# Employee Innovation in the Hospitality Industry: the Mediating Role of Psychological Safety

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## Abstract

In the current turbulent and highly competitive environment, innovation can be considered a strategic weapon that enables hotels to survive, compete, and succeed. Innovation has been advocated to enhance hotels' products, services, productions, processes, and overall performance. Innovation activities can take place as a result of employees' behaviour, hence there is a call for greater attention to employees, in order to enhance hotel performance. Since innovation activities may involve uncertainty and risk, it is crucial to understand what makes employees feel safe, also referred to in literature as psychological safety, and encouraged to engage in the innovative behaviour.

This conceptual paper presents an exploration of the factors that could encourage employee innovation in the hospitality industry. This relationship is supposedly mediated by psychological safety of the employees. The model propose seven essential elements that can promote innovative behaviour in the hospitality industry. Support and motivation from the management, high-quality relationships amongst members at work, autonomy, role expectation, and proactive personality, as an interpersonal trait, are all proposed to be positively associated with psychological safety and employee innovation, whereas openness to experiences and challenges at work are suggested to be positively associated only with

employee innovation. Thus, understanding what promotes innovative behaviour will help hoteliers to cultivate and encourage the innovative behaviour amongst hotels' employees, which can, in turn, enhance hotels' services quality and performance.

**Key words:** employee innovation, psychological safety, hospitality Industry.

**Introduction**

The nature of the hospitality sector is changing continuously. Due to globalisation, technological advancement, and the continuous change of customers' preferences and expectations, hotels are under pressure to be innovative and improve their products and services continuously to meet and exceed guests' expectations. Therefore, providing the same products and services in the same method will not satisfy customers in the long term (Ko 2015) because what is considered new and innovative today will be something customary after a while. Thus, hotels consider innovation an important strategy to face the growing competition and a strategic weapon for success (Al-Ababneh 2015).

Supporting employees' innovative behaviour is an essential step toward improving an organisation's innovativeness and leading to long-term success, especially for the service sector ( Li et al. 2016). As the hospitality industry is highly dependent on human resources in its operations, these resources can be a source of competitive advantages particularly if they are encouraged to engage in innovative behaviours. Thus, encouraging employee innovation can enhance hotels' operations (Orfila-Sintes and Mattsson 2009), service quality and customer satisfaction (Pivcevic and Petric 2011), customer retention, and hotels' financial performance (Grissemann et al. 2013). However, suggesting or implementing new idea in the workplace such as proposing new product or services, changing the current work procedures, or doing things in a good and new ways can involve a high level of uncertainty and risk (Kark and Carmeli 2009). The notion that a large number of new innovations fail and do not last for long

(Carmeli et al. 2014; Liu et al. 2016) makes employees tentative of showing innovative behaviour. Therefore, it is essential to understand what makes employees feel safe, also described as psychological safety in the literature, and motivated to engage in innovative behaviour at work.

Psychological safety has been defined as a shared perception amongst organisation's members that showing behaviours such as speaking up, asking questions, providing feedback, or suggesting new ideas will not be seen negatively by others, and there are no negative consequences of such behaviours (Edmondson 1999; 2004). In the hospitality industry, little research had been conducted to understand what encourages employee innovation and the links to psychological safety. This paper aims to discuss and propose a conceptual framework of the factors that could encourage employee innovation in the hotel industry with the mediating role of psychological safety. Therefore, this paper firstly provides an overview of innovation in the hotel industry and the relationship between employee innovation and psychological safety in the workplace. This is followed by a proposed conceptual model that could encourage employees to engage in innovative behaviour in the hospitality industry with the mediating role of psychological safety. Finally, it presents a conclusion and recommendation for future research.

