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Exploring the relationships between compassion at work, the evaluative perspective of positive work-related identity, service employee creativity, and job performance

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines whether compassion at work increases service employees' job performance. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to show the mechanism through which experienced compassion in an organization affects the job performance of service employees.

Design/methodology/approach – The employees from a department store in South Korea were surveyed using a self-administered instrument for data collection. Out of 550 questionnaires, a total of 309 usable questionnaires were obtained after list-wise deletion, for a 61.6 per cent response rate.

Findings – The results of this study suggest that the evaluative perspective of positive work-related identity mediates the relationship between compassion at work and service employees' job performance. In addition, the findings of this study demonstrate that there is significant mediating effect of service employee creativity on the relationship between compassion at work and job performance. Furthermore, the relationship between compassion at work and job performance was sequentially mediated by the evaluative perspective of positive work-related identity and the creativity of service employees.

Research limitations/implications – The common method variance in the self-reported variables imposes a need for caution in the interpretation of the findings. Future studies could avoid the problem of common method bias by, for example, using supervisor ratings of creativity and job performance. On the other hand, this study will add to the growing body of research on service marketing by highlighting the role of compassion at work to enhance service employees' job performance.

Practical implications – This study offers new insight for practitioners (i.e. CEOs, top management teams, employees) by suggesting that they may promote service employees' job performance if they pay more attention to compassionate acts in service marketing.

Originality/value – As services are becoming more important and harder to sell simultaneously, this study provides a new perspective to improve service employees' job performance by examining its link with compassion at work.

Keywords Job performance, Compassion at work, Evaluative perspective of positive work-related identity, Service employee creativity

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

As service has taken a more significant role in almost all business transactions during the past decade, employees in service organizations are increasingly experiencing suffering both inside and outside the workplace, such as overwork, stress, illness and injury. In particular, service employees who constantly interact with customers are often the target of customers' anger and criticism, which unsurprisingly produces high levels of suffering, for example, long-term emotional stress and exhaustion (Lam and Chen, 2012). Consequently, many service firms are demanding greater provision of compassion for their service employees to alleviate their suffering (O'Donohoe and Turley, 2006).

Compassion at work is defined as a relational process of noticing another person's suffering, experiencing an emotional empathy for his or her pain and behaving in some way that alleviates that pain (Dutton *et al.*, 2006; Kornfield, 1993). The majority of researchers agree that compassion is both a mental and a behavioral state which involves sympathetic consciousness of the distress and suffering of others and caring for those others often in communicative or behavioral ways

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(Dutton *et al.*, 2007; Frost *et al.*, 2006; Rynes *et al.*, 2012). As the "heart's response to others' suffering" (Kornfield, 1993, p. 326), compassion can play a critical role in improving organizational functioning by attenuating employees' suffering in service organizations (Dutton *et al.*, 2007; Grant *et al.*, 2008; Lilius *et al.*, 2008, 2011; Rynes *et al.*, 2012).

Existing research shows that compassion is central to organizational functioning. The absence of compassion in response to employees' suffering at work can lead to stress and job dissatisfaction, which have the potential to do great harm to both employees and the organizations themselves (Dutton *et al.*, 2007; Lilius *et al.*, 2008). Conversely, the presence of compassionate acts at work can often reinforce connections between employees and increase their capability to function as productive employees (Dutton *et al.*, 2007; Lilius *et al.*, 2008). For example, Lilius *et al.*'s (2008) research found a strong association between compassion at work and affective commitment, and also demonstrated the mediating effects of positive emotion between these two variables. Despite these insights from previous research, one of the most important questions about the effects of compassion at work still remains unanswered in the field of service management, namely, whether experienced compassion (i.e. giving, receiving and witnessing compassion between employees) in a service organization actually increases the job performance of its service employees. More specifically, what is the precise mechanism through which compassion at work may improve service employees' job performance? None of the existing studies has investigated how the experience of compassion at work acts upon the job performance of service employees, despite the fact that this relationship is of the utmost importance for leaders such as service managers.

Accordingly, the aim of our paper is to empirically examine how compassion at work influences service employees' job performance. Beyond examining the direct effect between compassion at work and service employee job performance, our primary objective is to develop an understanding of the underlying mechanism through which the compassion experienced by members of an organization positively affects the job performance of service employees. Lilius *et al.* (2008) highlighted the relationship between compassion and employee outcomes by investigating the mediating effect of positive emotion at work between the experience of compassion at work and affective commitment. As compassion at work generates positive emotion at work, we assume that it also develops positive work-related identity (PWRI)[1] as employees participate in the activities of work (i.e. a job) or through their membership of work-related groups, organizations, occupations or professions that may influence their job performance. We thus see PWRI (particularly the evaluative perspective) as an important mediator which is related to compassion's impact on job performance.

