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# Understanding Students' Intentions to Join the Hospitality Industry: The Role of Emotional Intelligence, Service Orientation, and Industry Satisfaction

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emotional intelligence, service orientation, intentions to stay in the hospitality industry

## **Disciplines**

Hospitality Administration and Management

## **Comments**

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## Abstract

A study of 246 hospitality degree students in Hong Kong and the United States found that emotional intelligence has a strong effect on students' intentions to pursue a career in the hospitality industry. The students' service orientation has a similar but weaker effect. The study also found that this relationship is mediated by the degree to which these post-internship students were satisfied with working in the industry. Because emotional intelligence can be enhanced through education, hospitality educators can help develop their students' emotional intelligence and service orientation and potentially increase their likelihood of developing successful careers within the industry.

## Keywords

emotional intelligence; service orientation; intentions to stay in the hospitality industry

Numerous educators and researchers are focusing on students' career intentions, especially the degree to which they wish to develop careers in the hospitality industry (see, for example, Chang and Tse, forthcoming; Song and Chathoth 2008; Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins 2010; Song and Chon 2012; Teng 2008; Wan, Wong, and Kong 2014). These studies are motivated in part by the acknowledgment that the hospitality industry seems not to be the most favored career track for many graduates of hospitality programs. For example, in one study, over 50 percent of students reported that they would only "possibly" seek jobs in hospitality (Richardson 2008). Similarly, a second study also found that only about half of the graduates in their sample sought their first jobs in the industry (King, McKercher, and Waryszak 2003). Other research has confirmed that hospitality careers are less than popular career choices for many students (e.g., Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins 2010; Richardson 2009; Song and Chathoth 2008, 2011). Thus, despite the increasing demand, a substantial proportion of college-educated professionals are not attracted to careers in hospitality, and the industry faces the critical problem of attracting and retaining its future talent (Barron 2008; Song and Chon 2012). This phenomenon causes us to ask: What factors are influencing students' career decisions and their intentions to join the industry? Our study answers a decade-old call "to investigate why so few students end up in the industry" (King, McKercher, and Waryszak 2003, 415) and

to develop strategies to encourage more graduates to develop careers in this ever-growing sector.

While indeed there are specific industry characteristics (such as salary, work–life balance, and perceived lack of work challenge and opportunities) that strongly influence students' career decisions (Kelley-Patterson and George 2001; O'Leary and Deegan 2005; Richardson 2009), individual-level traits also influence their decision making (Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins 2010; Teng 2008), and it is useful for both selection and training to determine which traits are salient. Research has shown that several individual factors, such as general self-efficacy, vocational interest, and person–job fit perceptions, all influence students' hospitality career aspirations (Song and Chon 2012). Yet beyond this general assessment, we know little about the ways that characteristics inherent in and important to how individuals engage and interact with customers influence students' career plans.

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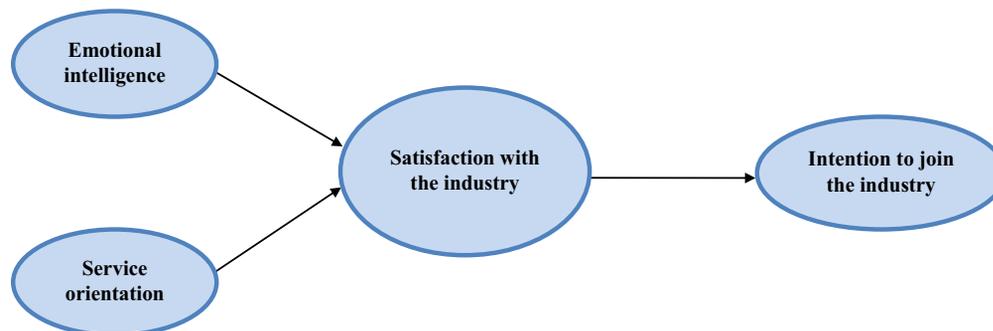
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**Exhibit 1:**  
**The Theoretical Model.**



In this study, we apply a fit perspective and we consider the impact of two key personality characteristics, emotional intelligence and service orientation on students' intentions to join the industry. We examine these two characteristics because of their direct and significant impact on service delivery (e.g., Gwinner et al. 2005; Kernbach and Schutte 2005; Prentice and King 2013). Our presumption is that students who are higher in these characteristics may be more successful in and thus more attracted to service-based work. Indeed, as Kusluvan et al. (2010, 193) suggest,

service orientation . . . emotional intelligence . . . are gaining importance as selection criteria for tourism and hospitality employees . . . more research is needed . . . [regarding] whether such people are willing to work in and have vocational commitment to the industry.

As shown in Exhibit 1, we address this issue through examining the mediating effect of satisfaction with the industry (after an internship).

