2015; Hur *et al.*, 2016; Shin *et al.*, 2015; Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016). For example, both emotional exhaustion and role ambiguity were found to be detrimental to service employee creativity (e.g. Coelho *et al.*, 2011; Grobelna, 2015; Hur *et al.*, 2016), and Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphongs (2016) discovered a negative effect from job stress on service employee creativity. Whereas Geng *et al.* (2014) and Hon *et al.* (2013) found that challenge-related stress increases service employee creativity and hindrance-related stress decreases it, some scholars have disputed the distinction between hindrance-related stress and challenge-related stress (Byron *et al.*, 2010). According to Byron *et al.*'s work, it is not the type of stress but the employee's motivation or attitude towards the job demands that exerts an influence on employee outcomes (Byron *et al.*, 2010). Faced with a demanding and unstructured job, frontline service employees suffer from stress, emotional exhaustion, role conflict and role ambiguity, but they are also actively involved in self-regulation to help them cope with external demands by using different motivation orientations (Hyosun and Hyeheun, 2015; Zhao and Namasivayam, 2013). However, the role played by employees' self-regulation efforts to deal with job demands has largely been neglected in previous studies on service innovation.

Regulatory focus theory distinguishes two motivational orientations in self-regulation: motivation with a promotion focus, orientated towards ideals, advancement and achieving gains, and motivation with a prevention focus, concentrating on ensuring safety and avoiding losses (Higgins *et al.*, 1997). When frontline employees are promotion-focused, their

growth and advancement needs motivate them to try to bring themselves into alignment with their ideal selves, thereby increasing their approach-related behaviours. When frontline employees are prevention-focused, their security and safety needs prompt them to attempt to bring themselves into alignment with their ought selves, thereby increasing their avoidance-related behaviours (Zhao and Namasivayam, 2013).

According to regulatory focus theory, different regulatory foci have different effects on service employee creativity because they involve different goals, risk-taking attitudes and cognitive states (Higgins *et al.*, 1997). First, frontline service employees with a promotion focus are expected to be sensitive to achievement and enhancement (Hyosun and Hyeheun, 2015). Their goals are to achieve gains and make improvements. Sassenberg and Scholl (2013) demonstrated that promotion-focused employees are more willing to perform challenging work than prevention-focused employees. Promotion-focused frontline employees always try to produce novel and useful ideas or behave creatively in order to improve their customer services, due to their achievement oriented and challenging attitudes in a job situation. Frontline service employees with a prevention focus have failure avoidance as their primary goal in life (Hyosun and Hyeheun, 2015), and employees with a chronic prevention focus are inclined to resist new ideas in an effort to ensure their own safety and avoid losses (Higgins, 1998).

Second, in order to achieve their ideals or aspirations, frontline employees with a promotion focus are willing to risk challenging established organisational policies, work methods and task relationships in an effort to develop novel ideas about creative service (Rook and Knippenberg, 2011). Conversely, frontline employees with a chronic prevention focus adopt conservative and preventive strategies (Zhao and Namasivayam, 2013). Coelho *et al.* (2016) demonstrated that highly conscientious service employees may become too cautious and risk-averse, thus thwarting their creative performance. Sassenberg and Scholl (2013) mentioned that employees with a strong prevention focus may show an avoidant tendency rather than taking the initiative to find solutions, when they are faced with problems. To avoid losses and ensure security, prevention-focused employees would rather choose a “risk-averse” and conservative information-processing style in which the generation of creative ideas is always undermined (Friedman and Förster, 2001).

Finally, most service organisations provide their potential frontline employees with job training to help familiarise them with standard solutions to customer problems (Hon and Lui, 2016). However, even if promotion-focused frontline employees are familiar with the standard procedures and solutions related to customer service, in order to achieve their goal for advancement, they are often cognitively activated to create new procedures for delivering service and providing novel solutions. Promotion-focused employees have a divergent thinking style that is associated with the ability to “think outside the box”, and that approach leads to the generation of creative ideas (Coelho *et al.*, 2016). In contrast, established skills make it relatively easy for prevention-focused employees to meet their goals of ensuring security and fulfilling responsibilities (Baas *et al.*, 2011). Such employees will then stop pursuing goals and will experience relief and cognitive deactivation during service encounters (Hyosun and Hyeheun, 2015). Those employees will resort to well-known and tested approaches, thereby exhibiting a lower level of creative idea generation.

Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H1. Promotion focus increases service employee creativity.
- H2. Prevention focus decreases service employee creativity.

Effects of different regulatory foci on emotional labour strategy

Grandey (2000) conceptualised emotional labour and different strategies for performing it from an emotion regulation perspective. According to emotion regulation theory, frontline service employees perform emotional labour by regulating their emotions through two

processes: antecedent-focused regulation and response-focused regulation, which correspond to two different emotional labour strategies – deep acting and surface acting (Grandey, 2000). The process of deep acting resembles antecedent-focused emotion regulation in which people regulate the precursor of their emotions – the perception of a situation – through attentional deployment or cognitive reappraisal of the situation before emotions are fully developed by the perception. In contrast, the process of surface acting corresponds with response-focused emotion regulation in which people regulate their outside or observable displays of emotions after experiencing those emotions (Geng *et al.*, 2014; Grandey, 2000; Liu *et al.*, 2013).

The self-regulatory nature of emotional labour may help us to understand the effects that service employees' responses to job demands have on their service innovation. However, previous studies on the impact of emotional labour mainly followed two approaches. The first approach concentrated on service employees' psychological consequences, such as their level of stress, job satisfaction, burnout, emotional exhaustion and emotional dissonance (e.g. Ashforth, 1993; Beal *et al.*, 2006; Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005; Johnson and Spector, 2007). The second approach focused on the employees' displays of external emotions and their related outcomes, such as affective delivery and customer satisfaction (e.g. Grandey, 2000, 2003; Hennighthrau *et al.*, 2006). So far, in service innovation research, little attention has been paid to the roles played by the different emotional regulation natures of deep acting and surface acting. To explore the potential application of emotional labour in service innovation research and practice, in this research we integrate emotion regulation theory into regulatory focus theory and argue that the different emotion regulation natures of deep acting and surface acting hold the key to explaining the different effects of regulatory foci on service employee creativity. We will start with an analysis of the effects of different regulatory foci on emotional labour strategy.

From an emotion regulation perspective, Chi and Grandey (2016) demonstrated that deep acting and surface acting indicate two distinct regulatory orientations. To perform emotional labour, frontline employees regulate their emotions with a promotion focus or a prevention focus. Frontline employees differ in their chronic regulatory foci and as a result are likely to have different emotional labour strategies. With a promotion focus, frontline employees are motivated by the achievement of gains and ideals (Higgins, 1998). Their goals are hopes and aspirations towards an ideal self (Hyosun and Hye Hyun, 2015). When performing emotional labour, they will choose a strategy for attaining advancement and gains in order to reduce the discrepancy between their real self and ideal self. Deep acting is about activating cognitions (e.g. using imagination, focusing on positive thoughts or changing perspectives) to express desired emotions (Hochschild, 1983). It seems to be an activation-oriented strategy, which could be motivated by a promotion focus (Chi and Grandey, 2016). Deep acting convinces employees that they really feel the emotion that they are trying to express. Being friendly to customers through deep acting may make monotonous frontline work more fun and increase frontline employees' sense of personal accomplishment. However, when employees choose surface acting, they realise that meeting emotional labour demands at work requires suppressing true feelings, and then they may feel "false", experiencing depersonalisation and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002). Prior studies have proved that surface acting is related to decreased levels of satisfaction and self-efficacy, whereas deep acting generates feelings of authenticity and personal accomplishment (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge and Lee, 2002). Thus, promotion-focused frontline employees would choose deep acting rather than surface acting to accomplish their desired end state.