Drawing upon social identity theory which posits that individuals interpret their identities by interacting with others in various social contexts (Tajfel, 1974, 1975), we suggest that experiences of compassion at work lead to the construction of evaluative perspective on PWRI, which in turn improves service employees' job performance. The evaluative perspective on PWRI assumes that individuals' work-related identities become positive when they are evaluated more favorably by themselves or by others (Dutton *et al.*, 2010). Experienced compassion among members may positively influence service employees' sense-making of being taken care of by their colleagues, bosses and organizations, leading to them positively evaluating and maintaining a sense of worth (Baumeister, 1998; Gecas, 1982). As a result, service employees may be motivated to further improve their job performance to enhance their sense of self-worth.

Another possible mediator on the relationship between compassion at work and job performance may be creativity. According to research on motivated information processing, compassion at work encourages employees to have creative and diverse perspectives when defining problems, which in turn generates creative solutions that provide collective benefits rather than singular gains due to its other-oriented and emotional nature (De Dreu *et al.*, 2008). The mediating role of creativity between compassion at work and job performance can be explained by affective events theory (AET), specifically the idea that organizational events cause affective reactions, which in turn lead to changes in the attitudes and behaviors of employees (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Experienced compassion at work generates a psycho-physiological state that allows employees to experience an emotional/cognitive openness to new possibilities and learning (Boyatzis *et al.*, 2013). Drawing upon AET, experiencing compassion allows service employees to have positive emotional states that can be transformed into emotional/cognitive openness to new possibilities and learning, such as a sense of creativity, which affects their job performance.

In sum, this paper aims to offer an empirical framework of how experienced compassion in organizations influences service employees' job performance, thus offering practical and actionable applications for managers in service marketing. More specifically, we examine the mediating roles of both the evaluative perspective of PWRI and creativity in linking compassion at work and service employee job performance, respectively.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1 The effects of compassion at work on service employee job performance

Recent studies have begun to show that compassion at work is positively associated with both individual and organizational functioning (Dutton *et al.*, 2007; Lilius, 2012; Lilius *et al.*, 2008, 2011; Madden *et al.*, 2012). As compassion is the empathetic reaction to another's suffering (Madden *et al.*, 2012), experiencing compassion from organizational members (i.e. giving or receiving emotional support, time and flexibility or material goods) plays an important role in employees' ability to recover from painful circumstances and get back on their feet, and thereafter to reengage with their work and improve service quality and customer service (Lilius *et al.*, 2011). Previous research suggests that employees who experience compassion at work are more likely to have positive emotions, such as pride, gratitude and inspiration, leading to a deeper affective commitment (Lilius *et al.*, 2008). Compassion at

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work also allows employees to achieve a better work–life balance and thereby reduce inter-personal conflict, which has been linked to a host of important organizational outcomes (Lilius *et al.*, 2011).

It has been shown that employees who experience compassion are more likely to engage in organizationally supportive behavior (Goetz *et al.*, 2010; Grant *et al.*, 2008). Dutton *et al.* (2007) noted that engaging in compassion at work develops an organizational propensity for cooperation in terms of generating relational resources, strengthening shared values and cultivating critical relational skills. Overall, previous research suggests that experiencing compassion in an organization does not only offer direct benefits to those employees who are suffering by alleviating their pain and anxiety, but also provides indirect benefits for other employees as a result of increased affective commitment, positive emotions, and employee attraction and retention.

Service employees' exposure to deviant customer behaviors (e.g. customer incivility, verbal abuse and aggression) is closely related to deleterious work reactions (i.e. retaliatory behaviors, stress and emotional exhaustion and turnover intention), which eventually leads to an immediate reduction in task performance (Grandy *et al.*, 2004). However, service employees who experience compassion at work are better able to deal with such instances of negative customer behavior and resume their duties by alleviating stress and tension and encouraging emotional readjustment following their traumatic experience (Sliter *et al.*, 2012).

Similar to the concept of compassion at work, virtuousness in organizations, described as the transcendent, elevating behavior of the organization's members, has been shown to have a significant positive relationship with organizational performance in 18 organizations (Cameron *et al.*, 2004). Virtuousness in and through organizations can be manifested as notions and instances of hope, gratitude, wisdom, forgiveness, compassion and resilience among employees. This positive relationship between virtuousness and performance is explained by two major attributes of virtuousness: its amplifying and buffering effects (Cameron *et al.*, 2004). The amplifying effects can promote positive emotions, social capital and prosocial behavior, while the buffering effects can protect against negative encroachments, both of which result in improving performance. Based on the preceding discussion, we advance the following hypothesis:

H1. Compassion at work is positively related to service employees' job performance.

2.2 The effects of compassion at work on the evaluative perspective of PWRI

Previous research has demonstrated that compassion can influence employees' attitudes and identities toward their organization by shaping their sense-making of the organization to which they belong as well as the colleagues with whom they work (Lilius *et al.*, 2008). That is, employees' perceptions of the organization's compassionate acts (i.e. giving, receiving or witnessing compassion) shape their subsequent identities, attitudes and behaviors toward their organization (Lilius *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, compassion is also conveyed in the form of narratives through the organization, which change employees' self-concepts and perceptions about their organization.