**Innovation in the Hotel Industry**    (Almost changed all this section)

At the present, the success of most organisations depends on their ability to innovate (Self et al. 2010). Innovation is considered a vital element that can enhance organisations' performance and lead to long-term survival (Campo et al. 2014). The term innovation originates from the Latin word '*innovare',* which means making something new (Sarri et al. 2010). People often have a different understanding of what innovation means, and usually, cannot distinguish it from creativity (Tidd and Bessant 2013). In fact, creativity and innovation are sometimes used

interchangeably and seem as one term for many people (Al-Ababneh 2015). Therefore, it is important to distinguish the two terms. Creativity has been defined as 'the development of ideas about products, practices, services, or procedures that are (a) novel and (b) potentially useful to the organisation' (Shalley et al. 2004: 934). On the other hand, innovation has been defined as 'a process of turning opportunities into new ideas and of putting these into widely used practice' (Tidd and Bessant 2009: 16). In addition, innovative ideas can be generated either by oneself or can be adopted from others, while creative behaviour can be seen as a component of innovative behaviour (Yuan and Woodman, 2010). Thus, it can be comprehended that creativity is about generating new and novel ideas, while innovation involves generating and implementing of creative ideas successfully (Hammond et al. 2011; Shalley et al. 2004).

Innovation in hotels can range from radical to incremental innovation. Radical innovation through the introduction of new products or services to the market, whereas incremental innovation involves the improvement or modification of the current service such as the shift from using keys to swiping cards, or adding value to current service via adding novel facilities such as serviced apartments (Al-Ababneh 2015; Ottenbacher and Gnoth 2005). In addition, innovation in the hotel industry can take several forms such as new product or service development, enhancing customer service, and the continuous improvement of products, services, processes, and work procedures (Wong and Pang 2003). Furthermore, other researchers such as Victorino et al. (2005) classified innovation in the hotel sector into three clusters: innovation regarding the hotel type such as the evolution of new hotels' classifications such as boutique hotels, innovation regarding service design, and innovation about employing the technology to enhance guests' experiences.

Innovation can be considered an essential factor for hotels to compete and succeed (Chen 2011). One of the crucial benefits of successful innovation for hotels is gaining a competitive advantage (Ottenbacher and Gnoth 2005). Thus, innovation is considered a major element that

can improve hotels' operations (Wong and Ladkin 2008), and enhance hotel's performance (Grissemann et al. 2013). These and many other benefits of innovation have motivated researchers to explore the determinants of innovation in the hotel sector. For example, in a survey study that was conducted at one of the tourist destinations in Spain, Martĺnez-Ros and Orfila-Sintes (2009) found that the form of the hotel management, the hotel market strategy and the hotel location and size are three main determinants of innovation activities in the hotel sector. Furthermore, following the work of Ottenbacher and Gnoth (2005), that identified what encourages successful service innovation, and drawing on the literature of hospitality innovation, Orfila-Sintes and Mattsson (2009) developed and tested a model of the essential determinants of innovative behaviour in the hotel industry and their influence on performance. The results verified the model and confirmed that innovation determinants such as providing additional services, being a part of a hotel chain (for the hotel), booking through tour operator, and managing the hotel by the owner can influence the four types of innovation: management, external communication, service scope, and back-office innovation, which, in turn, can improve the hotel performance in term of occupancy rate.

Developing new services in the hotel industry need the involvement of the front-line employees as they are in a direct contact with guests and acknowledge their needs and wants (Orfila-Sintes and Mattsson 2009). In fact, employees at the front-lines can have a clear vision about opportunities of change and improvement at work, sometimes better than top management (Carmeli and Spreitzer 2009). Thus, as the service quality depends mainly on the employees who provide it, employees' participation is crucial to the success of innovation in this sector (Chang et al. 2011), particularly as their contribution has been found improving service quality and customer satisfaction (Pivcevic and Petric 2011). Researchers such as Kattara and El-Said (2013), and Wong and Ladkin (2008) found that the innovative ideas that have been suggested by employees have improved the quality of hotels services. Therefore, it is important to

encourage hotels' employees to engage in innovative behaviours to increase hotel innovativeness.

Despite the high importance of innovation to the hotel sector, it has received little attention from scholars especially in relation to employee innovation (Al-Ababneh 2015; Ko 2015; Ottenbacher 2007). This lack of attention perhaps refers to the belief that creativity and innovation are generally linked to artistic industries such as painting, fiction writing, or music composing (Al-Ababneh 2015), or might also be linked to the belief that innovation is related only to industrial and technological industries such as automobiles, airplanes, phones and electrical devices. In addition, the main interest of hotels, historically, is to provide lodging service to travellers such as food and accommodation (Wong and Ladkin 2008), which might make people think that hotels focus merely on these main activities to satisfy customers' needs instead of innovation. Therefore, there is a call for more studies on innovation in the hotel industry, particularly employee innovation (e.g. Chen 2011; Grissemann et al. 2013; Ko 2015).