In contrast, a prevention focus is concerned with security and responsibility (Higgins, 1998). With a prevention focus, frontline employees' goals are to perform duties and obligations or even necessities. When performing emotional labour, the strategic inclination

induced by prevention focus is to be prudent and precautionary in order to avoid mismatches with the emotional labour requirements of the organisation. The focus of surface acting is to suppress or fake one's true feelings, thereby avoiding negative displays that would violate the organisation's display rules (Chi and Grandey, 2016). Thus, surface acting seems to be consistent with an inhibition-oriented strategy, which prevention-focused frontline employees prefer. On the other hand, risk taking is associated with deep acting – sometimes even if the perception of a situation is reappraised, it is difficult to change frontline employees' outside expressions (Grandey, 2000). To follow an organisation's emotional display rules, regulating inside feelings through deep acting is less secure than directly controlling outside expressions through surface acting (Beal *et al.*, 2006). Lindquist (2004) demonstrated that one way to understand the difference between surface acting and deep acting is in terms of risk taking. The researcher gave the following arguments about different levels of risk associated with different emotional labour strategies: "When you're surface acting, you remain in control of your emotions by consciously structuring the impressions you produce. When you're deep acting, you relinquish the possibility of emotional control. When you deep act, in other words, you work through acts of will and imagination to open yourself to the possibility that you might persuade yourself that the emotions you are presenting are real, you risk becoming the thing you are performing" (Lindquist, 2004, p. 197). Therefore, when prevention-focused frontline employees adapt their emotions to a situation, they need to decide whether to take the risk of overcoming their present emotional state. Faced with this situation, they are more likely to select a safer strategy and thereby often choose a surface-acting strategy, rather than a deep-acting strategy.

Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3. (a) Promotion focus increases deep acting and (b) decreases surface acting.

H4. (a) Prevention focus increases surface acting and (b) decreases deep acting.

Mediating effects of emotional labour strategies between regulatory focus and service employee creativity

After conceptualising emotional labour from an emotion regulation perspective, Grandey (2000) proposed a conceptual framework of "emotion regulation performed in the work", in which two emotional labour strategies (deep acting and surface acting) transmit the influence of situational and individual factors to organisational/individual well-being. Since Grandey's (2000) introduction of the conceptual framework for emotional labour strategies, as understood from the perspective of emotion regulation, researchers have found that emotional labour strategies mediate the effects exerted by individual differences (e.g. age and gender) on certain aspects of service employees' psychological well-being, such as emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and burnout (e.g. Jungheon and Chihyung, 2012; Kiffin-Petersen *et al.*, 2011). However, the emotional regulation perspective and its related conceptual framework have received less attention in service innovation research. We hypothesised the effects of different regulatory foci on emotional labour strategy in the previous section. In order to study the mediating role of emotional labour strategy in the relationships between different regulatory foci and service employee creativity, we still need to explore the impact of different emotional labour strategies on service employee creativity.

From an emotion regulation perspective, surface acting and deep acting have different creative consequences because they involve different emotion regulation processes (Geng *et al.*, 2014; Richards and Gross, 2000). Also, the emotion regulation processes related to different emotional labour strategies are not equally efficient in the consumption of cognitive resources. As is the case with response-focused emotion regulation, the process of

surface acting occurs at the back end in the emotion regulation process by faking required emotions and absorbing one's true emotions without adjusting the precursor of those emotions (Grandey, 2000). In order to regulate emotions according to the display rules of the service organisation, frontline employees using a surface acting strategy must monitor their emotional displays in the whole service delivery process (Gross, 1998). If a discrepancy between expressed emotions and required emotions is detected, a correctional process is evoked to lessen that discrepancy and display the desired expression. Constant self-monitoring and self-correction of external displays, and suppression of internal genuine feelings, cost frontline employees numerous cognitive resources that should be invested in the generation of creative ideas (Brotheridge and Lee, 2002; Gross and Levenson, 1997). On the contrary, the process of deep acting matches antecedent-focused emotion regulation and is evoked at the front end in the emotion regulation process by adjusting the precursor of one's inner feelings (Grandey, 2000). Frontline service employees using a deep acting strategy need not monitor their emotional display cues and correct them from moment to moment (Gross, 2009), which saves them a large amount of cognitive resources that can then be devoted to generating creative ideas. In their experimental study; Richards and Gross (2000) found that surface acting requires employees to invest a large quantity of cognitive resources and therefore impairs those employees' cognitive performance, whereas deep acting does not.

In addition, when the precursors of frontline employees' inner feelings are adjusted in deep acting, their perceived individual-environment relationship is also changed for the better (Grandey, 2003). Then frontline service employees are more inclined to sympathise with customers and more willing to generate creative ideas for providing customers with positive and memorable feelings towards every consumption experience (Geng *et al.*, 2014). What is more, frontline employees in deep acting actually experience more positive emotions and fewer negative emotions than do those in surface acting. Grandey (2003) found that positive emotions triggered by deep acting lead to creativity. Geng *et al.* (2014) investigated the effects of emotional labour strategies on service employee creativity and found that deep acting increases service employee creativity, whereas surface acting decreases it.

Integrated with the hypotheses articulated in the previous section, promotion-focused frontline employees select deep acting to perform emotional labour, thus leaving them with sufficient cognitive resources, positive emotions and deep sympathies with customers, and service employee creativity is promoted. In contrast, prevention-focused frontline employees prefer surfacing acting as their emotional labour strategy, and their emotion regulation requires so much of their cognitive resources that they cannot generate creative ideas about frontline service. Hence, it is logical to predict that the effects of promotion focus and prevention focus on service employee creativity are mediated by different emotional labour strategies. We propose the following hypotheses:

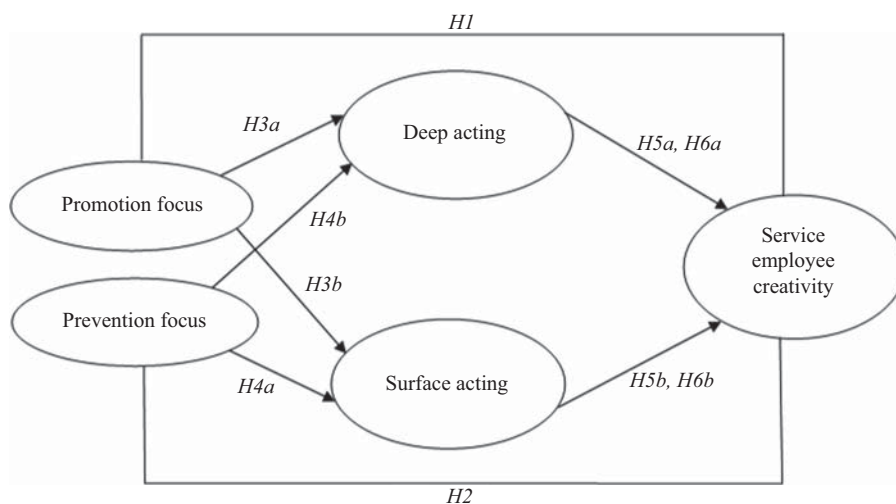
- H5. Promotion focus has a positive effect on service employee creativity, through (a) increasing deep acting and (b) decreasing surface acting.
- H6. Prevention focus has a negative effect on service employee creativity, through (a) decreasing deep acting and (b) increasing surface acting.