Employees who experience compassion tend to talk about how they are genuinely treated by their organization or colleagues. As employees share these compassion narratives, they construct positive perceptions of their organization, identifying their organization as a care-providing system (Kahn, 1993) and a source of social support and healing (Frost, 2003). According to Lilius *et al.* (2008), employees who experience compassion at work are more likely to perceive their organization in positive terms and experience positive emotions at work, as they feel that they are being taken care of by their organization. This leads them to see themselves as competent, capable, accepted and valued by others. The evaluative perspective of PWRI assumes that an employee's work-related identity is positive when they are regarded favorably by others (Dutton *et al.*, 2010). Thus, we suggest that employees who experience compassion at work are more likely to develop the evaluative perspective of PWRI, allowing us to hypothesize as follows:

H2. Compassion at work will be positively related to the evaluative perspective of PWRI.

2.3 The effects of the evaluative perspective of PWRI on creativity

Employees who are evaluated as worthwhile or crucial by the organization are more likely to have positive affective states (Dutton *et al.*, 2010), which promotes the discovery of novel and creative actions by developing their momentary thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson, 2003). It is thus argued that the evaluative perspective of PWRI promotes a better understanding of others (i.e. better relationships with supervisors and co-workers) (Dutton *et al.*, 2010), which allows employees to share more information among themselves and freely express their interests and suggest creative ideas that challenge the status quo (Shalley *et al.*, 2004). Free flows of information and support or encouragement among employees develop their intrinsic motivation which promotes cognitive flexibility, risk-taking mind and persistence, thus enhancing the development of creativity (Shalley *et al.*, 2004). From this, we derive the following:

H3. The evaluative perspective of PWRI is positively related to service employees' creativity.

2.4 The effects of creativity on service employee job performance

Service-oriented organizations highlight the important role of creativity in securing competitive advantages and ensuring their long-term sustainability. Accordingly, service employees are often expected to carry out their existing tasks and produce creative ideas at the same time (Berry *et al.*, 2006; Coelho *et al.*, 2011). Service employees (i.e. particularly sales workers who deal with customers) need creative skills and techniques for identifying customers' needs, collecting market information faster and proposing better solutions for the provision of high-quality customer service (Coelho and Augusto, 2010, Coelho *et al.*, 2011). The creative ideas and novel insights of service employees facilitate the customer service process by

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reducing service response times, simplifying unnecessary procedures and minimizing errors at work, leading to the enhancement of customer satisfaction, which is one of the most important job performance goals of service employees (Coelho and Augusto, 2010). Previous research has shown that employees with creative ideas and skills are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of job performance (Gilson *et al.*, 2005). For example, sales workers (i.e. real estate agents and insurance agents) may receive higher performance ratings when they adopt creative problem-solving approaches to selling products and obtaining new clients (Gong *et al.*, 2009). Based on the preceding discussion, we advance the following hypothesis:

H4. Employee creativity is positively related to service employees' job performance.

2.5 The mediating role of the evaluative perspective of PWRI between compassion at work and service employee job performance

Prior research suggests that compassion at work affects employees' attitudes and behaviors by shaping their perceptions about the organization to which they belong and the coworkers with whom they work (Lilius *et al.*, 2008). Researchers emphasize the importance of the employee belief that they are being taken care of by their organization or colleagues for key outcomes favorable to the employee (i.e. job satisfaction) and the organization (i.e. affective organizational commitment) (Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2006).

Based on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974, 1975), people's identities are shaped by socially interacting with others in various social contexts and distinguishing themselves from others through categorizing themselves into groups (Ellemers *et al.*, 2004; Tajfel, 1974, 1975). From the perspective of social identity theory, service employees who experience compassion at work are more likely to increase their intrinsic motivations for the further enhancement of organizational identity when they perceive themselves as members of a collective group with a positive distinctiveness. As social categorization would lead members of one group to favor the in-group at the expense of the out-group (Ellemers *et al.*, 2004; Dutton *et al.*, 2010), compassionate acts in an organization allow employees to evaluate themselves or their organization more favorably as compared to the out-group, which leads to more engagement in identity-enhancing behaviors (i.e. job commitment) (Baumeister, 1998; Gecas, 1982).

Among Dutton *et al.*'s (2010) four types of PWRI (i.e. virtue, evaluative, developmental and structural perspective), the evaluative perspective has its foundation in social identity theory (Dutton *et al.*, 2010). The evaluative perspective assumes that identities serve a crucial purpose to promote and sustain a sense of self-worth (Gecas, 1982). Based on these premises, the evaluative perspective posits that employees' work-related identities become more positive when they are evaluated favorably by themselves or others (Dutton *et al.*, 2010). Correspondingly, service employees try to promote their identity to favorably distinguish themselves from others. At the individual level, employees with a positive identity make more of a commitment to help other colleagues who are suffering within an organization, so that they create and maintain a sense of self-worth and self-esteem (Gecas, 1982). When employees frequently experience compassion at work, they construct a positive identity, as they are internally and externally evaluated as being worthwhile or important in some way (Ellemers *et al.*, 2004; Tajfel, 1974, 1975). The experience of compassion from organizational members allows service employees to make positive evaluations about their personal identity at work, which increases their motivation for further enhancement of their identity to maintain and/or enhance a sense of worth.