**Employee Innovation and Psychological Safety**

Employee innovative behaviour is considered an essential factor that can enhance an organisation performance and lead to long-term survival (Campo et al. 2014). The terms 'employee innovation', 'employee's innovative behaviour', and 'employee innovativeness' are often used interchangeably in the literature. Thus, employee innovation is a behaviour aims to develop new products, services, improves work process, or a combination of these, and may lead to a reduction in costs (Åmo 2005).

Innovative behaviour is considered a complex behaviour, and several researchers have considered it consists of two phases: introduction or generation of novel ideas, and idea implementation (Hammond et al. 2011; Janssen 2000; Scott and Bruce 1994; Shalley et al. 2004; Yuan and Woodman 2010). Idea generation involves the development or adoption of

ideas that can solve work problems or can make a positive change in the work environment, whereas implementation is the conversion of these ideas into actions (Yuan and Woodman, 2010). However, other researchers such as Janssen (2005), Slåtten and Mehmetoglu (2011), and Al-Ababneh (2015) suggested that employee innovation comprises of three phases: First, employee's innovation starts with problem recognition and the creating or adopting of novel ideas. Then, the innovative employee seeks support and tries to promote his or her ideas. At the final stage of innovation, the employee tries to make the idea productive and usable by producing a model or prototype that can be experienced and used at work. However, in the hotel industry, various studies have suggested that the boundaries between these stages are indistinct and using unidimensional construct is more sufficient (Li and Hsu 2016; MartÍnez-Ros and Orfila-Sintes 2009). Thus, drawing on the works of Janssen (2000); Scott and Bruce (1994) and Yuan and Woodman (2010), employee innovation in this study is defined as an employee's deliberate behaviour to generate and/or implement new and creative ideas into his or her workplace that can improve work or solve problem.

The importance of employee innovation has been confirmed in the hotel sector (Al-Ababneh 2015; Grissemann et al. 2013; Liu et al. 2016), therefore, investing in human resources can be one of the strategies to promote innovation in this industry. In fact, encouraging people to engage in innovative activities can occur through establishing a non-threatening environment that supports new ideas, knowledge sharing, and makes people comfortable to take risks (Gilson and Shalley 2004). Such environments are described in the literature as psychologically safe working environments. According to Kahn (1990: 705), psychological safety is a 'sense of being able to show and employ self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career'. Several researchers such as Frazier (2016), Kark and Carmeli (2009), Vinarski-Peretz and Carmeli (2011) and Yuan and Woodman (2010) have confirmed the importance of psychological safety in promoting employee engagement in their roles, and more

importantly improving their engagement in innovative behaviour. Thus, psychological safety encourages individuals to speak up, give suggestions, and do things in a new and a good way without fearing of negative repercussions (Muna Ibrahim and Zhang 2015; Edmondson and Lei 2014). Moreover, psychological safety improves knowledge sharing and learning in organisations (Edmondson 1999, 2004; Edmondson & Lei 2014) and encourages employees to discuss errors that occur at work (Frese and Keith 2015). Therefore, in this study psychological safety is considered a vital element that works as a mediator to contribute towards employee innovative behaviour.

**The proposed model**

The significant role of innovative behaviour for organisations has encouraged several researchers to explore what encourages and enhances employees' initiatives. Thus, several authors tried to develop models of innovative behaviour determinants in the work environment. Åmo (2005), categorised the factors that influence employee innovation into two categories: organisational contextual factors and employees' interpersonal factors. Firstly, interpersonal factors' influences on innovative behaviour have been studied by several authors. For example, personality traits such as being proactive (Åmo 2005; Seibert et al. 2001), and openness to experience has been found positively associated with employees' innovative behaviour (Batey and Furnham 2006; Hammond et al. 2011; Yesil and Sozbilir 2013). Furthermore, Janssen (2000), suggested that employees with high educational level demonstrate more innovative behaviour than others. However, individual factors alone do not promote employee innovation, yet, employees' expectations about the benefits and risk of innovative behaviour have a more significant influence (Yuan and Woodman 2010). Furthermore, using a survey method to examine the influence of environmental factors (e.g. support for innovation, participative safety), and proactive personality on employee innovation in international hotels in Taiwan, Chen (2011) found that the influence of environmental factors on employee innovation is

