The mediating role of transformational leadership in the relationship between cultural intelligence and employee voice behavior: A case of hotel employees

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ABSTRACT

This study, for the first time, evaluates the mediating effect of transformational leadership in the relationship between cultural intelligence and voice behavior. Data were collected from 316 non-national employees from various hotels in Thailand. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data. The results show that non-national employees with a higher level of cultural intelligence are more likely to display voice behaviors. Furthermore, this relationship is partially mediated by transformational leadership. This study offers a unique perspective by presenting cultural intelligence as a personal antecedent of voice behavior and by identifying the underlying mediation mechanism that affects this relationship. This investigation has important implications to manage and lead multicultural organizations, especially to promote voice behavior.

Introduction

In today's increasingly culturally-dynamic business environment, employee's proactive behaviors are critical for organization survival, adaptability, and success. Voice behavior is one such proactive work behavior that has attracted wide academic attention. Researchers have defined voice behavior as an employee's discretionary behavior of speaking out on ideas, suggestions, or concerns about work-related issues with intent to make organizational or unit improvements (Chou, Chou, Barron, & Barron, 2016). It is also observed through literature that in culturally diverse organizations, employees face numerous problems in adaptability and that they restrain from speaking up before they could adjust to the wide range of cultural situations (Jiang, Le, & Gollan, 2018; Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, & Jonsen, 2010). To effectively work in multicultural groups or organizations, employees must understand different cultural rules and norms, and behave in a culturally appropriate manner (Shah & Barker, 2017). Literature has identified cultural intelligence as an integral variable which enables employees to work efficiently in these complex environments. Cultural intelligence (CQ) is defined as "an individual's capability to function and manage effectively in cross-cultural settings" (Ang et al., 2007, p. 336). Cultural intelligent employees can overcome cultural barriers making them more comfortable in speaking up, or with engaging in voice behavior.

In service industry, frontline employees play significant role in ensuring organizational success. Frontline employees play a boundary-spanning role (Coelho, Augusto, & Lages, 2011), as the primary link between the organization and its customers (Suan & Nasurdin, 2014). They deal with many people inside and outside the organization (e.g., supervisors, coworkers, and customers) (Coelho et al., 2011). Front line employees – those service providers who have direct contact with customers (Barnes, Ponder, &

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Hopkins, 2015) spend a considerable amount of time interacting with customers (Coelho et al., 2011; Garma & Bove, 2011). According to Coelho et al. (2011), frontline service employees occupy a privileged position to collect first-hand market information and uncover customers' latent need. If they speak up and share their knowledge more frequently, this would be beneficial for organizations. Further, hospitality sector is high-contact services (Garma & Bove, 2011; Grissemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012), frontline employees play a crucial role to ensure quality service and the success of services (Garma & Bove, 2011; Jaiswal & Dhar, 2015). The frontline employees that "represent the most vital resource for a hotel, as they frequently have face-to-face contact with customers which enables them to distinguish a hotel's service delivery quality from its competitors" (Suan & Nasurdin, 2014, p. 346).

Globalization of the workplace necessitates that leaders be able to manage cross-border situations as well as the domestic context. We consider transformational leadership capable of development and communication of a compelling vision of the future in ever increasing cultural diversity and managing an organizational transformation towards it, thus acting as a mediator in the relationship between CQ and voice behavior. Transformational leadership is chosen because recent research has emphasized the importance of transformational leadership in directing employees' behaviors in culturally diverse contexts (Jung, Bass, & Sosik, 1995). Additionally, research indicates that transformational leaders display attributes that are largely fostered by cultural competencies (Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012), and transformational leadership has been consistently shown to directly drive voice behavior (Liu, Zhu, & Yang, 2010; Yuanyi & Guiyao, 2011).

No study seems to examine the relationship among CQ, transformational leadership, and voice behavior; however, some have looked at the variables in pairs. For instance, in general, the relationship between different forms of leadership and CQ has been investigated (Rockstuhl, Seiler, Ang, Van Dyne, & Annen, 2011; Solomon & Steyn, 2017), however there are limited studies that investigate the relationship between transformational leadership and CQ (Ansari, Reza, & Mahdi, 2012; Hamidianpour, Esmaeilpour, & Zarei, 2016; Lee, Veasna, & Wu, 2013). Furthermore others have examined the relationship between voice behavior and transformational leadership (Duan, Li, Xu, & Wu, 2017; Liu et al., 2010; Yuanyi & Guiyao, 2011), and a few examined the relationship between voice behavior and CQ (Jiang et al., 2018; Ryser, Angerer, Ganesh, & Schulze, 2016). This study will extend our understanding of the antecedent of employee's voice behavior by examining the role of cultural intelligence in enhancing voice behavior. Moreover, the mediating effect of transformational leadership will help us to better understand the link between cultural intelligence and voice behavior.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Cultural intelligence