According to collective self-esteem research (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992), service employees form collective self-esteem by evaluating the organizations to which they belong. At the organizational level, the evaluative perspective posits that service employees' collective identities become more positive when they evaluate the meaning of their organizational membership as desirable and valuable (Ellemers *et al.*, 2004). Compassion at work helps service employees to construct positive collective self-esteem, seeing their organization as a care-providing system and a source of social support and healing (Frost, 2003). Service employees with positive collective identity aspire to a better place of work that is favorably perceived by themselves or others (e.g. coworkers, supervisors and customers).

Based on social identity theory, positive collective identity evokes members' intrinsic motivations for further enhancement of organizational identity and the accomplishment of an organization's goals (Ellemers *et al.*, 2004). Consequently, service employees with positive collective identity are more likely to increase their job performance (e.g. improved levels of service quality and customer satisfaction) to further enhance their organization's identity. For example, Dutton *et al.* (2010) argued that the evaluative perspective of PWRI increases the understanding of others through mutual attractiveness and improves access to self-affirmational resources through more proactive responses to threats by creating positive emotions among members.

In this respect, we argue that the experience of compassion among service organizational members tends to develop the evaluative perspective of PWRI, which in turn increases job performance. Based on the preceding discussion, we advance the following hypothesis:

H5. The evaluative perspective of PWRI mediates the relationship between compassion at work and service employees' job performance.

2.6 The mediating role of creativity between compassion at work and service employee job performance

Our study also attempts to examine whether service employee creativity mediates the link between compassion at work and service employees' job performance. According to AET, perceptions of work events are the proximal causes of employees' affective reactions, which results in the shaping of work attitudes and behaviors (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Employees' affective reactions to a work event depend on the extent to which the event is "perceived to promote or impinge upon personal well-being" (Ashton-James and Ashkanasy, 2005, p. 24). In this

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respect, compassion at work may elicit a strong affective response, as it is closely related to employees' well-being.

From the perspective of AET, employees' experiencing compassion at work invokes a positive emotional state which enables them to have openness to new possibilities and learning, such as a sense of creativity (Boyatzis *et al.*, 2013). Previous research has found that the arousal of positive emotions leads to cognitive openness and improvement in creative problem-solving (Ashby *et al.*, 1999), greater cognitive and emotional openness and precision (Talarico *et al.*, 2009) and the tendency to change behavior (Janig and Habler, 1999). Positive emotions develop positive cognitions so that employees think in a more positive manner and are more optimistic about the future through recalling positive valence memories (Bower and Forgas, 2001).

Furthermore, research on motivated information processing suggests that compassion allows service employees to seek solutions that provide mutual benefits rather than cater to singular interests due to its other-oriented nature (De Dreu *et al.*, 2008). The motivation to search for collective gains encourages individuals to not only obtain integrative diverse information (De Dreu *et al.*, 2008), but also embrace the ideas of others who are different (Weingart *et al.*, 1993). Compassion at work also increases service employees' cognitive flexibility, motivation to take risks and openness to complexity, all of which promote their creativity (Polman and Emich, 2011). Taken together, prior research suggests that compassion at work enables employees to open to different ideas and embrace diverse information so that they recreate new ideas or approaches to solve problems.

Service employees at work often face complicated situations and problems that demand creativity. It is this creativity which allows service employees to handle customers' problems and satisfy their particular needs, which results in improving customers' perceptions of the service encounter (Bitner *et al.*, 1990). The capability of service employees to integrate diverse information into a novel idea can be consequential in achieving job objectives and improving customer satisfaction (Wang and Netemeyer, 2004). Service employees with creative minds are more likely to view a given situation as representing a new perspective and to seek more innovative methods in response to that situation, thereby achieving high levels of customer service performance.

In this respect, we suggest that compassion at work facilitates service employees' sense of creativity, leading to increases in their job performance. Based on the preceding discussion, we advance the following hypothesis:

H6. Creativity mediates the relationship between compassion at work and service employees' job performance.

3. Research method

3.1 Data collection and participant characteristics

The present study surveyed salespeople working in a department store in South Korea. The decision to restrict the sample to sales employees was taken to ensure that the jobs being examined were comparable. While it is a widely held perception that "creative work" is the exclusive preserve of certain types of occupations, such as scientists and artists, in fact, creativity is in no way restricted to specific jobs (Mumford *et al.*, 1997). Indeed, creative work actually characterizes a surprisingly wide range of employment (Shalley *et al.*, 2000), not least salespeople by virtue of their creative marketing and selling activities. For example, sales workers with creativity are more likely to develop new ideas for satisfying customer needs and generate various solutions for novel customer problems than those who treat their customers in a conventional way (Martinaityte and Sacramento, 2013). For this reason, department store salespeople represent a suitable sample from which to study creativity, as they are able to provide "a "real-world" illustration of creative performance" (Redmond *et al.*, 1993, p. 125). Perhaps not surprisingly, salespeople are an established research subject in the literature on creativity (Gong *et al.*, 2009, 2012) and, therefore, a particularly appropriate sampling choice for testing the current research model.