greater than the influence of interpersonal factors. Therefore, several authors have focused mainly on studying the effect of contextual factors on creativity and innovation (e.g. Grissemann et al. 2013; Hunter et al. 2007; MartÍnez-Ros and Orfila-Sintes 2009; Orfila-Sintes and Mattsson 2009).

In a meta-analysis study, Hammond et al. (2011) identified the most important predictors of individual innovation that can encourage the generation and implementation of innovative ideas, which are contextual factor such as: autonomy, role expectation, challenges and complexity, leader-member exchange, supervisory support, positive relationships at work, positive work climate, supportive climate for innovation, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. However, in the hospitality industry, few studies have been conducted to explore what encourages and enhance employee innovation. Ko (2015) investigated what motivates employees' innovative behaviour in the hotel sector from the managements' perspective in Taiwan. The results suggest that five factors can motivate employees' innovative behaviour: training and development, support and motivation from top management, open policy, recognition, and autonomy and flexibility, respectively from the most to the least important based on supervisors' perceptions. However, the author noted that cultural factors might have had an influence on the findings, thus, more studies are needed.

According to Chen (2011), a hotel management that encourages employees to take risks, and rewards their novel ideas can motivate innovative behaviour. Thus, since innovative behaviour can involve interpersonal risk-taking (Al-Ababneh, 2015), it is important to promote employees' perception of psychological safety at work, which can alleviate the fear of taking risks (Edmondson & Lei 2014). However, reviewing the literature has revealed that the role of psychological safety in enhancing innovative behaviour in the hospitality industry was neglected. Therefore, the proposed conceptual model focuses on the variables that could

promote employees' innovative behaviour in the hotel sector with the mediating role of psychological safety.

An organisation's management has a vital role in promoting both psychological safety (Edmondson 1999, 2004; Frazier et al. 2016; Kahn, 1990) and employee innovation (Åmo 2006; Chen 2010; Lee and Tan 2012) in any work setting, including the hotel industry. Hotels' top management has the power and the responsibility to establish polices, strategies, and guidelines that could encourage employees to feel safe and motivated to engage in innovative behaviour. Establishing a psychologically safe climate that is supportive for trial and error, and allow employees to try new things can alleviate employees' fear of any negative consequences of showing innovative behaviour (Yuan and Woodman 2010). In addition, establishing a reward system that complements employees' motivation to innovate (Lee and Tan 2012), providing verbal support (Chen 2010) and recognition makes employees feel that innovative behaviour is valued and desired. Thus, when a hotel's employees perceive that developing innovative ideas in their work setting is an appreciated and rewarded behaviour and managers are accessible and listen to their contributions, they will be more likely to feel safe to take risks and motivated to develop innovative ideas. Therefore, it can be proposed that:

*Proposition 1: Management's support and motivation are positively associated with psychological safety and employee innovation in the hospitality industry.*

Having a high-quality relationship amongst members in a workplace positively influences employees' perception of psychological safety (Carmeli and Gittell 2009; Edmondson 1999, 2004; Frazier et al. 2016), and employees' innovative behaviour (Scott and Bruce 1994; Vinarski-Peretz and Carmeli 2011; Yuan and Woodman 2010). As an illustration, a trusted relationship amongst co-workers and between employees and their supervisors makes employees feel more secure when conducting innovative behaviour because this trusted

relationship eliminates the fear of being embarrassed or punished when trying innovative ideas and failing (Yuan and Woodman 2010). Moreover, a high-quality relationship at work makes an employee feel cared for and valued, which promotes their perception of psychological safety and then motivates innovative behaviour (Vinarski-Peretz and Carmeli 2011). Thus, feeling valued and supported at work can promote employee innovation (Scott and Bruce 1994), and improves the probability of innovation to be successful (Yuan and Woodman 2010). Therefore, a good relationship amongst co-workers and between employees and their supervisors in the hotel industry can be considered a vital element to promote psychological safety and employee innovation. Thus, it is proposed that:

*Proposition 2: A good relationships amongst co-workers, and between employees and their supervisors are positively associated with psychological safety and employee innovation in the hospitality industry.*

The next posited element is autonomy or freedom in the workplace. Autonomy means that an employee has a certain degree of freedom to decide how to fulfil his or her tasks (Ko 2015). When employees experience autonomy in their jobs, it means that they are trusted to choose how to accomplish their tasks, thus, this freedom promotes the perception of psychological safety in the workplace (Frazier et al. 2016). In addition, giving employees freedom and interdependence to choose how to carry out their tasks at work is considered an important factor that improves members' ability to innovate (Hammond et al. 2011). Consequently, people's perception of autonomy at work enables them to take decisions and establish solutions for problems (Chandrasekaran and Mishra 2012) which can be considered a motivator for innovative behaviour that increases the probability of coming up with novel ideas and reaching innovative solutions. In the hospitality industry, there are standards and guidelines to ascertain service quality that employees are expected to follow, which may mean less freedom. However, autonomy in the hotel sector has been considered one of the factors that encourages innovative

behaviour (Ko 2015). In fact, giving employees a certain level of autonomy in performing their tasks means that they are empowered to take decisions, which can promote employee innovation. Consequently, we propose that:

*Proposition 3: Employees' perception of autonomy is positively associated with psychological safety and employee innovation in the hospitality industry.*

Another predictor for psychological safety and employee innovation is role expectation (or role clarity). This means it is important to let an employee have a clear understanding of what he or she is expected to do (Frazier et al. 2016). Creating a perception amongst employees at work that they are expected to be creative and innovative improves their innovative performance (Hammond et al. 2011), and promotes psychological safety (Frazier et al. 2016). Extensive research has found a positive relationship between individuals' perception that they are required and expected to be innovative and capable of individual innovation. (Carmeli and Schaubroeck 2007; Scott and Bruce 1994; Unsworth et al. 2005). Thus, when employees perceive that they are expected to be innovative, they will be more likely engage in innovative behaviours such as idea generation and implementation, and this perception makes employees feel that innovation is desired and expected, and both managers and co-workers will value employees' contributions (Yuan and Woodman 2010). Therefore, in the hospitality industry we can propose that:

*Proposition 4: Role expectation is positively associated with psychological safety and employee innovation in the hospitality industry.*

Personality traits is another factor that can influence employee innovation and psychological safety in the hotel industry. The first trait is being proactive. A proactive person has been found to be positively associated with an employee's innovative behaviour (Chen 2011; Seibert et al. 2001) and psychological safety (Frazier et al. 2016). People who are considered proactive have

a long-term focus, and they continually look for information, scan the environment, foresee the future, and create plans for change (Thomas et al. 2010). In addition, a proactive person is aware, goal oriented, self-motivated (Parker et al. 2010), and has the tendency to change the current situation via proactive behaviours (Fuller and Marler 2009); whereas, a person with low proactive traits tends to adapt to the current situation without thinking of changing the status quo (Bergeron et al. 2014).

In the hotel sector, employees are in a direct contact with guests, serving them and responding to their requests (López-Cabarcos et al. 2015). Thus, a proactive personality seems important in the hospitality industry as such a person has the ability to develop creative solutions and implement them (Miron et al. 2004), which may improve guest satisfaction. Furthermore, proactive personality in the hotel context is associated with employees' enthusiasm to develop innovative products that may improve performance (Chen 2011). However, Chen argues that the effect of environmental factors on innovative behaviour outweighs the effect of individual factors. Taken together, we propose that:

*Proposition 5: Proactive personality is positively associated with psychological safety and employee innovation.*

Another personality trait that is related to employee innovation behaviour is openness to experience (Hammond et al. 2011; Yesil and Sozbilir 2013), but not associated with psychological safety (Frazier et al. 2016). This trait has been defined as the 'disposition to be imaginative, nonconforming, and unconventional' (Judge et al. 2002: 765). According to Batey and Furnham (2006), openness to experience is the most significant personality trait that can predict individuals' inclination for innovation. Individuals with openness to experience trait can be characterised as being less shy and adaptable to changes and new experiences, which seems important for innovative behaviour (Hammond et al. 2011).