The conceptualizations and definitions of CQ are fairly consistent in the literature including meta-cognitive, motivational, and behavioral aspects (Andresen & Bergdolt, 2017). Many research scholars acknowledge that CQ is the capability to adapt to diverse cultural situations (Ang et al., 2007; Chen, Lin, & Sawangpattanakul, 2011); thus, allowing an individual to function effectively in intercultural settings (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Someone high on CQ understands and acts appropriately across a wide range of cultures, as CQ is thought to be a "culture-free construct" (Crowne, 2008). Andresen and Bergdolt (2017) categorize it as a Meta-cognitive construct which is a form of knowledge and has control over cognition. Cultural intelligence which expresses the cultural competency is described by Earley and Ang (2003), as the ability of one to adapt effectively to different environments. Cultural intelligence is a set of skills that include intellectual, motivational, and behavioral components, focusing especially on solving intercultural problems. With cultural intelligence, an individual can be skilled and flexible when gaining knowledge about culture; they will have the ability to act in accordance with the cultural structure they are communicating with, to adapt to the culture and reshape his/her structure of thought accordingly. Cultural intelligence not only includes the knowledge necessary to understand cultural differences, but also strategic thoughts, fields of interests and behavioral consequences of the individual's interactions with different cultures (Presbitero & Attar, 2018). A culturally intelligent person is one who has the ability to identify the information he/she has obtained, while paying attention to his/her position and the process of judgment (Triandis, 2006).

Cultural intelligence is expressed as a multi-dimensional concept in literature (e.g., Earley & Ang, 2003; Presbitero & Attar, 2018). Ng, Van Dyne, Ang, and Ryan (2012) argue that cultural intelligence is based on four dimensions. The first dimension is metacognitive cultural intelligence which refers to the degree of cultural awareness that a person has during intercultural exchanges. Individuals who approach new cultural interactions with an open-mind and who do not hesitate to question cultural assumptions have a high level of metacognitive cultural intelligence and are consciously aware of the cultural preferences of other individuals before and during the interaction. The second dimension is cognitive cultural intelligence which reflects the knowledge of norms, practices, and contracts in different cultures from education and personal experience. It includes having knowledge about the economic, legal, socio-linguistic and interpersonal systems of different cultures and subcultures and the basic frameworks of cultural values. Individuals with cognitively high cultural intelligence understand the similarities and differences of cultures (Triandis, 2006). In this dimension, an individual should be regarded as a person who is aware of only some basic cultural differences and their effects on him/herself and others, rather than as an expert on a particular culture. Individuals with a high cognitive cultural intelligence have the ability to demonstrate the similarities and differences between cultures.

The third dimension is the motivational cultural intelligence referring to the level of desire, interest and energy of an individual to achieve intercultural adaptation. It is the ability of the individual to direct his/her attention and energy towards learning about places that vary culturally (Earley & Ang, 2003). Motivational cultural intelligence is concerned with the individual's ability to think strategically. The fourth dimension is behavioral cultural intelligence. In this dimension, cultural intelligence expresses the ability of an individual to demonstrate proper verbal and nonverbal actions while interacting with individuals from different cultures (Ang

et al., 2007). In its broadest sense, behavioral cultural intelligence is the ability of an individual to adapt his/her behavior in different cultural settings. Behavioral cultural intelligence is based on having a broad repertoire and using a series of behaviors. Behavioral dimension, as an important component of cultural intelligence, generally reflects the most prominent feature of social interactions. At the same time, non-verbal behaviors within this dimension are particularly important because they behave as a silent language that communicates their meaning in silent and discreet ways (Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Joireman, 2008).