On the basis of the above discussion, different regulatory foci influence service employee creativity through the mediation of dissimilar emotional labour strategies. The relationship in the conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

Methods

Sample and procedures

Survey data for this study were collected with the collaboration of locally owned restaurants in China. We selected restaurants as the research context for two reasons. First, increased



Motivating
service
employee
creativity

Figure 1.
The conceptual model

competition in the service industry has driven restaurants to provide more customised and innovative services, which makes the generation of creative ideas to meet various customer needs a part of frontline employees' work (Hon *et al.*, 2013; Liu *et al.*, 2013). For example, a Chinese chain restaurant named "Haidilao" always has so many customers at lunchtime and suppertime that many customers have a long wait for seating. In the waiting area, Haidilao restaurant provides free fruit, drinks, snacks, and even a manicure to make the customers less anxious when waiting for available seats. There are numerous other customised and innovative services in Haidilao restaurant, and more than 90 per cent of the ideas about those services are generated by the frontline service employees (Wang and Cheng, 2012). The role of service employees in creating restaurants' customised and innovative services is particularly important because restaurant service innovations rarely are R&D-based (Engen and Magnusson, 2015) and consequently restaurants may be more dependent on frontline employees' creativity in general. Second, to meet the high job demands in restaurants, and especially the emotional labour demands, service employees need to regulate their emotions, strategies and behaviour with either a promotion or prevention regulatory focus. Therefore, restaurants constitute a particularly fitting context for studying the effects of different regulatory foci on service employee creativity from an emotion regulation perspective.

After a pilot study on 43 employees and 8 supervisors selected from six restaurants in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, China, we ensured the clarity of each item in our survey questionnaire. Then we contacted and visited managers of 135 locally owned restaurants located in Shanxi, Sichuan and Gansu Provinces of China to discuss the study's purpose and invite them to participate in the survey, with the promise of providing copies of the results. A total of 74 restaurant managers agreed to allow interviews with their employees. The rest of those restaurants refused to participate, mostly because of work overload. Among the restaurants participating in our research, 63 were full-service restaurants and 11 were fast-service restaurants. However, frontline employees and supervisors in cafeterias were not included in our survey because frontline cafeteria employees have so few personal interactions with customers that their generation of creative ideas is very limited.

We asked managers who agreed to participate in our study to introduce their supervisors and frontline employees in the restaurants. Our recruits were limited to full-time employees who reported directly to a supervisor. We explained our research purpose and assured those frontline employees and supervisors about the study's anonymity and confidentiality.

Finally, 428 frontline employees and 97 immediate supervisors agreed to participate in our research. Because frontline employees in the selected restaurants were always busy dealing with high job demands, in the first stage of our research we did not ask them to return the survey immediately – we decided to give them enough time to finish it and in the process to concentrate on the survey's questions. We assigned each employee a numbered envelope with a survey containing questions to determine his or her chronic regulatory focus, emotional labour strategy and demographic profile, and asked the employee to seal the completed survey in that envelope to protect employee anonymity. A month later, we started the second stage, collecting surveys from the selected employees and asking their supervisors to rate each frontline employee's creativity. Eventually, we received completed and usable questionnaires from 304 employee-supervisor pairs (a 71 per cent response rate) in 51 restaurants. These 304 subordinates reported to 72 immediate supervisors. The number of employees evaluated by each supervisor ranged from one to nine, and the average number of subordinates per supervisor was 4. A *t*-test indicated no significant differences between respondents and nonrespondents with respect to gender, age and tenure (all p 's > 0.10). The employee sample comprised 43 per cent male and 57 per cent female respondents, with a mean age of 28.9 years ($SD = 4.8$) and a mean job tenure of 4.0 years ($SD = 2.2$). They were low-level employees who were directly responsible for frontline service work. The supervisor sample comprised 54 per cent male respondents, with a mean age of 33.4 years ($SD = 6.3$) and a mean job tenure of 5.8 years ($SD = 3.7$). They were middle-level employees who held indirect responsibilities for the service performance of the frontline employees they supervised. All the respondents were local Chinese.

Measures

All measures were translated from English into Chinese and then back-translated into English by two independent bilingual individuals following the back-translation procedure. Some terms that may be understood differently according to cultural differences and some errors that may occur in the process of transforming an English questionnaire into a Chinese questionnaire were modified on the basis of the results of the pilot test. Table AI lists all the items of the scales used in this study. Individuals responded to each item on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "1 = strongly disagree" to "7 = strongly agree".

Promotion focus/prevention focus. Ten items used to measure frontline employees' chronic regulatory focus were derived from the scales used by Brenninkmeijer *et al.* (2010), which are a shorter version of the general regulatory focus measure (GRFM; Lockwood *et al.*, 2002) and have been used by Hyosun and Hyeheun (2015) in an empirical study in the Asian context to identify the chronic regulatory focus of service employees. The prevention focus scale consisted of five items, an example of which is "I see myself as someone who is primarily striving to fulfil my obligations and responsibilities". The promotion focus scale consisted of five items, an example of which is "In my work, I strive to reach my ideal self to fulfil my hopes and aspirations". In our study, the Cronbach's α coefficients for prevention focus and promotion focus were 0.88 and 0.89, respectively.

Surface acting/deep acting. Surface acting and deep acting were measured with 11 items from the revised forms of the scales used by Diefendorff *et al.* (2005). The surface acting scale consisted of seven items and focused on the extent to which the individual displays a required emotion without changing his or her inside feelings. The deep acting scale consisted of four items and focused on the extent to which the individual adjusts his or her inside feelings to perform emotional work. In our study, the Cronbach's α coefficients for surface acting and deep acting were 0.92 and 0.80, respectively.

Service employee creativity. Supervisors responded to each item on a seven-item scale that was developed on the basis of the scale used by Gong *et al.* (2009) in an empirical study in the Chinese context, indicating the extent to which the supervisors agreed with statements

about their subordinates' creativity. Because the meaning of creativity varies in different domains, and the survey of Gong *et al.* (2009) was used for insurance sales jobs in the company, we made adjustments so that the items were better adapted to frontline service jobs. For example, one of the items originally was "This person often uses creativity to increase sales forces in different ways", and we adapted it to read "This person often uses creativity to satisfy customers in different ways", to make it applicable in the service setting. The Cronbach's α coefficient for service employee creativity was 0.92.

Control variables. We included age, job tenure and gender as control variables in our model, because these variables can all influence employee creativity (Coelho *et al.*, 2011; Gong *et al.*, 2009). Age and job tenure were measured in years, and gender was processed as a dummy variable (male = 1, female = 0).