We focused on students who had completed an internship to ensure that our respondents had a realistic view of the industry (Song and Chon 2012; Teng 2008). Research has shown that students' aspirations to enter the industry deteriorate as they progress in their studies, particularly after they have received direct exposure to the industry (Jenkins 2001). This may occur because the internship experience dispels students' unrealistic perceptions about the industry's employment conditions (Zahari et al. 2010). Thus, focusing on post-internship students enables us to examine a group that more accurately understands the nature of hospitality-based work, in essence taking the issue of expectations off the table.

Our goal is to understand which types of students possess a higher level of career aspirations for the industry. Investigating the roles of emotional intelligence and service orientation in influencing students' career aspirations can offer both meaningful theoretical insights and

significant practical implications on education and human resource management in the hospitality industry.

## Literature Review and Hypotheses

### Career Choice and Fit

The basis of this study is that students will choose work that best engages their skills and which fits with their personality characteristics (Tinsley 2000). Indeed, as research on person-environment fit suggests, individuals are active managers of their own careers and they select jobs after carefully gathering data about themselves and their potential work environments (Furnham and Schaeffer 1984; Holland 1985; Singh and Greenhaus 2004). In this regard, their goal is to find positions that best match their overall needs and personality traits (Verquer, Beehr, and Wagner 2003). Research also shows that this is an effective strategy, as individuals will be more successful when their personality traits match the demands of their chosen line of work (Carliss 2005). When there is fit, or congruence, individuals are more likely to perform at a higher level, meet their supervisors' expectations, and remain longer in their jobs and fields (Carliss 2005; Vogel and Feldman 2009). One form of environmental fit is the degree to which individuals' traits enable them to meet the demands of their jobs. If individuals can use their traits to perform well in their job, they are much more likely to progress in the selection process, be successful in their jobs, and remain in their chosen line of work (Cable and DeRue 2002; Carliss 2005).

### Emotional Intelligence

One type of personality trait that is likely central to individuals' success in a service-based business is their emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence refers to "an individual's ability to perceive and understand information, and to generate and regulate emotions that promote emotional and

intellectual growth” (T. Kim et al. 2011, 1030). Individuals higher in emotional intelligence can sense emotion-based information, as well as understand and manage their own and others’ emotions, thereby enhancing both their personal and social competence. As a result, emotional intelligence is directly related to individuals’ professional success (Goleman 1995; Mayer and Salovey 1997). A key point about emotional intelligence is that it can be strengthened through training and experience (Elfenbein 2006).

The effect of emotional intelligence on service performance is notable. Emotional intelligence enables employees to better understand, perceive, and manage both their own and customers’ emotions as they co-create the service experience. In turn, this promotes customer performance and results in higher levels of customer satisfaction (Kernbach and Schutte 2005; T. Kim et al. 2011). This happens through two ways. As part of managing themselves, employees higher in their emotional intelligence tend to use more effective emotional labor strategies (Joseph and Newman 2010). Because of its diverse customer base, jobs in this sector are emotionally challenging (Morris and Feldman 1997). Employees often need to balance their true emotions with those they can freely display. When dealing with stressful, on-the-spot service encounters, which can often involve difficult customers, individuals who have higher levels of emotional intelligence are more likely to adopt the deep surface acting approach (such as reappraising the meaning of stressful events), rather than the surface acting approach (such as hiding one’s true emotions). The deep acting strategy is often associated with a lower level of emotional dissonance and a higher level of affective service delivery (Grandey 2003).

Emotional intelligence also helps employees to connect with others and implement effective adaptive strategies to read and engage with customers (Brotheridge 2006; Kernbach and Schutte 2005; Prentice and King 2013). This is why those higher in emotional intelligence perform better (than those lower), both in providing a service and recovering from service failures (T. Kim et al. 2011). Due to their service acumen, employees with higher emotional intelligence receive higher merit increases and assume higher level positions than their lower emotional intelligence counterparts (Côté and Miners 2006; Kernbach and Schutte 2005; Prentice and King 2013).

Ultimately, those who are higher in emotional intelligence are able to sustain themselves in service-based work. These individuals not only maintain or maximize positive moods and higher self-esteem, but they also resist the deteriorating influences of negative events, such as interactions with unhappy customers (Schutte et al. 2002). As a result, emotional intelligence can offset factors that cause burnout among customer-contact employees and managers (Lee and Ok 2012). Overall, people with higher emotional intelligence tend to face such undesirable working conditions in a

more positive manner and as a result experience lower turnover intentions (Joseph and Newman 2010).