Lin, Chen, and Song (2012) suggest that CQ is a high order mental process which aids in the application of cultural knowledge (norms, practices, and conventions of different cultural groups obtained from education and experience). This component of CQ includes actively thinking about cultural situations and actively questioning one's cultural assumptions (Nel, Nel, Adams, & De Beer, 2015). A person high on this component of CQ has the ability to revise mental models and possesses knowledge of cultural similarities and differences that allows him/her to connect old and new cultural experiences (Ang, Van Dyne, & Tan, 2011; Schlägel & Sarstedt, 2016). The CQ can be divided into two sub-dimensions based on its motivational and cultural aspects. Motivational CQ is a driving force for individuals in culturally diverse situations because it directs and motivates one's adaptation to a new cultural setting (Chen, Liu, & Portnoy, 2012). Behavioral CQ involves competently interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds, which includes utilizing a wide variety of behaviors (Presbitero & Attar, 2018). This includes the adaptation of one's tone, gestures, and body language (Deng & Gibson, 2008) as well as the appropriate use of verbal and non-verbal behaviors in a multicultural context (Chen & Lin, 2013).

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership involves inspiring others to believe in a leader's vision to achieve high levels of performance (Bass & Avolio, 1993). It is characterized by the ability of the leader to understand the organizational culture, realign it to a new vision (Chai, Hwang, & Joo, 2017), and change followers' values and self-concepts, which necessitates active emotional relationships. Thus, leaders who use this style to transform their organizations do so by challenging themselves as well as their followers to achieve success and inspire and empower others in order to help them achieve great visionary outcomes (Ross, Fitzpatrick, Click, Krouse, & Clavelle, 2014). In summary transformational leadership as an authentic leadership style encompassing innovation, creativity, individualized consideration, building trust and relationships, and rational caring (Turkel, 2014).

Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, and Fetter (1990) identified the following six key transformational leadership behaviors: (1) articulating a vision, (2) providing an appropriate model, (3) fostering the acceptance of group goals, (4) high performance expectations, (5) individualized support, (6) intellectual stimulation. Carless, Wearing, and Mann (2000) further described transformational leaders as seven behaviors are: (1) communicates a vision, (2) develops staff, (3) provides support, (4) empowers staff, (5) is innovative, (6) leads by example, and (7) is charismatic. Bass (1985) identified a set of four basic behaviors of transformational leadership style, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Individualized consideration includes providing socio – emotional support, supportive climate and new learning opportunities (Bass & Riggio, 2006), advice and feedback (Bass & Avolio, 1993), recognizes subordinate's individual differences needs and desires to help followers attain (Bass, 1997) successively higher levels of potential. Intellectual stimulation refer to leaders stimulate their followers' efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003).

Inspiration motivation relate to leaders behave in way that motivate and inspire subordinates by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' work (Bass & Riggio, 2006), and articulates and compelling a visions (Avolio & Bass, 2004). Idealized influences (attributed and behavioral) as charismatic describes leaders who usually have high standards of moral and ethical conduct (Northouse, 2015), they are centered on values, beliefs, and a sense of mission (Antonakis et al., 2003), therefore, they are admired, respected, and trusted (Avolio & Bass, 2004).

Voice behavior

Voice behavior refers to suggestion of creative ideas, directions, opinions, and thoughts and then persuading people in organizations to accept and implement these constructive suggestions (Ng & Feldman, 2012). Aryee, Walumbwa, Mondejar, and Chu (2017) propose that to maintain continuous growth and sustainable development, organizations need to augment employee voice behavior. It can help organizations to improve decision making processes, and quality of products and services. Raising voice about important issues and problems, and then suggesting solutions to address the potential threats would make organizational systems more effective. However, the transformational aspects of voice also involves risk because of uncertainty associated with the suggested change (Detert & Burris, 2007; Liu & Liu, 2017; Morrison, 2011; Snape & Redman, 2010). Even if an idea is highly constructive, the success of the idea depends on multiple challenges such as resistance from others inside the organization, status-quo, uncertain forces outside the control of an individual or organization, and lack of commitment and trust from the top management (Aryee et al., 2017).

These challenges are further aggravated if voice behavior triggers conflicts and unacceptance from co-workers. Therefore, voice is a rather complex phenomenon, especially in multicultural work environments where values, beliefs, opinions, experiences, and attitudes of individuals vary quite considerably. To engage in voice behaviors in such multicultural settings, individuals should consider situations of discomfort, non-conformity, dissent, and stress more often due to cultural barriers. Lack of trust on each other where employees belong to varied cultural backgrounds may further alleviate the risk and stress of engaging in voice behaviors (Ng & Feldman, 2012). If an employee has important idea or information to share with others, he/she might consider it risky and stressful due to lack of understanding of others' cultures, preferences, and opinions about change orientation processes (Chou et al., 2016).