Measurement analyses

In order to assess the convergent and discriminant validity of our constructs, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the AMOS 17.0 computer package. The CFA results showed an acceptable fit to the five-factor model ($\chi^2 = 583.89$, $df = 340$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.95; NFI = 0.90; GFI = 0.88, RMSEA = 0.049) (Hu and Bentler, 1999). Next, we computed a four-factor model that combined the items of promotion focus and prevention focus. This four-factor model yielded a poorer fit to these data ($\chi^2 = 1,413.96$, $df = 344$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.80; TLI = 0.78; NFI = 0.75; GFI = 0.70, RMSEA = 0.101). Then we computed a three-factor model that combined the items of promotion focus and prevention focus, and also combined the items of deep acting and surface acting. This three-factor model yielded a poorer fit to these data ($\chi^2 = 1,797.67$, $df = 347$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.72; TLI = 0.70; NFI = 0.68; GFI = 0.64, RMSEA = 0.124). The hypothesised five-factor model fit these data better than either the four-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 830.07$, $\Delta df = 4$, $p < 0.001$) or the three-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1,213.78$, $\Delta df = 7$, $p < 0.001$) did. Thus, the five constructs were treated independently for hypothesis testing. The factor loading for each item on its corresponding construct was greater than 0.70 and there were no cross-loadings between items on any two constructs. Thus, the convergent validity was satisfied.

In our study, the mediators (emotional labour strategies) and the independent variables (different regulatory foci) were collected from the same source, so we had to test for common method biases among the mediators and the independent variables. Harmon's one-factor test was used to test for common method variance, because the data were collected from one source (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). This test consists of testing a one-factor model and comparing it with results from the model with four factors (the two mediators and the two independent variables). The one-factor model demonstrated a poor fit ($\chi^2 = 2,114.85$, $df = 189$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.46; TLI = 0.40; NFI = 0.44; GFI = 0.52, RMSEA = 0.182), although the four-factor model demonstrated a good fit ($\chi^2 = 353.99$, $df = 183$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.94; NFI = 0.90; GFI = 0.90, RMSEA = 0.058). The results of a χ^2 difference test indicated that the four-factor model fit the data significantly better than the one-factor model, in which all items were loaded onto one latent construct ($\Delta\chi^2 = 1,760.86$, $\Delta df = 6$, $p < 0.001$), thereby showing that common method bias was not an issue in this study (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012).

We used the average variance extracted (AVE) suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) to assess discriminant validity of our constructs. Table I reports the means, standard deviations and correlations of all variables. As is shown in Table I, the root AVE values on the diagonal in parentheses are greater than the value of 0.50 suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and are significantly greater than inter-construct correlations, which indicates adequate discriminant validity.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age ^a	–							
2. Tenure ^a	0.03	–						
3. Gender ^a	0.22**	0.05	–					
4. Promotion focus ^a	0.10	0.11	0.03	(0.78)				
5. Prevention focus ^a	–0.11	–0.03	–0.02	–0.09	(0.79)			
6. Deep acting ^a	0.21**	0.12*	0.25**	0.24**	–0.08	(0.73)		
7. Surface acting ^a	–0.15*	–0.20**	–0.13*	–0.28**	0.36**	–0.17**	(0.80)	
8. Service employee creativity ^b	0.14*	0.15*	0.22**	0.40**	–0.37**	0.38**	–0.42**	(0.81)
Mean	28.94	0.43	4.04	4.53	4.22	4.25	3.91	4.05
SD	4.79	0.50	2.16	0.94	1.12	0.90	1.21	1.18

Table I.
Correlations, means
and standard
deviations

Notes: $n = 304$. The roots of the AVEs are on the diagonal in parentheses. ^aData were provided by frontline employees; ^bdata were provided by frontline employees' immediate supervisors. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Results

Because frontline employees were partially nested within supervisors when service employee creativity was rated by supervisors, we used HLM to account for potential nonindependence of the observations. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression may not take into consideration the nested nature of individual-level data (Bliese and Halverson, 1998; Gong *et al.*, 2009). There were no group-level variables in our hypothesised model, so a random intercept was allowed to account for the nesting effect. We performed the analyses using hierarchical linear and nonlinear modelling, version 6. In fact, in separate analyses using OLS regression, we obtained similar results for all the hypotheses.

To test our hypotheses about both the direct effects of different regulatory foci on service employee creativity and the indirect effects exerted through the mediating roles of deep acting and surface acting, we used procedures for testing multiple mediation that were outlined by MacKinnon (2000) and involve three steps in HLM analysis. The first step in the analysis involved regressing service employee creativity on each regulatory focus and the control variables. The results presented in Table II (for model 1 and model 2) demonstrate that promotion focus is significantly and positively related to service employee creativity ($\gamma = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$), whereas prevention focus has had a negative relationship with service employee creativity ($\gamma = -0.37$, $p < 0.001$), thereby supporting the direct effects of different regulatory foci on service employee creativity. Thus, *H1* and *H2* are supported.

Because our mediation hypotheses imply that regulatory focus is related to emotional labour strategy, the first part of the second step in the mediation analysis involved regressing deep acting and surface acting on each regulatory focus and the control variables. The results in Table II (for model 3 and model 4) indicate that promotion focus has a positive relationship with deep acting ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < 0.001$) and a negative relationship with surface acting ($\beta = -0.25$, $p < 0.001$), thus supporting the main effects of promotion focus on the two emotional labour strategies. Thus, *H3a* and *H3b* are supported. The results reported in model 4 indicate that prevention focus is positively related with surface acting ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$), so *H4a* is supported. *H4b* – that is, a negative relationship between prevention focus and deep acting – is not supported, however ($\beta = -0.01$, ns), according to the results in model 3.

The second part of the second step of the mediation analysis involved regressing service employee creativity on both deep acting and surface acting. We simultaneously entered them into a single regression analysis to correct for any multicollinearity among these variables. The results reported in model 5 indicate that deep acting has a significant, positive relationship with service employee creativity ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$), and the results also show that surface acting is negatively related to service employee creativity ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < 0.001$).

Variables	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Motivating service employee creativity
<i>Step 1: service employee creativity</i>					
Model 1					
Age	0.01	0.01	0.70	0.48	
Tenure	0.10	0.03	3.94	0.00	
Gender	0.23	0.16	1.45	0.15	
Promotion focus	0.47	0.07	7.10	0.00	
Model 2					
Age	0.01	0.01	0.95	0.34	
Tenure	0.11	0.03	4.06	0.00	
Gender	0.31	0.16	1.92	0.05	
Prevention focus	-0.37	0.05	-7.60	0.00	
<i>The first part of Step 2: deep acting and Surface acting</i>					
Model 3: deep acting					
Age	0.10	0.03	3.33	0.00	
Tenure	0.07	0.02	4.25	0.00	
Gender	0.08	0.11	0.75	0.45	
Promotion focus	0.14	0.05	3.00	0.00	
Prevention focus	-0.01	0.04	-0.30	0.77	
Model 4: surface acting					
Age	-0.22	0.08	-2.75	0.01	
Tenure	-0.06	0.02	-2.79	0.01	
Gender	-0.32	0.13	-2.47	0.01	
Promotion focus	-0.25	0.06	-4.56	0.00	
Prevention focus	0.36	0.05	6.05	0.00	
<i>The second part of Step 2: service employee creativity</i>					
Model 5					
Age	0.01	0.01	0.86	0.47	
Tenure	0.05	0.03	2.11	0.01	
Gender	0.11	0.16	0.73	0.01	
Deep acting	0.38	0.06	6.08	0.00	
Surface acting	-0.35	0.05	-6.84	0.00	
<i>Step 3: service employee creativity</i>					
Model 6					
Age	-0.00	0.01	-0.03	0.98	
Tenure	0.06	0.02	2.68	0.01	
Gender	0.10	0.12	0.84	0.40	
Promotion focus	0.34	0.07	4.75	0.00	
Deep acting	0.32	0.07	4.75	0.00	
Surface acting	-0.29	0.05	6.15	0.00	
Model 7					
Age	0.00	0.01	0.53	0.60	
Tenure	0.09	0.03	3.64	0.00	
Gender	0.19	0.16	1.20	0.23	
Prevention focus	-0.27	0.04	-6.25	0.00	
Surface acting	-0.28	0.05	-5.64	0.00	
Note: <i>n</i> = 304					