The data for this study were collected using a self-administered instrument. A total of 550 sales employees were invited to participate in the study. To ensure confidentially, the respondents were instructed to seal the completed questionnaires in pre-addressed envelopes and return them directly to the researchers by mail. In all, 321 questionnaires were returned, and a total of 309 usable questionnaires were obtained after list-wise deletion, for a 61.6 per cent response rate. Based on these 309 individuals, a preliminary analysis revealed that 89.9 per cent of the subjects were female, with an average age of 34.17 (SD = 9.01) years and an age range from 20 to 57 years. A majority of the participants (nearly 57.0 per cent) had at least a high school education, and just over 43.0 per cent had a college education. The respondents, on average, had almost 8.19 (SD = 5.74) years of work experience[2].

3.2 Measurement scales

Existing scales were used in the questionnaire (Table I). The scales selected were English-based and required double translation. Translation of the English questionnaire into Korean followed the process recommended by Brislin (1970).

3.2.1 Compassion at work

Compassion at work was measured with three items (e.g. "How frequently have you experienced compassion from your supervisor?") from the experienced compassion scale developed by Lilius *et al.* (2008) (α = 0.846).

3.2.2 Evaluative perspective of PWRI

The evaluative perspective of PWRI was measured with three items (e.g. "As a member of this organization I am well regarded by others.") from the Bednar *et al.* (2011) (α = 0.886).

3.2.3 Service employee creativity

Creativity was measured using four items (e.g. "I try to be as creative as I can in my job.") adapted from Coelho and Augusto (2010). In line with several other scholars, the decision was taken to use a self-report method to measure employee creativity (Coelho *et al.*, 2011). While some researchers argue that research including the measurement of creativity is particularly vulnerable to common method bias (Crampton and Wagner, 1994), other scholars hold that the measure of creativity differs qualitatively from other performance dimensions in that it is not easily evaluated by external evaluators (Ng and Feldman, 2012). Thus, it has

Table I Scale items and construct evaluation

Construct	Items	λ^{ac}	*t*-value
Compassion at work (a)	How frequently do you experience compassion on the job?	0.754	24.885
	How frequently do you experience compassion from your supervisor?	0.919	37.726
	How frequently do you experience compassion from your coworker?	0.753	24.015
Evaluative perspective of PWRI (b)	As a member of this organization, I am well regarded by others	0.756	27.586
	As a member of this organization, I evaluate myself favorably	0.935	57.675
	As a member of this organization, I am regarded favorably by others	0.874	45.831
Service employee creativity (b)	I try to be as creative as I can in my job	0.773	25.375
	I experiment with new approaches in performing my job	0.774	25.318
	When new trends develop, I am usually the first to get on board	0.646	16.397
	On the job, I am inventive in overcoming barriers	0.763	24.149
Job performance (b)	Building effective relationships with customers	0.790	32.050
	Making effective presentations to customers and prospects	0.898	55.572
	Achieving annual sales targets and other objectives	0.843	41.570
	Understanding our services and their applications	0.725	24.091
	Understanding customer needs and work processes	0.661	18.575

Notes: Goodness-of-fit: $\chi^2_{84} = 205.44$, $p < 0.05$; CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.05; [a]all factor loadings are significant ($p < 0.01$); (a): items measured on a scale ranging from 1: never, 2: rarely, 3: sometimes, 4: quite often, 5: very often; (b): items measured on a scale ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree"

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been suggested that employees are in the best position to evaluate their own creativity, as they are the ones who are most cognizant of their own contributions (Janssen, 2000). Service industry workers such as sales people, flight attendants and front of house hotel employees provide their customers with a largely intangible service (Berry *et al.*, 2006), with the result that the creative ideas of service employees can often not be reliably measured by third parties. Supervisors, for example, are unlikely to observe the majority of the creative decisions made by their staff as they go about their work (Janssen, 2000). This being the case, self-ratings have become an accepted means of assessing the creativity of service employees directly through their own views, although it is recommended that a pilot test on a different sample is conducted to validate the measurement scales used (Ng and Feldman, 2012). We thus pre-tested the constructs with a different sample drawn from frontline employees in retail banking, and confirmed the same results with the sample of this study with regard to the validity of and the relationships among the other variables (e.g. compassion and job performance), as well as creativity ($\alpha = 0.826$).

3.2.4 Job performance

To measure job performance, five items (e.g. "I am building effective relationships with customers" and "I make effective presentations to customers and prospects") were adapted from Low *et al.* (2001) ($\alpha = 0.890$).

3.2.5 Control variables

In testing the hypotheses, we controlled for age (in years), gender and job tenure as a sales person (in years). We controlled for these variables not only because they were found to affect the level of employee creativity in previous research on the subject (Amabile, 1988; Scott and Bruce, 1994; Tierney and Farmer, 2002) but also because they were shown to influence job performance (Bowen *et al.*, 2000; Sturman, 2003).