Cultural intelligence and voice behavior

People with greater cultural intelligence are expected to handle problems more effectively in diverse cultural situations due to superior competence in detection, assimilation, and reasoning correctly (Ang et al., 2007). In a multicultural workplace with immense workforce diversity, if an employee possesses higher cultural intelligence, he/she is better able to gather and manipulate information, generate emotive, behavioral, or cognitive actions towards cultural cues (Chao, Takeuchi, & Farh, 2017; Jyoti & Kour, 2015). Building on this argument, cultural intelligence facilitates initiation of positive relationships with others. Therefore, culturally intelligent individuals develop trust on each other to share new and novel ideas and as a consequence they may speak up more often (Ansari et al., 2012). They know that in order to actually realize an idea, they need to build social support in favor of the idea. In doing so, they try to minimize others' doubts, fears, and uncertainties associated with change-oriented ideas. They have to speak up quite extensively to gather social support in truly implementing a new idea.

Johnson, Lenartowicz, and Apud (2006) further suggest that culturally intelligent employees perform better in organizations with diverse workforce due to their ability to understand others' cultural ideologies and thus acting in accordance with the expectations of coworkers. They also know well what to say, when to say, and how to say by having an understanding of cultural signs that others use in their work settings. For example, if an employee possesses greater level of cultural intelligence, s/he may be more informal in communicating with a coworker from Western culture. In multicultural work contexts, an individual with higher CQ recognizes the appropriate time and ways to propose new ideas and suggestions, and understand cultural schemas more accurately (Ang et al., 2007). They know when and how to apply these schemas, and direct themselves to continuously learn new cultural rules, and flex their verbal and non-verbal behaviors to cater to cultural needs. While communicating with Asian culture employees, one has to take care of schemas such as speaking softly, sharing information face to face, disseminating meeting agendas in advance for their prior preparation, overcoming their pessimism by setting collective goals ahead of personal goals, and helping them to speak up by addressing their fears and uncertainties (Lee & Sukoco, 2010). A positive association between CQ and discretionary, non-obligatory, and organizational citizenship behaviors is already established in literature (Rockstuhl, Ang, Ng, Lievens, & Van Dyne, 2015). A person who knows cultural diversities of workers from various cultures would always feel comfortable in helping others and taking care of their needs and wants. If an employee from one culture does not understand a new entrant from another culture, s/he would feel shy and reluctant to extend help during orientation phase because of lack of understanding of culture, preferences, and values of the coworker. Building on the above theoretical bases and the existing empirical hints, we propose:

Hypothesis 1. Cultural intelligence is positively related to voice behavior.

The mediating role of transformational leadership

Researchers have found CQ to be related to leadership (Jiang et al., 2018; Rockstuhl et al., 2011; Solomon & Steyn, 2017) and have found that social skills are important for effective leadership. With respect to transformational leadership and CQ, scant research has been conducted. The few studies conducted did find some relationships; for example, Keung and Szapkiw (2013) found a significant positive relationship between CQ and transformational leadership in a study of international school leaders. Box, Converso, and Osayamwen (2015) did find a correlation between the subcomponents of CQ and transformational leadership in managers from two Fortune 500 companies.

A key component of CQ is an individual's ability to engage in adaptive action (Trevarthen, 2009). Therefore, the skills of CQ which include the ability to adopt behaviors and to read and understand cultural cues displayed by others most likely contribute to individual's transformational leadership skills because a transformational leader has the ability to understand the organizational culture. If a transformational leader understands an organizational culture he/she may also have skills to understand other cultural differences, such as national cultures.

Additionally, transformational leaders challenge themselves, hence they may have the motivation to explore new cultures as interacting in a new culture is often a challenge. Transformational leaders give individualized consideration to others (Vasilagos, Polychroniou, & Maroudas, 2017) and in order to treat employees individually and considerately, they need to understand intercultural differences, which is an aspect of CQ. Cultural intelligence involves knowledge of cultural similarities and differences and thinking about cultural situations and questioning assumptions that would likely to be useful when understanding an organizational culture which is a skill of transformational leaders (Bass, 1999). CQ is also the desire to adapt to a new cultural setting, as well as an interest in novel settings. Transformational leaders are also driving toward a new vision; thus this would involve changing the organization and culture in the organization. CQ involves understanding when and how to appropriately act in diverse settings, which likely seems a skill related to a transformational leaders' ability to inspire others as every individual is inspired differently and thus a transformational leader will need to modify his/her behavior to be effective.