Table II.
Results of hierarchical
linear modelling for
the effects of
regulatory foci on
service employee
creativity

In the final step of the mediation analysis, service employee creativity was regressed on each regulatory focus, deep acting, surface acting, and the control variables. As predicted, the results in model 6 indicate that the direct effect of promotion focus on service employee creativity declines when deep acting and surface acting are entered into the equation ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$ vs $\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$). At the same time, the effect of deep acting

($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001$) and surface acting ($\beta = -0.29, p < 0.001$) on service employee creativity remains significant. The results reported in model 7 indicate that the direct effect between prevention focus and service employee creativity declines when surface acting is entered into the equation ($\beta = -0.37, p < 0.001$ vs $\beta = -0.27, p < 0.001$). At the same time, the effect of surface acting ($\beta = -0.28, p < 0.001$) on service employee creativity remains significant. Together, these results suggest that deep acting and surface acting mediate the relationship between promotion focus and service employee creativity, and that surface acting mediates the relationship between prevention focus and surface acting. *H5a, H5b* and *H6b* are supported. The proposed mediating effect of deep acting between prevention focus and service employee creativity (*H6a*) is, however, not supported.

To further test *H5* and *H6* (the two mediation hypotheses), we performed Preacher and Hayes's (2008) test of indirect effect by examining whether the total effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is significantly reduced with the addition of the mediators to the model. To perform the test, we used SPSS19.0 software and the bootstrapping approach, thereby making no assumption about the distribution of indirect effect and providing confidence intervals for the estimate (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Our results confirmed the mediating effects of deep acting ($z = 3.40, p < 0.001$; 95% CI: 0.04-0.13) and surface acting ($z = 3.89, p < 0.001$; 95% CI: 0.06-0.17) on the relationship between promotion focus and creativity, and the mediating effect of surface acting ($z = -4.23, p < 0.001$; 95% CI: -0.16--0.06) but not the effect of deep acting ($z = -1.47, ns$; 95% CI: -0.07-0.01) on the relationship between prevention focus and creativity.

Discussion

Because of the pivotal role that frontline employees play in acquiring knowledge and interacting with customers, their creativity is essential to achieving service innovation success (Engen and Magnusson, 2015). Our primary objective for this study was to understand the roles that service employees' responses to high job demands play in those employees' service innovation. To gain that understanding, we examined whether and how frontline service employees' motivational orientations in self-regulation to deal with their job demands also affect their creativity. Integrating regulatory focus theory and emotion regulation theory as the predominant theoretical lens, we distinguished the effects of promotion and prevention regulatory foci on frontline employee creativity, and proposed different emotional labour strategies as the mediating mechanisms between each regulatory focus and frontline employee creativity. The results of this study have significant theoretical and managerial implications for service innovation research and practice.

Theoretical contributions and implications for future research

Our study makes several significant theoretical contributions to the current service innovation research. First, by examining the effects of different regulatory foci on service employee creativity, this study expands the theoretical views on the influence that service employees' responses to high job demands exert on their service innovation, as seen from a self-regulatory perspective. Previous service research has paid a great deal of attention to investigating the effects of service employees' passive responses to tough job demands such as job stress, emotional exhaustion and role ambiguity on their creativity (e.g. Coelho *et al.*, 2011; Grobelna, 2015; Hon *et al.*, 2013; Hur *et al.*, 2016; Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016). This study is novel because it does not consider service employees as stressed or exhausted individuals exposed to tough job demands, as previous research does. On the contrary, it regards service employees as individuals who will actively engage in self-regulation to deal with job demands, and it explores different effects of service employees' motivation orientations in their self-regulation on their creativity.

Although previous studies have emphasised the negative effects that service employees' passive responses to job demands have on their creativity (e.g. Grobelna, 2015; Hur *et al.*, 2016; Shin *et al.*, 2015; Tongchaiprasit and Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2016), our study found a positive effect of promotion focus on frontline employee creativity. This finding shows that if a service employee's motivation to deal with the job demands is oriented towards realizing achievements that motivation increases his or her creativity. That conclusion supports the results of previous work suggesting that challenge-related stress increases service employee creativity because such stress is defined as the stress people appraise as potentially promoting their personal growth and achievement (e.g. Geng *et al.*, 2014; Hon *et al.*, 2013; Jeoushyan *et al.*, 2016). In addition, this study found that frontline employees' prevention focus decreases their creativity. This finding suggests that a frontline employee who focuses on avoiding hazards to deal with job demands has lower creativity. It provides a possible explanation for the results of previous work suggesting that hindrance-related stress decreases service employee creativity: hindrance-related stressors, such as organisational politics, red tape and job insecurity, may activate frontline employees' motivation to focus on avoiding hazards, with the result that those employees' generation of novel ideas decreases (e.g. Geng *et al.*, 2014; Hon *et al.*, 2013). Those findings indicate that the existence of high job demands in the service industry is not necessarily harmful to service innovation. The self-regulatory perspective offers new explanations about the influences that are exerted on service employees' creativity and innovative behaviour by their responses to high job demands. Therefore, our study provides an important step for any future research on service innovation that aims to evaluate whether a self-regulatory perspective will aid both scholars and practitioners in their quests to better understand service employees' creativity and innovative behaviour.

Second, by analysing the emotion regulation mechanism through which regulatory focus affects service employee creativity, this study identifies the role of emotional labour strategy as a mediator between regulatory focus and service employee creativity. Previous studies on the effects of emotional labour have focused on the psychological consequences for service employees, and on their display of external emotions and the related outcomes (e.g. Ashforth, 1993; Beal *et al.*, 2006; Chang and Chiu, 2009; Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005; Grandey, 2000, 2003; Grayson, 1998; Hennigsthorau *et al.*, 2006). Few research studies have paid attention to the respective roles that the emotional regulation natures of different emotional labour strategies play in service innovation. By exploring the difference between deep acting and surface acting, from an emotional regulation perspective, this study found the mediating effect of emotional labour strategy between regulatory focus and service employee creativity: service employees with a promotion focus are more creative partly because they choose a deep acting strategy rather than a surface acting strategy to regulate their emotions. On the other hand, workers with a prevention focus are less creative partly because they prefer surface acting as their emotion regulation strategy. Although current service research regards emotional labour as a demanding workload (e.g. Ashforth, 1993; Beal *et al.*, 2006; Chang and Chiu, 2009; Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005), this study provides some optimistic information and shows that by actively choosing deep acting as their emotional labour strategy, promotion-focused service employees can become more creative. Because emotional labour has become one of the most important job demands in today's competitive service industry, the findings in this study imply that future research should analyse different emotional regulation natures of emotional labour strategies in order to explore the possible link between emotional labour and service innovation.