The research findings on the importance of emotional intelligence have a direct bearing on whether college students elect to enter the service industry. We contend that because their traits better match the requirements of service-based work, people higher in emotional intelligence are more likely to form more positive attitudes and perceptions about hospitality jobs (B. Kim et al. 2012; Kusluvan et al. 2010), especially after obtaining exposure to working in the industry through a realistic job preview. This is because these students are more likely to experience congruent person–job fit and, as a result, have greater intentions to pursue hospitality-based jobs. Thus, we expect that hospitality students with higher emotional intelligence will generally manage service encounters in their internships more successfully (Grandey 2003; Kernbach and Schutte 2005), and further they will be more likely to perceive a better fit for themselves in this line of work (Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins 2010; Teng 2008). They are thus more likely to form more positive attitudes and perceptions about hospitality-based jobs and careers (B. Kim et al. 2012; Lee and Ok 2012), and will be more likely to join the industry after graduation. This rationale leads to our first hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** The higher students’ emotional intelligence, the greater their post-internship intentions to join the hospitality industry.

### *Service Orientation*

A second personality trait likely to influence students’ intentions to join the hospitality industry is their service orientation. Although a stream of research has considered service orientation as a group phenomenon (e.g., Homburg, Hoyer, and Fassnacht 2002; W. G. Kim, Leong, and Lee 2005), it is also relevant at the individual level. Service orientation refers to a “set of basic individual predispositions and an inclination to provide service, to be courteous and helpful in dealing with customers and associates” (Cran 1994, 36). Those higher in their service orientation are self-controlled, dependable, well-adjusted, and likable (Kusluvan et al. 2010), and they will readily assist customers, especially with problem-solving and meeting customers’ needs (Gwinner et al. 2005). Similar to emotional intelligence, service-oriented individuals tend to demonstrate better job performance, as well as higher levels of other desirable social and psychological features such as self-acceptance, a sense of well-being, responsibility, self-control, and tolerance (Hogan, Hogan, and Busch 1984). Employees’ service orientation leads to their use of more adaptive customer-service behaviors, which results in more positive service delivery and higher service quality (Bettencourt, Gwinner, and Meuter 2001; Gwinner et al. 2005). These findings suggest

that individuals higher in their service orientation have better service attitudes, adapt themselves better to diverse customers, and deliver services in a more positive manner than those lower in this personality trait.<sup>1</sup>

Applying the concept of person–job fit, we propose that individuals higher in their service orientation will be more attracted to service-based work (Schneider 1987). As they have a predisposition toward offering help to others, the nature of service work will likely fit those with higher dispositions. These individuals will be more likely to find service-based work interesting and meaningful and are likely to be more successful in their jobs. Indeed, this idea is supported by research which finds that service orientation correlates significantly with intrinsic motivation in service jobs ( $r = .50, p < .01$ ; Gwinner et al. 2005). In addition, as suggested by the attraction–selection–attrition (A-S-A) theory, individuals will seek out employment opportunities in an organization (and by extension, an industry) when they believe that the organization (or industry) has values or beliefs similar to their own (Schneider 1987). Those higher in their service orientation may be more attracted to service-based work.

In contrast, those with lower levels of service orientation will see the industry as a poor fit for their personality traits and may be less likely to enter the industry. This notion is consistent with the “attrition” process discussed in the A-S-A theory, whereby those who do not experience a strong job fit deselect themselves out of their jobs (Schneider 1987). Even if individuals enter an organization or industry with a poor fit (e.g., students discovered that they picked a “wrong” major after they experienced hospitality work), these individuals will eventually leave their current situation and seek out better fit elsewhere, as outlined in the “attrition” process in the A-S-A model (Schneider 1987).

Taken together, we expect that after exposure to service-based work, individuals who are higher in their service orientation will be more likely to join the industry upon graduation. Through their internships, these individuals will likely have experienced congruence between their service orientation and the type of work they would be performing, and this congruence would further solidify their intentions to join the industry. This rationale leads to our second hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2:** The higher students’ service orientation, the greater their post-internship intentions to join the hospitality industry.

### *The Mediating Role of Overall Industry Satisfaction*

To further understand the process by which emotional intelligence and service orientation influence hospitality students’ post-internship intentions to pursue a career in this

sector, we explore the role of overall industry satisfaction. Industry-level satisfaction refers to an individual’s overall affective evaluation of working in an industry, in this case, hospitality. The construct is adapted from the job satisfaction concept, which refers to “a positive emotional state resulting from an appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke 1976, 1304). Job satisfaction reflects an overall feeling of fulfillment that one’s work meets one’s needs (Bretz and Judge 1994).

Although there are many factors that influence job satisfaction, person–job fit plays a role. Indeed, research shows that when employees experience job fit congruence, they are more likely to experience satisfaction (Ishitani 2010; Perdue, Reardon, and Peterson 2007; Saari and Judge 2004). In this view, if individuals perform work that enables them to successfully apply their traits, they will be more fulfilled in their jobs (Arvey et al. 1989; Judge and Larsen 2001; Judge, Locke, and Durham 1997; Staw, Bell, and Clausen 1986). Studies of hospitality employees have expressly found that key individual traits such as emotional stability and the degree of customer orientation drive employees’ job satisfaction (Donavan, Brown, and Mowen 2004). All this work suggests that traits, and the notion of fit, matter.