Transformational leaders intellectually stimulate their employees' to explore opportunities, challenge status quo, and view old problems from new perspectives. Detert and Burris (2007) indicate that transformational leaders nurture their employees' psychological safety, or a belief that engaging in risk-taking behaviors wouldn't lead to personal harms, thus alleviating negative concerns about speaking up, which in turn motivates employees' voice behavior. Duan et al. (2017) posit that employees under transformational leaders have more leeway in communicating new ideas due to a higher level of trust and social exchange. Inspirational motivation (another component of transformational leadership) would provide help to followers to understand collective vision of the organization and while pursuing the collective goal, frequent interactions may start to occur among employees. It is the inspiration that a transformational leader provides to strive for the common joint meaning and cause, and all members of the group start to share

suggestions for that common vision. Furthermore, through individualized consideration and idealized influence, transformational leaders emphasize on employees' personal development, and take care of their needs and aspirations, resulting in greater trust and self-efficacy. Employees become more willing to take risks to voice their thoughts and become less worried about failures when they find support, encouragement, and trust from their leaders (Martin, Guillaume, Thomas, Lee, & Epitropaki, 2016). Based on these arguments and research findings, we propose that there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership and voice behavior.

CQ facilitates employees' psychological reflection of social exchange norms, leading to a greater tendency to maintain better relationships with leaders, specifically in culturally diverse settings. Researchers contend that individuals with higher CQ usually benefit from mental capabilities that drive their psychological processes in appreciating relationship phenomena in intercultural workplaces. Since the attributes (e.g., personal obligations and trust) and norms (e.g., norms of reciprocity) underlying social exchange tend to vary across cultural groups (Le, Jiang, & Nielsen, 2016), the establishment of quality exchange relationships may require employees to mentally process and effectively digest these attributes and norms. For instance, employees with higher CQ, due to their sensitive mental process in handling cultural cues (Ang et al., 2007), may better be able to understand essential elements of social exchange (e.g., the prerequisites of trust and reciprocity, Blau, 1964) that are critical for transformational leaders in a different culture. This understanding may equip them with self-efficacy in relationship building in a multicultural workplace and subsequently generate a greater likelihood of actively pursuing quality relationships.

As discussed above, voice behaviors may challenge the status quo, involve personal risks and costs, and cause stress. These characteristics might make many employees who experienced cultural barriers, reluctant to speak up. Under transformational leaders, employees have high levels of trust in and understanding of their supervisors, which can drive them to express ideas freely and openly with less concern about being misunderstood or criticized. For example, Duan et al. (2017) indicated that transformational leadership enables employees to obtain more opportunities, and use more communication channels, to speak up and exchange information or ideas informally with supervisors. Having more informal communications and exchanges with the supervisor, employees usually benefit more from their supervisors' support and responsiveness at work (Fix & Sias, 2006) and is important for employees, because of potential cultural obstacles, who may need more of such support from their supervisors before engaging in voice behaviors. The proposed model is presented in Fig. 1. On the basis of above arguments, we propose:

Hypothesis 2. Employees' cultural intelligence is positively related to transformational leadership.

Hypothesis 3. Transformational leadership is positively related to employees' voice behavior.

Hypothesis 4. Transformational leadership mediates the relationship between cultural intelligence and their voice behavior.

Methods

Sample

The participants of the current study were non-national employees from hotels in Thailand, working in culturally heterogeneous groups requiring cross-cultural interactions. The sample of the study consisted of frontline service employees from front office (FO), and customer–contact employees (housekeeping, food and beverage (F&B), restaurant, gym, sale). We contacted the HR representatives of various hotels in Bangkok Thailand, who provided us with the data about such employees. In total, 470 employees were distributed a questionnaire and 327 responses were recorded. 11 of the completed questionnaires had missing values so we had 316 usable responses on which analysis was performed. The mean age of the final sample was 36.8 (SD = 8.2). Of the participants, 57% had graduation degree; 51% were from Asian countries, 26% from European countries, 13% from Australia, and 10% from the African region. On average, these respondents had lived in Thailand for 6.2 years (SD = 2.05). They had a mean tenure of 3.84 years (SD = 1.02) in their current organizations, with 35.7% working in large organizations (250 or more staff), 46.3% in medium organizations (20–249 staff), and others in small organizations (fewer than 20 staff). As for cross-cultural interactions in the workplace, these employees indicated that they "sometimes" (6.4%), "most of the time" (31.7%), or "always" (61.9%) interacted with people with cultural backgrounds that differed from their own. Of the 316 respondents, 35% were male, and 65% were females. Nearly 60 percent of the respondents is younger than age 30. Finally, regarding education level, approximately 38% had bachelor degrees, about 34% had college – level degrees, 22% had vocational level, and 6% had high school diplomas.
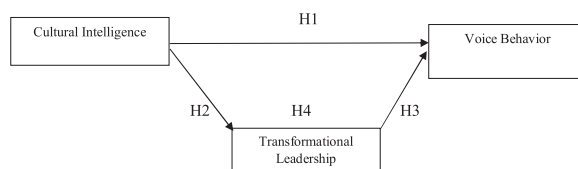

Fig. 1. Proposed Model.