Openness to experience tends to be the most popular personality trait that is related to innovation (Patterson 2009). In the hospitality industry, Yesil and Sozbilir (2013) conducted a study in the Turkish hotel sector to examine the relationship between five personality factors and employee innovation. The authors found that of all the personality traits, openness to experience had been found the only one that is positively associated with employee innovation. Thus, Yesil and Sozbilir explained that employees with openness to experience are more likely to engage in innovative behaviours in the hotel sector. Hence, we posit the following:

*Proposition 6: Openness to experience trait is positively associated with employee innovation.*

Logically speaking, more challenges at a workplace can provoke uncertainty amongst employees, which contradicts psychological safety. However, it can be posited that challenges at work can promote innovative behaviour. A challenging job is where an individual perceive that his or her roles or tasks are challenging and also interesting, but not 'unduly overwhelming' (Hunter et al. 2007). Thus, a challenging job requires a variety of skills and behaviours and that can promote innovative behaviour (Hammond et al. 2011). Amabile (1988) provided a clear explanation for this issue by illustrating that a complex or a challenging job is often characterised by less routine and includes different activities and challenges, and that can encourage members to generate novel ideas to overcome such difficulties. Moreover, this kind of job often involves multiple aspects and that may encourage people to focus on different issues at one time and make innovation more required for this type of jobs than others (Oldham and Cummings 1996). Thus, challenges at the hospitality industry can encourage members to generate innovative ideas to overcome these challenges or problems. For example, a shrinkage in a hotel's market share, or reduction in occupancy rate will compel sales' and marketing members to develop innovative solutions to these issues. In sum, it can be proposed that:

*Proposition 7: Challenges at work is positively associated with innovative behaviour in the hospitality industry.*

Since developing new ideas at work can involve interpersonal risk taking (Al-Ababneh 2015; Carmeli et al. 2009; Yuan and Woodman 2010), psychological safety is considered an essential element that can mitigate the risk associated with innovation and encourage people to engage in innovative behaviours (Vinarski-Peretz and Carmeli 2011). In fact, psychological safety alleviates individuals' uncertainty and the fear of being embarrassed or rejected for speaking their minds or developing new ideas (Edmondson and Lie 2014) and that can encourage employees to engage in innovative behaviours. Moreover, in a psychologically safe workplace, members can experiment to generate creative solutions without having a concern about negative repercussions (Frazier et al. 2016). Therefore, this study believes that individuals' perception of psychological safety in the hospitality sector is an essential factor to promote employees' innovative behaviour. Hence, we propose the following:

*Proposition 8: Psychological safety is positively associated with employee innovation.*