Third, the integration of regulatory focus theory and emotion regulation theory in this study provides a new theoretical approach for future research on service innovation. Previous studies have used regulatory focus theory to analyse service employees' psychological outcomes, such as turnover intent (Hyosun and Hyehyun, 2015) and job

satisfaction (Zhao and Namasivayam, 2013). Scholars have applied emotion regulation theory as a theoretical mechanism for comprehending how different emotional labour strategies affect employees' psychological well-being (e.g. Kiffin-Petersen *et al.*, 2011; Jungthoon and Chihyung, 2012). However, neither of the two theories has been used in service innovation research. By integrating the rationales of emotion regulation theory and regulatory focus theory, this study establishes a theoretical framework in which service employees' motivational orientations in self-regulation decide their emotional regulation strategies, and those strategies subsequently influence the employees' creativity. The empirical results in our study imply that the theoretical framework is feasible for use by future researchers as they explore the effects that service employees' motivation and strategy exert on service innovation.

However, our study did not find the anticipated negative effect of prevention focus on deep acting. A possible explanation for that result may be the emotion regulation nature of deep acting and surface acting. Although a prevention-focused frontline employee would choose a surface acting strategy rather than a deep acting strategy in order to reduce the risk related to emotional labour, previous research has found that surface acting is a more stressful strategy that requires substantially greater levels of self-regulation when compared with deep acting (Beal *et al.*, 2006; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Brotheridge and Lee, 2002). During a service encounter, surface actors would find it increasingly difficult to maintain display rules and control their external expressions for a long time (Beal *et al.*, 2006). In such a situation, a prevention-focused employee would need to change his or her emotional labour strategies temporarily. Deep acting is the alternate strategy for the employee to choose in order to meet the emotional labour requirements of the service organisation. Perhaps for that reason, our findings fail to support the hypothesised negative effect of prevention focus on deep acting, as well as the mediating role of deep acting between prevention focus and frontline employee creativity.

Implications for service managers

The findings of this study indicate that service employees' regulatory focus and emotional labour strategies play important roles in sparking their creativity and innovation in a frontline service setting. With this knowledge, managers will be able to fine-tune HRM programs, such as recruitment and training programmes, in a way that promotes service employees' creativity and innovative behaviour.

First, our study shows the importance, in employee recruitment and selection, of seeking measures for assessing the regulatory focus that affects service employee creativity. For example, to promote creativity and innovation in the service setting, managers could use a professional assessment instrument, such as the GRFM (Lockwood *et al.*, 2002) or the regulatory focus questionnaire (Higgins *et al.*, 2001) to assess and identify the chronic regulatory focus of prospective employees. To provide advantages that enhance employee creativity and service innovation, managers should match good candidates who have a strong promotion focus with frontline jobs. By doing that, managers will be able to motivate the service employees' deep acting and ultimately will be able to obtain greater creativity and innovation in the frontline service workplace.

Second, our study also has implications for training and development in a service organisation. Service employees with a strong prevention focus have a clear tendency to refuse creative ideas or innovation in an attempt to avoid dangerous situations. It is necessary to introduce training and development programs, led by professional counsellors, to induce such employees to develop positive attitudes and creative cognition regarding their work situation through approach-related self-regulation skills. Managers should provide developmental feedback rather than performance feedback, so that their employees do not always feel anxious about their responsibilities and are able to self-regulate with a

promotion focus. Virtual education tools using videos or other internet media that encourage service employees to bring themselves into alignment with their ideal selves can be provided to inspire them with a promotion focus that will motivate their creative ideas and innovative behaviours (e.g. Rodrigues *et al.*, 2015; Strutton *et al.*, 2009).

In addition, in some service organisations' training programs, service employees are asked to practice facial expressions and body language to perform emotional labour through surface acting. However, our findings indicate that it is necessary to encourage prevention-focused employees to choose deep acting rather than surface acting in order to weaken the indirect, negative effects that prevention focus through surface acting exerts on service employee creativity. Hence, managers should introduce training programs to teach prevention-focused employees how to use deep acting to express positive emotions (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002). Rules regarding deep acting rather than surface acting may be stated explicitly in training materials, in order to promote service employee creativity and service innovation. Because service employees' selection of emotional labour strategies tends to be influenced by their recognition in the workplace (Shin *et al.*, 2015), supervisors could communicate with prevention-focused service employees and encourage them to form a positive cognitive reappraisal of their work situation. For example, prevention-focused service employees could be encouraged to sympathise with customers or think about happy events before a service encounter. By encouraging prevention-focused employees to choose deep acting rather than surface acting, the indirect, negative effect that prevention focus through surface acting exerts on service employee creativity would then be mitigated. Because service employee creativity is central to driving service innovations, securing customer satisfaction, nurturing and stimulating customer relationships and gaining a competitive advantage (e.g. Rodrigues *et al.*, 2015; Strutton *et al.*, 2009), service organisations may benefit significantly by motivating service employee creativity through managing the employees' regulatory foci and emotional labour strategies.

Limitations

This study has the following major limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, because service employee creativity is merely the first step in the innovation process of a service organisation (Engen and Magnusson, 2015), our study explains how service employees' self-regulation for dealing with job demands affects idea generation rather than idea implementation in a service organisation. Future research should focus on the effects that different regulatory foci and emotional labour strategies exert on idea implementation in the service industry. Such research should complete our understanding of those effects on service innovation.

Second, whereas our study design used different sources for predictor variables (frontline service employees) and outcome measures (supervisors) to prevent the occurrence of common-method variance in some cases, all variables were collected with survey measures and are therefore subject to monomethod bias. In addition, alternative explanations for observed relationships may exist because of the cross-sectional design of our study. There may be ambiguity in the causal direction, for example, and emotional labour strategy may also have an important role in employee's regulatory focus in such a way that deep acting facilitates promotion focus while surface acting facilitates prevention focus. Future study should develop experimental and longitudinal research to ascertain causality of the relationships in our model.

Conclusion

To conclude, by empirically examining the effects of different regulatory foci on service employee creativity, we hope to stimulate future service innovation research to focus on the motivations for service employees' creativity and innovative behaviours from a self-regulatory

perspective. By highlighting the different emotion regulation natures of deep acting and surface acting, our study emphasises the role of emotional labour strategy as a possible mechanism for explaining the differences among service employees in their creative and innovative behaviours, that understanding should influence future research on service innovation. Finally, by offering suggestions encouraging managers to design HRM programs that support and maintain service employee creativity, we demonstrate that service innovation practices could benefit from management efforts to influence service employees' motivational orientations and emotional labour strategies.

