

Regulatory focus and AI learning intention among hotel employees: The moderating roles of organizational climate

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the hospitality industry, as hotels increasingly integrate AI-enabled systems to improve service quality and operational efficiency (Tussyadiah, 2020; Gretzel et al., 2015). Despite these technological advancements, the success of AI implementation ultimately depends on employees' readiness to engage in continuous learning (Noe et al., 2014). In this regard, AI learning intention, which refers to employees' willingness to acquire and apply AI-related knowledge and skills, has become a crucial element of digital transformation.

Most previous studies on technology adoption have applied the Technology Adoption Model (Davis, 1989) and its extensions (Venkatesh et al., 2003). These studies focused on perceived usefulness and ease of use as key predictors of technology adoption. However, AI deployment in hospitality requires more than acceptance or intention to use. It requires staff to continuously learn, update, and apply AI-related competencies to perform their jobs. These models still do not fully explain why some employees view learning AI as a growth opportunity, while others see it as a source of uncertainty, risk, or pressure.

To address this gap, this study adopts Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT) (Higgins, 1997, 1998), which distinguishes between promotion focus and prevention focus as two self-regulatory orientations. Promotion-focused individuals are motivated by growth and advancement, often pursuing gains and aspirations (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Prevention-focused individuals prioritize security and responsibility, striving to avoid losses and negative outcomes (Wallace et al., 2008; Dai et al., 2021). Compared with technology acceptance theories, which primarily explain whether employees accept or intend to use technology, RFT explains how employees are motivated to engage with AI learning demands. It also differs from Self-Determination Theory, which focuses on the quality of motivation, because RFT emphasizes the strategic orientation through which employees pursue gains or avoid losses. This distinction is particularly relevant in hospitality, where AI learning may simultaneously relate to career advancement, service improvement, performance pressure, and job insecurity.

Employee behavior is also influenced by organizational climate, which signals valued norms and expectations (Schneider et al., 2013). A supportive climate encourages learning (Eisenberger et al., 1990), while a punitive climate may reduce psychological safety and inhibit experimentation (Edmondson, 1999). From an interactionist perspective, behavior emerges from the interaction between personality traits and situational factors (Diener et al., 1984; Endler & Edwards, 1986). Applied to the hospitality context, this view suggests that employees' AI learning intention may reflect both their regulatory focus and the organizational environment in which they work. Accordingly, this study examines how promotion and prevention focus relate to hotel employees' intention to learn AI and tests whether organizational climate moderates these relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT) proposes that individuals regulate goal-directed behavior through two motivational orientations: promotion focus and prevention focus (Higgins, 1997, 1998). Promotion-focused individuals pursue growth and advancement, emphasizing gains and aspirations (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). Prevention-focused individuals prioritize security, seeking to avoid losses and negative outcomes (Brockner & Higgins, 2001).

In hospitality industry, these orientations may shape employees' responses to AI learning. Research indicates that regulatory focus influences work-related attitudes and performance in hotel contexts (Dai et

FINDINGS

The measurement model showed satisfactory reliability and validity. The structural results indicated that promotion focus positively affected AI learning intention ($\beta = 0.466$, $p < 0.001$), and prevention focus had a negative effect ($\beta = -0.264$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1a and H1b.

The moderation results were partially supported. Supportive climate strengthened the positive relationship between promotion focus and AI learning intention ($\beta = 0.153$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H2a, and weakened the negative effect of prevention focus ($\beta = 0.091$, $p < 0.05$), so H2b was supported. Punitive climate weakened the relationship between promotion focus and AI learning intention ($\beta = -0.114$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H3a, and strengthened the negative effect of prevention focus ($\beta = -0.103$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H3b.

CONCLUSION

This study extends Regulatory Focus Theory to AI learning in the hotel context. The findings show that promotion focus increases employees' AI learning intention, and prevention focus reduces it. More importantly, organizational climate changes these relationships. Supportive climate strengthens the positive effect of promotion focus and reduces the negative effect of prevention focus. In contrast, punitive climate weakens the positive effect of promotion focus and strengthens the negative effect of prevention focus.

These results suggest that hotel employees' AI learning intention depends on both personal motivation and the work environment. The study contributes to hospitality and tourism literature by showing that AI learning is not only a technology acceptance issue, but also a person–situation interaction process. For hotel managers, the findings highlight the importance of creating a supportive and non-punitive climate that encourages learning, reduces fear of mistakes, and helps employees view AI as an opportunity rather than a threat.

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