Measures

Cultural intelligence

A measure of cultural intelligence developed by Ang, Van Dyne, Koh, and Ng (2004) and later validated by Ang, Van Dyne, and Koh (2006) was used for this study. This scale contains twenty items that assess cultural intelligence in terms of four items of metacognitive (e.g., *"I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures"*), six items for cognitive (e.g., *"I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of other cultures"*), five items for motivational (e.g., *"I am sure I can deal with the stresses of adjusting to a culture that is new to me"*) and five items for behavioral dimensions (e.g., *"I use pause and silence differently to suit different cross-cultural situations"*). Participants were asked to respond to the statements on a 5- point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Voice behavior

This variable was measured employing Van Dyne and LePine (1998) six-item scale (e.g., *"I speak up with new ideas for new projects or changes in procedures"*). This scale has been popularly used by researchers (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009; Hsiung, 2012) and mainly assesses voice from the promotive perspective (e.g., the expression of new ideas for unit and organizational improvements) and emphasizes the transformational aspects (e.g., the initiation of changes) of voice (Liang, Farh, & Farh, 2012; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998).

Transformational leadership

This scale was assessed using a modified version of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Avolio, Bass, and Jung (1999). For this study, only 16 items from transformational and developmental exchange were selected and the wording was slightly modified so that it would be a self-evaluation and relevant to the study population. The participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Results

Since the data was collected from the same respondents and at the same time, the potential influence of common method bias was also examined. We estimated a measurement model in which indicators were allowed to load on their theoretical construct and a common factor. The fit of this model was very good (χ2 (df = 132) = 256.739, CFI = 0.964, RMSEA = 0.036 and TLI = 0.975). However, more importantly, the variance extracted by the common factor was 0.284, which is lower than the 0.50 criterion suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) as indicative of the presence of a substantive construct. Thus, common method bias did not seem to be an issue in this study.

We tested the measurement model for the three study variables using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in AMOS 22 before hypothesis testing. We conducted CFA test and the results show that our three-factor baseline model displayed an acceptable model fit (λ^2 [182] = 334.74, λ^2/df = 1.83, CFI = .97, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .05), and yielded a better model fit than the alternative models, including a three two-factor models (any two of the three variables were combined), a one-factor model (all items/indicators of the three variables were loaded onto one factor), and a null model. The results from CFA supported the discriminant validity of the measurement model, suggesting that the three study variables could be treated as three distinct constructs. The reliability of the scales was evaluated through two normal indicators: Bagozzi and Yi (1988) composite reliability index and Fornell and Larcker (1981) average variance extracted index. Composite reliability of all constructs range from 0.81 to 0.92 are above the minimum acceptable value 0.6 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Meanwhile, all the average variance extracted values from 0.52 to 0.63, are excess of the 0.5 recommended threshold (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998; Nunnally, 1978). All these results imply that the conditions for reliability are fulfilled for the constructs. Moreover, all estimated loadings of the indicators are greater than 0.5 (ranging from 0.695 to 0.837), and is significant (t-value > 1.96; p < .05), thus indicating acceptabl83convergent validity for all measures (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

The CFA results (see Table 1) showed that the one-factor model did not fit the data adequately (λ^2[df = 198] = 2012.33, λ^2/df = 10.16, SRMR = 0.18, RMSEA = 0.20, CFI = 0.59), suggesting that CMV might not be a significant issue in our study. Despite the identical observed items for both models, the three-factor model cannot be nested within the model with a method factor, thus the change in CFI was used for comparison. Since the CFI change was 0.04, which is smaller than the rule of thumb of 0.05 proposed by

Table 1
Model fit indices.