4. Results

4.1 Reliability, validity and common method bias

Table II shows the mean values, standard deviations and correlations of the variables included in the current study. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to verify the convergent and discriminant validity of the measures using M-plus Version 7.11. The measurement model fit well with the data as seen in the fit statistics ($\chi^2_{(84)} = 205.438$; $p < 0.05$, CFI = 0.953, TLI = 0.941, RMSEA = 0.068, SRMR = 0.051). All item loadings exceeded 0.646, with all *t*-values greater than 2.58 ($p < 0.01$), providing evidence of convergent validity among our measures. All measures additionally exhibit strong reliability with composite reliabilities ranging from 0.829 to 0.893 (Table II). We checked the condition for discriminant validity among constructs as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). All AVE were larger than the squared correlation between the construct and any others (Table II). Overall, our constructs, therefore, exhibit sound measurement properties.

Table II Construct means, standard deviations and correlations

	1	2	3	4
Compassion at work	1			
Evaluative perspective of PWRI	0.198**	1		
Service employee creativity	0.294**	0.398**	1	
Job performance	0.269**	0.438**	0.544**	1
Mean	3.352	3.573	3.601	3.781
SD	0.785	0.680	0.631	0.611
α	0.846	0.886	0.826	0.887
CR	0.852	0.893	0.829	0.890
AVE	0.660	0.737	0.549	0.621

Notes: *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability

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Because these measures are self-reported, we evaluated the impact of common method bias, which is highly problematic if a single latent accounts for the majority of the manifest variables' variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). According to Podsakoff *et al.* (2012), method bias can be controlled through both procedural (e.g. protecting respondent anonymity, reducing evaluation apprehension, improving item wording and separating the measurement of the predictor and outcome variables) and statistical remedies. First, we conducted the Harman's one-factor test, the most commonly used technique for addressing common method variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). Specifically, we compared the one-factor Harman's confirmatory factor analysis solution to the four-factor solution, and found that the single-factor solution did not fit the data well ($\chi^2_{(90)}$ = 1230.030; $p < 0.05$, CFI = 0.557, TLI = 0.483, RMSEA = 0.202, SRMR = 0.127) and was indeed significantly worse than the four-factor solution ($\triangle\chi^2_{(6)}$ = 1,024.592, $p < 0.01$). Second, we used the ex post procedure recommended by Podsakoff *et al.* (2012), in which an additional common method factor is introduced to the measurement model. This factor did not account for any substantial variance in the indicator variables (8.0 per cent). In line with the empirical findings of Podsakoff *et al.* (2012) that an average of 18-32 per cent of the variance in a typical measure is attributable to method variance, we confirmed that our method bias was not serious. Finally, only 20.0 per cent of the standardized factor loadings were above 0.50 for the common methods factor. In addition, convergent validity and construct reliability of the common methods factor were not supported (CR = 0.727, AVE = 0.162). In sum, our data are not affected by common method bias.

4.2 Hypothesis testing

We estimated all path coefficients in our structural model analysis, the results of which are shown in Figure 1. The hypothesized model offered an acceptable fit to data ($\chi^{2(120)}$ = 270.74, $p < 0.05$: CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.05, SRMR = 0.06). The proposed model could explain 3.8 per cent of the variance in the evaluative perspective of PWRI, 30.7 per cent of service employee creativity and 43.3 per cent of the variance in job performance. We conducted the three-step process to test the hypotheses that the evaluative perspective of PWRI and service employee creativity would fully or partially mediate the relationship between compassion at work and job performance. As a first step, compassion at work was shown to significantly predict employees' job performance (b = 0.245, $p < 0.01$) in the upper figure (Figure 1). Therefore, *H1* was supported. Second, six paths were examined in the lower figure model. Compassion at work was a significant predictor of the evaluative perspective of PWRI (b = 0.164, $p < 0.05$), supporting *H2*. In addition, the evaluative perspective of PWRI was positively related to service employee creativity, providing support for *H3* (b = 0.305, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, *H4*, which argues that service employee creativity is positively related to job performance, was supported (b = 0.417, $p < 0.01$).

To test our mediation hypotheses (*H5* and *H6*), we used an analytical approach outlined by Hayes (2013). In Table III, we provide estimates of the indirect effects, along with the symmetric and 95 per cent bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals for our path estimates (Hayes, 2013, N = 5,000). *H5* stated that the relationship between experienced compassion at work and job performance was mediated by the evaluative perspective of PWRI, and this hypothesis was supported (b = 0.049, 95 per cent CI [0.012, 0.117]). Finally, *H6* stated that service employee creativity mediated the path between experienced compassion at work and job performance, and this hypothesis was supported (b = 0.079, 95 per cent CI [0.017, 0.185]).

4.3 Post hoc analysis of mediators

As our study predicted that compassion at work is positively and sequentially associated with job performance through the evaluative perspective of PWRI and service employee creativity, we tested the significance of sequential indirect effect using a three-path mediated model (Taylor *et al.*, 2008; Lau and Cheung, 2012). The advantage of this approach is that we were able to isolate the indirect effect of both mediators: the evaluative perspective of PWRI and service employee creativity. This approach also allowed us to investigate the indirect effect passing through both of these mediators in a series (Taylor *et al.*, 2008; Lau and Cheung, 2012). When controlling for the sequential mediators, compassion at work was no longer a statistically significant predictor of job performance (b = 0.092, 95 per cent CI [−0.026, 0.256]), providing support for a fully mediated model (b[3] = 0.025, 95 per cent CI [0.007, 0.060]; Table III).