References

- Agnihotri, R., Rapp, A.A., Andzulis, J.M. and Gabler, C.B. (2014), "Examining the drivers and performance implications of boundary spanner creativity", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 164-181.
- Amabile, T.M., Conti, R., Coon, H., Lazenby, J. and Herron, M. (1996), "Assessing the work environment for creativity", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 39 No. 5, pp. 1154-1184.
- Ashforth, B.E. (1993), "Emotional labor in service roles: the influence of identity", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 88-115.
- Baas, M., De Dreu, C.K. and Nijstad, B.A. (2011), "When prevention promotes creativity: the role of mood, regulatory focus, and regulatory closure", *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, Vol. 100 No. 5, pp. 794-809.
- Beal, D.J., Trougakos, J.P., Weiss, H.M. and Green, S.G. (2006), "Episodic processes in emotional labour: perceptions of affective delivery and regulation strategies", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 91 No. 5, pp. 1053-1065.
- Bliese, P.D. and Halverson, R.R. (1998), "Group size and measures of group-level properties: an examination of eta-squared and ICC values", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 24 No. 2, pp. 157-172.
- Brennkmeijer, V., Demerouti, E., Blanc, P.M.L. and Emmerik, I.J.H.V. (2010), "Regulatory focus at work", *Career Development International*, Vol. 15 No. 7, pp. 708-728.
- Brotheridge, C.M. and Grandey, A.A. (2002), "Emotional labour and burnout: comparing two perspectives of people work", *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, Vol. 60 No. 1, pp. 17-39.
- Brotheridge, C.M. and Lee, R.T. (2002), "Testing a conservation of resources model of the dynamics of emotional labour", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 57-67.
- Byron, K., Khazanchi, S. and Nazarian, D. (2010), "The relationship between stressors and creativity: a meta-analysis examining competing theoretical models", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 95 No. 1, pp. 201-212.
- Chang, C.P. and Chiu, J.M. (2009), "Flight attendants' emotional labor and exhaustion in the Taiwanese airline industry", *Journal of Service Science & Management*, Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 305-311.
- Chi, N.W. and Grandey, A.A. (2016), "Emotional labor predicts service performance depending on activation and inhibition regulatory fit", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 57 No. 4, pp. 1-28.
- Coelho, F.J. and Augusto, M. (2010), "Job characteristics and the creativity of frontline service employees", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 426-438.
- Coelho, F.J., Augusto, M. and Lages, L.F. (2011), "Contextual factors and the creativity of frontline employees: the mediating effects of role stress and intrinsic motivation", *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 87 No. 1, pp. 31-45.
- Coelho, F.J., Lages, C.R. and Sousa, C.M.P. (2016), "Personality and the creativity of frontline service employees: linear and curvilinear effects", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 34 No. 7, pp. 1-28.
- Crowe, E. and Higgins, E.T. (1997), "Regulatory focus and strategic inclinations: promotion and prevention in decision-making", *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes*, Vol. 69 No. 2, pp. 117-132.

- Diefendorff, J.M., Croyle, M.H. and Gosserand, R.H. (2005), "The dimensionality and antecedents of emotional labour strategies", *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, Vol. 66 No. 2, pp. 339-357.
- Eisingerich, A.B., Rubera, G. and Seifert, M. (2009), "Managing service innovation and interorganizational relationships for firm performance: to commit or diversify?", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 344-356.
- Engen, M. and Magnusson, P. (2015), "Exploring the role of front-line employees as innovators", *Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 35 No. 6, pp. 303-324.
- Fornell, C. and Larcker, D. (1981), "Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 39-50.
- Friedman, R.S. and Förster, K. (2001), "The effects of promotion and prevention cues on creativity", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 81 No. 6, pp. 1001-1013.
- Gebauer, H., Lightfoot, H.W. and Goudarzi, K. (2011), "Exploring the alignment between service strategy and service innovation", *Journal of Service Management*, Vol. 22 No. 5, pp. 664-683.
- Geng, Z., Liu, C., Liu, X. and Feng, J. (2014), "The effects of emotional labour on frontline employee creativity", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 26 No. 7, pp. 1046-1064.
- Giannopoulou, E., Gryszkiewicz, L. and Barlatier, P.J. (2014), "Creativity for service innovation: a practice-based perspective", *Journal of Service Theory & Practice*, Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 23-44.
- Gong, Y., Huang, J.C. and Farh, J.L. (2009), "Employee learning orientation, transformational leadership, and employee creativity: the mediating role of employee creative self-efficacy", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 52 No. 4, pp. 765-778.
- Grandey, A. (2000), "Emotion regulation in the workplace: a new way to conceptualize emotional labour", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 95-110.
- Grandey, A. (2003), "When 'the show must go on': surface acting and deep acting as determinants of emotional exhaustion and peer-rated service delivery", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 46 No. 1, pp. 86-96.
- Grave, S.J., Chen, H. and Daugherty, P.J. (2009), "The relationship between strategic orientation, service innovation, and performance", *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 282-300.
- Grayson, K. (1998), "Customer responses to emotional labor in discrete and relational service exchange", *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 126-154.
- Grobelna, A. (2015), "Role ambiguity: a problem or a challenge facing contemporary hospitality industry; the critical role of employees' creativity", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 77-98.
- Gross, J.J. (1998), "Antecedent-and response-focused emotion regulation: divergent consequences for experience, expression, and physiology", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 74 No. 1, pp. 224-237.
- Gross, J.J. (2009), *Handbook of Emotion Regulation*, Guilford Press, New York, NY.
- Gross, J.J. and Levenson, R.W. (1997), "Hiding feelings: the acute effects of inhibiting negative and positive emotion", *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, Vol. 106 No. 1, pp. 95-103.
- Halinen, A., Jaakkola, E. and Rusanen, H. (2014), "'Accessing resources for service innovation – the critical role of network relationships'", *Journal of Service Management*, Vol. 45 No. 1, pp. 223-225.
- Hennighthorau, T., Groth, M., Paul, M. and Gremler, D.D. (2006), "Are all smiles created equal? How emotional contagion and emotional labor affect service relationships", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 70 No. 3, pp. 58-73.
- Hertog, P.D., Aa, W.V.D. and Jong, M.W.D. (2010), "'Capabilities for managing service innovation: towards a conceptual framework'", *Journal of Service Management*, Vol. 21 No. 4, pp. 490-514.
- Higgins, E.T. (1998), "Promotion and prevention: regulatory focus as a motivational principle", *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 30 No. 3, pp. 1-46.

- Higgins, E.T., Shah, J. and Friedman, R.S. (1997), "Emotional responses to goal attainment: strength of regulatory focus as moderator", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 72 No. 3, pp. 515-525.
- Higgins, E.T., Friedman, R.S., Harlow, R.E., Idson, L.C., Ayduk, O.N. and Taylor, A. (2001), "Achievement orientations from subjective histories of success: promotion pride versus prevention pride", *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 3-23.
- Hochschild, A.R. (1983), *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feelings*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
- Hon, A.H.Y. and Lui, S.S. (2016), "Employee creativity and innovation in organizations: review, integration, and future directions for hospitality research", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 28 No. 5, pp. 862-885.
- Hon, A.H.Y., Chan, W.W.H. and Lu, L. (2013), "Overcoming work-related stress and promoting employee creativity in hotel industry: the role of task feedback from supervisor", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 416-424.
- Hu, L. and Bentler, P.M. (1999), "Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: conventional criteria versus new alternatives", *Structural Equation Modeling*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 1-55.
- Hur, W.M., Moon, T. and Jun, J.K. (2016), "The effect of workplace incivility on service employee creativity: the mediating role of emotional exhaustion and intrinsic motivation", *Journal of Services Marketing*, Vol. 30 No. 3, pp. 302-315.
- Hyosun, J. and Hyeheyun, Y. (2015), "Understanding regulatory focuses: the role of employees' regulatory focus in stress coping styles, and turnover intent to a five-star hotel", *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol. 27 No. 2, pp. 283-307.
- Jeoushyan, H., Changyen, T., Yang, T.C., Liu, C.H. and Hu, D.C. (2016), "Exploring the relationship between proactive personality, work environment and employee creativity among tourism and hospitality employees", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 54 No. 2, pp. 25-34.
- Johnson, H.A.M. and Spector, P.E. (2007), "Service with a smile: do emotional intelligence, gender, and autonomy moderate the emotional labor process?", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 319-333.
- Junghoon, L. and Chihyung, O. (2012), "Reducing burnout and enhancing job satisfaction: critical role of hotel employees' emotional intelligence and emotional labor", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 1101-1112.
- Kiffin-Petersen, S.A., Jordan, C.L. and Soutar, G.N. (2011), "The big five, emotional exhaustion and citizenship behaviors in service settings: the mediating role of emotional labor", *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 50 No. 1, pp. 43-48.
- Kraak, J.M., Holmqvist, J. and Woodside, A.G. (2017), "The authentic service employee: service employees' language use for authentic service experiences", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 72 No. 2, pp. 199-209.
- Lages, C. and Piercy, N. (2012), "Key drivers of front-line employee generation of ideas for customer service improvement", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 215-230.
- Lindquist, J. (2004), "Class affects, classroom affectations: working through the paradoxes of strategic empathy", *College English*, Vol. 67 No. 2, pp. 187-209.
- Liu, C., Liu, X. and Geng, Z. (2013), "Emotional labour strategies and service performance: the mediating role of employee creativity", *Journal of Applied Business Research*, Vol. 29 No. 5, pp. 1583-1596.
- Lockwood, P.C., Jordan, H. and Kunda, Z. (2002), "Motivation by positive or negative role models: regulatory focus determines who will best inspire us", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 83 No. 4, pp. 854-864.
- MacKinnon, D.A. (2000), "Multivariate applications in substance use research: New methods for new questions", in Rose, J.S., Chassin, L., Presson, C.C. and Sherman, S.J. (Eds), *Contrasts in Multiple Mediator Models*, Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 141-160.