Models	λ^2	df	λ^2/df	SRMR	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
Null model	3218.73	218	14.76				
One-factor	2012.33	198	10.16	0.18	0.20	0.59	0.54
Two-factor (CQ and voice behavior combined)	1147.73	197	5.82	0.13	0.13	0.84	0.81
Two-factor (CQ and transformational leadership combined)	983.82	197	4.99	0.15	0.16	0.62	0.61
Two-factor (Transformational leadership and voice behavior combined)	768.95	197	3.90	0.11	0.12	0.82	0.79
Three-factor with a method factor	334.74	182	1.83	0.04	0.05	0.97	0.96
Three-factor (baseline model)	478.28	195	2.45	0.06	0.07	0.93	0.91

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics, Correlations, and Reliabilities.

	Variables	Mean (SD)	α	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Cultural intelligence	3.76(.41)	.88	1									
2	Transformational leadership	3.71(.53)	.86	.34**	1								
3	Voice behavior	3.78(.38)	.91	.38*	.48***	1							
4	Age	36.8(8.2)		.13*	.05	.11**	1						
5	Gender	.41(.48)		.03	.05	.03	.04	1					
6	Education	4.01(.72)		.21**	.18*	.15*	.05	.02	1				
7	Nationality	.62(.45)		.06	.02	.03	.05	.04	.08	1			
8	Length of residence	6.2(2.05)		.16*	.02	.03	.04	.05	.03	.05	1		
9	Tenure	3.84(1.02)		.13**	.08	.17*	.02	.03	.04	.02	.12**	1	
10	Organizational size	5.94(1.82)		.03	.02	.02	.04	.05	.03	.04	.03	.05	1

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

*** p < .001.

Bagozzi and Yi (1988), the influence of the method factor could be regarded as not significant. In addition, although the method factor slightly increased the model fit, the explanatory power of this factor accounted for only 19.28% of the method variance, which is less than 25%–40% that prior scholars suggested and observed to be reasonable (Williams, Cote, & Buckley, 1989). These analyses indicated that CMV was less likely to severely distort our results.

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations of study variables. CQ, transformational leadership, and voice behavior were significantly and positively correlated, providing initial support for our hypotheses. Following the approach used in recent research, structural models were computed to test hypotheses. The mediation relationship was tested using the methodology proposed by Mathieu and Taylor (2006). We first tested a model containing a direct path from CQ to voice behavior, without the presence of the mediator (i.e., transformational leadership). This model fit the data well (λ^2 [df = 174] = 294.24, λ^2/df = 1.69, SRMR = 0.04, RMSEA = 0.05, CFI = 0.96). CQ was positively related to voice behavior (β = 0.48, p < 0.001), supporting Hypothesis 1. We then examined the effect of CQ on transformational leadership (hypothesis 2), the effect of transformational leadership on voice behavior (hypothesis 3), and the mediating role of transformational leadership in the CQ-voice behavior relationship (Hypothesis 4). We compared the full mediation model with the partial mediation model. Fit statistics (see Table 3) demonstrated that the partial mediation model was the better model ($\Delta\chi$ 2 = 65.48, Δdf = 1, p < 0.001). The values of λ^2/df, SRMR, and RMSEA met the cut-offs and were smaller for the partial mediation model than for the full mediation model. The CFI value for the partial mediation model was above the threshold of 0.90 and was greater than that for the full mediation model.

The SEM results demonstrated that CQ significantly and directly predicted transformational leadership (β = 0.33, p < 0.001), supporting Hypothesis 2. Transformational leadership positively predicted voice behavior (β = 0.35, p < 0.001), supporting Hypothesis 3. Additionally, the indirect effect of CQ on voice behavior via transformational leadership (β = 0.13, Boot SE = 0.04, Boot 95% bias-corrected CI = [0.03, 0.22]) that was obtained in AMOS 22 (5000 bootstrap samples) was statistically significant. These SEM results confirmed our mediation hypothesis that the effect of CQ on voice behavior could be mediated by transformational leadership. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported. The SEM results verified that this mediation is a partial rather than a full mediation, with the coefficient for the direct path from CQ to voice behavior still being statistically significant (β = 0.38, p < 0.001).

Discussion

This study shows that employees with higher CQ engage in voice behavior s more often and that this relationship is mediated by their immediate supervisor's transformational leadership characteristics. Our findings are consistent with prior research showing that cultural intelligence contributes to employees' positive outcomes such as discretionary behaviors (Ang et al., 2007) and organizational citizenship behaviors (Chen et al., 2011), which share certain commonalities (e.g., the nature of benefiting the organization) with voice behavior (LePine & Van Dyne, 2001). CQ fosters working relationships among employees and make them comfortable with each other so that they can freely exchange ideas and suggest new and novel ways to improve organizational products, services, and

Table 3

Fit indexes for structural models.