5. Conclusion

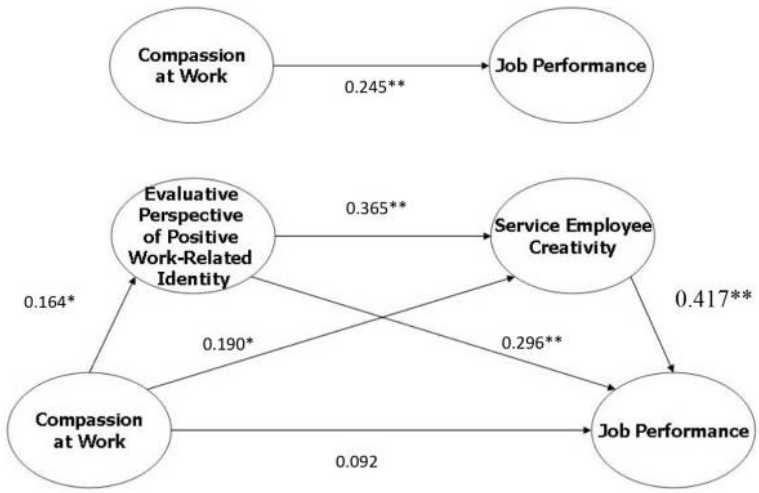
The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between compassion at work and service employees' job performance in a mediated way, an under-researched, yet crucial aspect of cognitive and emotional interactions between the two variables. Beyond examining the direct effect, our study attempts to investigate the mediating effect of the evaluative perspective of PWRI and creativity on the relationship between compassion at work and service employee job performance, respectively.

Our study shows that the relationship between compassion at work and job performance is fully double-mediated by the evaluative perspective of PWRI and service employee creativity. This is the major finding of our study, that both PWRI and creativity play an essential role as a mediating link between compassion at work and job performance. The logic behind the full-mediating effect of PWRI and creativity on the relationship between the two variables may be explained through the combined rationale of social identity theory and AET. Thus, our study not only reveals a positive relationship between compassion at work and job performance, but also attempts to explore a mechanism for how compassion at work influences job performance in terms of two mediators, namely, PWRI and creativity.

5.1 Theoretical implications

Our findings contribute to several streams of research. First, our study will add to the growing body of research on service marketing by reinforcing the important link between compassion at work and service employee's job performance. None of these studies in service marketing have examined the

Figure 1 Research model



Notes: Compassion at work --> EPWRI --> job performance: 0.49*; compassion at work --> service employee creativity --> job performance: 0.79*; compassion at work --> EPWRI --> service employee creativity --> job performance: 0.25*; *p< 0.05, **p< 0.01; EPWRI = evaluative perspective of positive work-related identity

Table III Path coefficients and indirect effects for mediation models

	Path coefficient				Indirect effects		
From → To	COM	EPW	SEC	JP	Estimate	CI_{low}	CI_{high}
COM		0.164*	0.190*	0.092			
EPW			0.365**	0.296**			
SEC				0.417**			
Total indirect effect					0.153*	0.076	0.256
COM → EPW → JP					0.049*	0.102	0.117
COM → SEC → JP					0.079*	0.017	0.185
COM → EPW → SEC → JP					0.025*	0.007	0.060

Notes: $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; COM: compassion at work, EPWRI: evaluative perspective of positive work-related identity; SEC: service employee creativity, JP: job performance

association between compassion at work and service employees' job performance despite its important implications for service management. Thus, this study is the first to examine the relationship between compassion at work and service employee's job performance in the literature of service marking.

Second, another major finding of our study is that the evaluative perspective of PWRI plays an essential role in linking compassion at work and job performance. Through self-categorization and social identity processes (Ellemers *et al.*, 2004), positive self-regard drawn from virtuous acts is a crucial factor in building positive identity, which further motivates individuals to promote their sense of pride or contentment (Dutton *et al.*, 2010). Research on social identity indicates that employees with high self-regard and positive evaluations from others are more like to engage in their work to maintain their sense of self-worth and esteem (Gecas, 1982). Our study provides further support for social identity theory by showing that employees are more energized to work harder (i.e. increase job performance) to maintain their prestigious image when they perceive themselves as part of a collective which is seen positively in the eyes of social audiences for its virtuous acts (i.e. compassion at work).

Third, our study provides a theoretical explanation for how compassion at work develops the creativity of service employees, eventually leading to higher levels of job performance in line with AET (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Although early research on creativity has focused on cognitive factors as the antecedents of creativity, more recent studies attempt to explain the process of creativity development in terms of the impact of emotional experiences on the creative process (Zhou and George, 2003). Our study considers that compassion at work can be a crucial antecedent in the generation of a sense of service employee creativity. Thus, our study contributes to the literature on creativity by exploring more comprehensive antecedents (i.e. compassion at work) that help better understand the motivator of service employees' creativity.