Consequently, based on the above proposition the following conceptual model is proposed (Figure: 1.1). Variables such as top management support and motivation; high-quality relationships at work; job design characteristics such as autonomy, role clarity or expectation, challenges; and interpersonal factors such as proactive personality and openness to experience are all considered independent variables, whereas psychological safety works as a mediator, and employee innovation is the dependent variable.
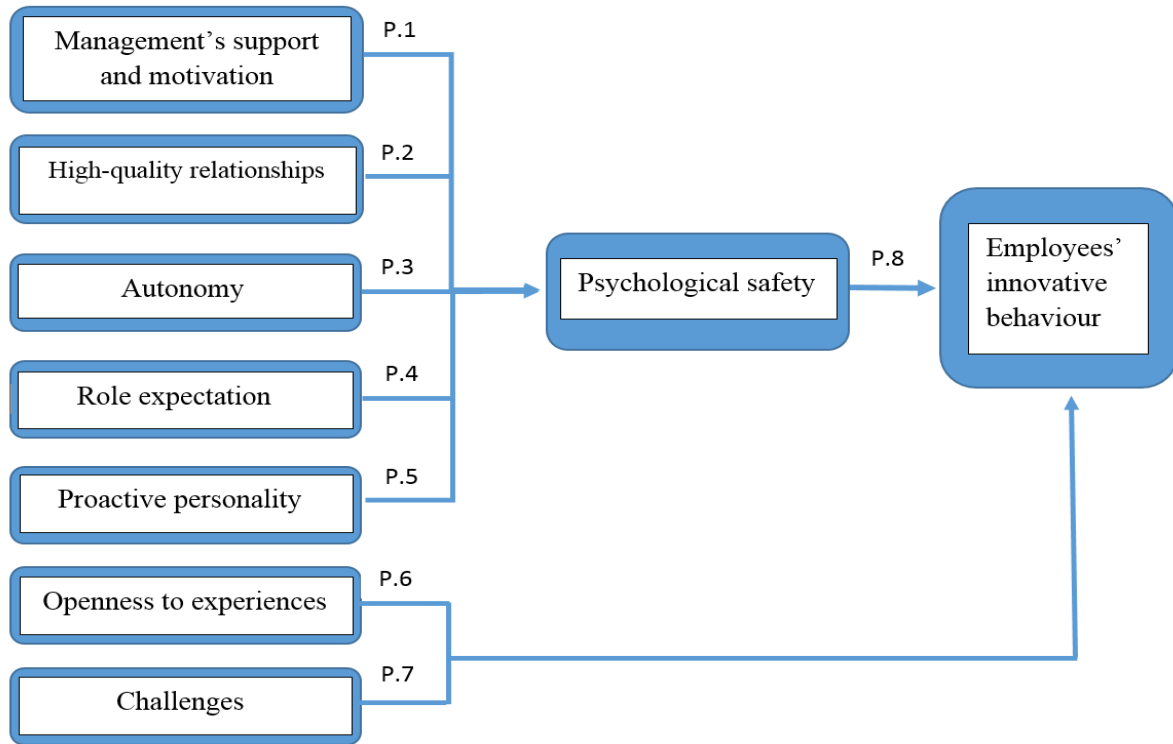
Figure 1.1: The proposed conceptual model

## Conclusion

Employee innovation is a crucial factor that can enhance hotels' operations, service quality, guests' retention and satisfaction, and overall performance. Nevertheless, what encourages employee innovation in the hospitality industry has received little attention from scholars. The proposed conceptual model focuses on the factors that can encourage innovative behaviour in the hospitality industry with a focus on the mediating role of psychological safety as an essential element to mitigate any interpersonal risk that might be associated with innovative behaviour. Thus, it is posited that management's support and motivation; a good relationship between employees and their supervisors and amongst co-workers themselves; giving employees a certain degree of autonomy to decide how to fulfil their tasks; providing a hotel's employees a clear explanation of their roles' expectation; and personality trait such as being proactive are all considered vital variables that can promote employee innovation in the hotel

industry with the mediating role of psychological safety. Therefore, we propose that these factors can make employees feel psychologically safe to engage in innovative behaviours in the hospitality businesses. Furthermore, openness to experience as a personality trait and challenges in the work settings are proposed to be elements positively associated with innovative behaviour in the hospitality industry. Knowledge and understanding of these factors can help hospitality businesses to cultivate and encourage the innovative behaviour amongst their employees, which can, in turn, enhance services quality and performance.

The conceptual model has been proposed based on a critical review of literature from past studies, with the majority of them having been conducted in a non-hospitality sector. This induces the need for further research to assure the validity of this model. By acknowledging that some of the proposed variables have several constructs (e.g. management support and motivation), exploratory study using interviews with head departments, supervisors, and employees in the hotel industry can help to refine and condense these constructs, and identify what constructs can encourage psychological safety and employee innovation most, from the participants' perspective, and, thus, the proposed model can be used to prompt further answers in the interviews. Furthermore, exploratory studies using interviews could add to the identification of alternative or additional variables that could be more relevant to the sector from both the management and employees' perspective that were not previously identified. Then, testing the identified variables and constructs through empirical research is essential to advance our knowledge and develop an increasingly stronger theoretical model on employee innovation in the context of the hospitality industry

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