Fit indexes	Full mediation model	Partial mediation model
λ^2	686.76	621.28
Df	354	353
λ^2/df	1.94	1.76
SRMR	0.056	0.042
RMSEA	0.057	0.052
CFI	0.91	0.95
TLI	0.90	0.94

processes (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009). Due to better working relationships, employees trust each other and start to raise their voice because they know that others would understand their voice behaviors.

Theoretical contributions of this study are manifold. To begin with, as a pioneer study to introduce cultural intelligence as an antecedent of employee voice behavior, the present research contributes to the current literature by confirming the role cultural intelligence plays in motivating employees to speak up about organizational products, services, and processes. Our study has identified a relatively new individual factor (i.e., CQ) that can explain employees' tendency to engage in voice behavior in a multicultural work setting. This factor extends beyond the common individual factors (e.g., personality, job status, and demographics) reported previously in the literature (Morrison, 2011; Ott & Michailova, 2018) to focus specifically on employee competence in dealing with intercultural interactions. This examination of CQ also partially answers calls for the study of voice behavior from cultural perspectives (e.g. Loi, Ao, & Xu, 2014; Morrison, 2014). Our findings are consistent with Rockstuhl et al. (2015), who indicate that individuals' abilities of effectively functioning in intercultural work settings are associated with various types of discretionary and non-obligatory behaviors, including voice behavior. Furthermore, this study addresses call from Chou and Barron (2016) study who proposed that in multicultural work contexts, employees may raise their voice if they understand others' cultures better and leaders can play effective role in further explaining this relationship.

The present study has revealed the mechanism or process through which CQ influences employees' voice behavior. The revealed mechanism, highlighting the role of transformational leadership characteristics, has contributed to our knowledge of why cultural competence can help employees to speak up. Prior studies have shown evidence that transformational leadership characteristics affect employees' voice intention and behavior (e.g. Parker & Wu, 2014; Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010). Additionally, transformational leadership allows employees to trust each other and engage in sharing knowledge and raising voice. Through individualized consideration, transformational leaders inspire followers to learn cultures, values, and beliefs of others, thus, making them adept in understanding cultural schemas of fellow coworkers.

Practical implications for human resource management

This study has important implications for HR practices in multicultural workplaces involving employees. First, managers should value the benefits that employees' CQ may bring to the organization or workgroup. In agreement with past research, which points out that the leaders or HR managers themselves should improve their cultural intelligence in order to effectively manage multicultural groups (e.g. McComas, 2014; Rockstuhl et al., 2011), our study implies that it is also important to develop the cultural intelligence of the general staff. This is especially relevant in hospitality industry as employees have to interact with guests and co-workers having diverse cultural backgrounds. It is important to thus understand what values, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions different people hold and how to effectively engage in raising voice without creating conflict or unacceptability from others (Chen et al., 2012). Managers need to embody transformational leadership qualities and styles. Example, a leader who engender emotion and identification (Elkins & Keller, 2003), articulates a compelling vision for the future, encourage a two-way exchange in communication, build a secure climate, provide coaching, support, and resources. Our results suggest that to enhance employees' voice behavior, HR managers should design training to involve real and direct interactions between the supervisor and employees to foster better relationships, which may potentially encourage them to speak up in the session and later in their actual work (Van Dyne et al., 2008). It is important to understand that a supervisor's transformational leadership mediate the relationship between an employee's CQ and voice behavior and supervisors should be trained to display more transformational attributes such as building trust, showing individualized consideration, and inspiring them to speak up without fear.

Limitations

Although this study adds value to the literature, it is limited in certain ways. The surveys were self-report based, although social desirability was assessed to minimize this limitation. This study was also cross-sectional, so causality could not truly be determined. Thus, future researchers should expand on this study by examining the relationships in a longitudinal study in order to determine causality. Furthermore, a convenience sample was used to conduct the study; therefore, this study may not be generalizable to other populations. However, the sample was fairly large. In addition, there may be other important mediation mechanisms to explain the CQ-voice behavior relationship. Future research could include additional mediators, such as leader-member exchange and empowering leadership to further explain the link between cultural intelligence and voice behavior. There may be some value in examining the subcomponents of meta-cognitive CQ, cognitive CQ, motivational CQ, and behavioral CQ with respect to leadership and voice behavior in the future.

To conclude, this study found that there is a positive relationship between cultural intelligence and employees' voice behavior. Moreover, transformational leadership mediated the link between cultural intelligence and employees' voice behavior.

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