Finally, post hoc analysis of this study demonstrates a double mediating effect for the evaluative perspective of PWRI

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and creativity on the relationship between compassion at work and job performance in service management. The findings imply that among service employees, the evaluative perspective of PWRI generated from an organization's virtuous acts, combined with a sense of creativity, are important in improving service employee job performance, which has important implications for the service management literature.

5.2 Managerial implications

On a practical level, this study offers new insights for practitioners (i.e. CEOs, top management teams, employees) by suggesting that they may improve service employee job performance by paying more attention to compassionate acts in their organizations. Considering that positive identities strengthen employees through building social resources (Dutton *et al.*, 2010), encouraging compassionate acts on the part of the organization (i.e. top management teams) allows service employees to build up positive identities of both themselves and their organization, leading to not only a more committed workforce, but also a more productive one. Furthermore, by supporting the mediating effect of both the evaluative perspective of PWRI and creativity on the relationship between compassion at work and job performance, this study reveals a concrete and specific mechanism for how compassion at work affects job performance. The findings of our study point practitioners toward a number of areas which would improve job performance, such as the systematic and strategic promotion of compassionate climates in organizational goals and strategies, an authentic and trustful way of offering support for employees who experience suffering, a high level of honesty and integrity among members, mutual relationships based on caring and help and tolerance for mistakes and forgiveness at the organizational level.

Second, our study supports a positive relationship between compassion at work and service employees' creativity. Our study suggests that compassionate acts in an organization's routines could develop a creative organizational culture that allows service employees to open to new possibilities and leanings. Such a creative corporate culture could be developed by coaching and training organizational members on how to effectively help others with compassion. Due to its other-oriented nature, compassion at work functions as a prosocial motivator which encourages employees to look for solutions that provide mutual gains rather than cater to singular interests. Thus, managers or leaders should model their behaviors (i.e. compassionate acts) to make allowances for the mistakes and errors of employees throughout the organization, which will eventually nurture a more creative and innovative mindset among service employees.

Third, this study shows that the evaluative perspective of PWRI is an important antecedent of service employee performance. Therefore, service firms should consider providing a series of rewarding programs (i.e. wall of fame, rites of enhancement and company ceremonies) to increase employees' sense of self-worth or self-esteem, so that they can increase their motivation for further enhancement of their identity through more commitment to their jobs.

Finally, our study corroborates the idea that building a compassionate climate in an organization develops positive identity (PWRI) and then promotes employee creativity, eventually leading to increased job performance. It follows that to promote PWRI and creativity through compassionate acts in an organization, managers should carefully monitor how employees make sense of their organization, paying close attention to various factors, specifically:

- employees' evaluations of how they perceive their organizations (i.e. regarding their organization as a supportive and care-providing system);
- the top management team's (TMT) role modeling behaviors (i.e. respectful, trustful, courteous and compassionate ways of acting); and
- an organization's emphasis on providing an open organizational atmosphere that challenges the status quo to continuously develop creativity.

Combining all of the above is likely to increase employees' job performance.

5.3 Limitations and future studies

In spite of the various contributions of the present study, it has several limitations that might usefully be considered in future research. First, the sample of salespeople was drawn from a specific line of work in one country (i.e. South Korea). The model of this study should, therefore, be tested and generalized in a variety of occupations, industries and countries. This is an area in which further research is required.

Second, the nature of the cross-sectional data we used in the analysis means that caution is required in concluding that there is a definite causal relationship between the variables. As the employees in this study were surveyed at a single time point, we did not capture longitudinal variation, with the result that a definite cause-and-effect relationship could not be determined. A study using a longitudinal design would overcome this limitation in future research. For example, a study might usefully collect self-reported data at two different points of time to clarify the causality between compassion at work and job performance, such as having the respondents fill out forms on demographic information and compassion at work or the evaluative perspective of PWRI during a first round of data collection, followed by the completed questionnaires about creativity and job performance during the second round of data collection, perhaps 6 to 9 weeks later.

Finally, the common method variance in the self-reported variables imposes a need for caution in the interpretation of the findings. Although Harman one-factor and common method factor tests were conducted, common method bias may still be a concern, as both predictor and dependent variables are from the same source in this study. Therefore, future studies could avoid the problem of common method bias by, for example, using supervisor ratings of job performance.

Notes

1 Dutton *et al.* (2010) developed the four types of PWRI – virtue, evaluative, developmental and structural – that capture the different sources of positivity at work. PWRI is

defined as a positive portion of individuals' self-concept toward their work or organization that comes from being a member of a particular organization (Bednar *et al.*, 2011; Dutton *et al.*, 2010).

2 We asked the managers of the HR department about the gender ratio, education level and age of the employees across the department store. Although they were unable to provide statistical information about their workforce, they did confirm that the sample characteristics of this study were representative of their sales employees.

3 The coefficient of sequential mediation effect: compassion at work → the evaluative perspective of PWRI → service employee creativity → service employees' job performance.

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