- Melton, H.L. and Hartline, M.D. (2010), "Customer and frontline employee influence on new service development performance", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 411-425.
- Mumford, M.D. (2003), "Where have we been, where are we going? Taking stock in creativity research", *Creativity Research Journal*, Vol. 15 Nos 2/3, pp. 107-120.
- Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B. and Podsakoff, N.P. (2012), "Sources of method biases in social science research and recommendations on how to control it", *The Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 63 No. 1, pp. 539-569.
- Preacher, K.J. and Hayes, A.F. (2008), "Asymptotic and resampling strategies for assessing and comparing indirect effects in multiple mediator models", *Behaviour Research Methods*, Vol. 40 No. 3, pp. 879-891.
- Richards, J.M. and Gross, J.J. (2000), "Emotion regulation and memory: the cognitive costs of keeping one's cool", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 79 No. 3, pp. 410-424.
- Rodrigues, L.C.A., Coelho, F.J. and Sousa, C.M.P. (2015), "Control mechanisms and goal orientations: evidence from frontline service employees", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 49 Nos 3/4, pp. 350-371.
- Rook, L. and Knippenberg, D. (2011), "Creativity and imitation: effects of regulatory focus and creative exemplar quality", *Creativity Research Journal*, Vol. 23 No. 4, pp. 346-356.
- Sassenberg, K. and Scholl, A. (2013), "If I can do it my way the influence of regulatory focus on job-related values and job attraction", *Journal of Economic Psychology*, Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 58-70.
- Shin, I., Hur, W.M. and Oh, H. (2015), "Essential precursors and effects of employee creativity in a service context", *Career Development International*, Vol. 20 No. 7, pp. 733-752.
- Sigala, M. and Kyriakidou, O. (2015), "Creativity and innovation in the service sector", *Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 35 No. 6, pp. 297-302.
- Slatten, T., Svensson, G. and Sværi, S. (2011), "Empowering leadership and the influence of a humorous work climate on service employees' creativity and innovative behaviour in frontline service jobs", *International Journal of Quality & Service Sciences*, Vol. 3 No. 3, pp. 267-284.
- Storey, C. and Kahn, K.B. (2010), "The role of knowledge management strategies and task knowledge in stimulating service innovation", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 397-410.
- Strutton, D., Pentina, I. and Pullins, E.B. (2009), "Necessity is the mother of invention: why salesperson creativity is more important now than ever and what we can do to encourage it", *Journal of Selling and Major Accounts Management*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 20-35.
- Sundbo, J. and Gallouj, F. (2000), "Innovation as a loosely coupled system in services", *International Journal of Services Technology and Management*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 15-36.
- Tongchaiprasit, P. and Ariyabuddhiphongs, V. (2016), "Creativity and turnover intention among hotel chefs: the mediating effects of job satisfaction and job stress", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 33-40.
- Victorino, L., Verma, R., Plaschka, G. and Dev, C. (2005), "Service innovation and customer choices in the hospitality industry", *Journal of Service Theory & Practice*, Vol. 15 No. 6, pp. 555-576.
- Wang, G.P. and Netemeyer, R.G. (2004), "Salesperson creative performance: conceptualization, measurement, and nomological validity", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 57 No. 8, pp. 805-812.
- Wang, J. and Cheng, L. (2012), "The relationships among perceived quality, customer satisfaction and customer retention: an empirical research on Haidilao restaurant", *2012 Proceedings of the International Conference On Service Systems And Service Management In China, IEEE Xplore, Shanghai*, pp. 749-754.
- Zhao, X.Y. and Namasivayam, K. (2013), "The relationship of chronic regulatory focus to work-family conflict and job satisfaction", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol. 31 No. 2, pp. 458-467.

Variables	Items
Promotion focus	I focus on accomplishing job tasks that will further my advancement In general, I am focused on achieving positive outcomes in my life My work priorities are impacted by a clear picture of what I aspire to be In my work, I strive to reach my ideal self to fulfil my hopes and aspirations I often think how I will achieve success in my work
Prevention focus	I focus my attention on avoiding failure at work I often worry that I will fail to fulfil my responsibilities at work I am very careful to avoid exposing myself to potential losses at work I see myself as someone who is primarily striving to fulfil my obligations and responsibilities
Deep acting	I am focused on preventing negative events in my work I try to actually experience the emotions that I must show to customers I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display I work hard to feel the emotions that I need to show to customers
Surface acting	I work at developing the feelings inside of me that I need to show I put on an act in order to deal with customers in an appropriate way I fake a good mood when interacting with customers I put on a "show" or "performance" when interacting with customers I just pretend to have the emotions I need to display for my job I put on a "mask" in order to display the emotions I need for the job I show feelings to customers that are different from what I feel inside I fake the emotions I show when dealing with customers
Service employee creativity	This person often develops creative service packages for customers This person often uses creativity to retain customers through different means and channels This person often uses creativity to satisfy customers in different ways This person often develops novel and useful solutions to customer problems This person often suggests new procedures to deliver high-quality service This person often creates new services to satisfy customer needs This person's work is creative and practical

Table A1.
All the items of
the scales

About the authors

Zizhen Geng is an Associate Professor at the Business School of Xi'an International Studies University. Her research interests include employee creativity, service management, and service innovation. She has published in *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* and *Journal of Applied Business Research*. Zizhen Geng is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: 119256061@qq.com

Caifeng Li is a PhD Student at the School of management, Xi'an Jiaotong University. Her research interests include organisational creativity and service innovation.

Kejia Bi is a Lecturer at the Business School of Xi'an International Studies University. His research interests include innovation management and entrepreneurship.

Haiping Zheng is an Associate Professor at the Business School of Xi'an International Studies University. His research interests include organisational behaviour, human resource management and strategy management.

Xia Yang is an Associate Professor at the Business School of Xi'an International Studies University. Her research interests include innovation management and knowledge management. She has published in *South African Journal of Business Management*.

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com