Adapting the concept of job satisfaction to overall industry satisfaction, we argue that higher levels of emotional intelligence and service orientation promote individuals’ overall satisfaction with working in the industry. Students higher in emotional intelligence in general are likely to find hospitality-based work less taxing and even enjoyable, and their internship would confirm this belief (e.g., Kernbach and Schutte 2005; Sy, Tram, and O’Hara 2006). For instance, Lee and Ok (2012) report that emotional intelligence indirectly improves an individual’s job satisfaction with a service job through creating a sense of perceived personal accomplishment. Likewise, service orientation promotes job satisfaction, as individuals are performing work that is suited to their inclination to help others (Donavan, Brown, and Mowen 2004). We would argue that similar to job satisfaction, students who are higher in their levels of emotional intelligence and service orientation would be more satisfied working in the industry that provides this type of work.

Overall, we would argue that after obtaining exposure to hospitality-based work, students higher in emotional intelligence and service orientation would find working in the industry more satisfying than those lower in these dimensions. Furthermore, this sense of satisfaction would strengthen these students’ intentions to join the industry upon graduation (H.-B. Kim and Park 2013). Although we have found no research examining industry satisfaction and career intentions, we do know that job satisfaction strengthens vocational commitment and reduces turnover intentions (Brown and Peterson 1993; Cotton and Tuttle 1986;

Griffeth, Hom, and Gaertner 2000). Moreover, we also know that person–organization fit influences job satisfaction and career success (Bretz and Judge 1994). These related findings lead us to believe that students' levels of emotional intelligence and service orientation would promote their industry satisfaction, which in turn would strengthen their career intentions. Thus, we posit the following:

**Hypothesis 3A:** Overall industry satisfaction will mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and students' post-internship intentions to join the industry.

**Hypothesis 3B:** Overall industry satisfaction will mediate the relationship between service orientation and students' post-internship intentions to join the industry.

## Method

### Sample

To test our hypotheses, we surveyed a total of 246 undergraduate students from two hospitality programs, one in the United States and the other in Hong Kong. All of these students had completed internships. We used two samples to increase the external validity of the results and thus enrich the study's implications. In both institutions, students were taking a required course in hospitality management.

In the Hong Kong sample, we adopted a two-wave design. This allowed us to minimize the superficial relationships between the variables due to common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003). The first survey, administered at the beginning of the semester, asked students about their emotional intelligence and service orientation. We also collected demographic data, such as gender and age. The second survey, administered approximately four months later, at the end of the semester, asked the same cohort of students to report their satisfaction with the industry and intentions to join it after graduation. We emphasized that their responses would be strictly used for research purposes only and would not affect their course grades (other than receiving 5% course credit for participating in the study). In addition, collecting information on our independent variables at a time frame different from our dependent variable helps address bias concerns inherent in this form of research.

For the U.S. sample, we administered a single-wave survey that elicited students' responses about their emotional intelligence, service orientation, overall satisfaction with the industry, and intentions to join the industry. To meet the data collection anonymity protocols involving human subjects, each student was assigned a pseudonym and only the course instructor could match each pseudonym with the student's real name. Participation was completely voluntary

and course credit was not offered. The final sample size of 246 resulted after cases with missing values had been excluded (69 from the United States and 177 from the Hong Kong samples).

### Measures

**Emotional intelligence.** We measured emotional intelligence using a nineteen-item scale developed and validated by Brackett and colleagues (Brackett and Mayer 2003; Brackett et al. 2006). The scale consists of the following five dimensions: perceiving emotion, the use of emotion, understanding emotion, self-managing emotion, and social management of emotions. A sample item for perceiving emotion was "By looking at people's facial expressions, I recognize the emotions they are experiencing," and an item for social management of emotions was "When someone I know is in a bad mood, I can help the person calm down and feel better quickly." The reliability of this scale was .87. We performed a second-order confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the five dimensions as first-order latent constructs, and the overall emotional intelligence concept as the second-order latent construct, using Lisrel 8.8 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 2006). The CFA results showed a good fit to the data:  $\chi^2 = 333.48$  ( $n = 246$ ;  $df = 147$ ,  $p < .01$ ), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .07, comparative fit index (CFI) = .95, incremental fit index (IFI) = .95.

**Service orientation.** We measured service orientation using a five-item scale from Gwinner and colleagues (2005). The five items are as follows: "I enjoy helping others," "The best job I can imagine would involve assisting others in solving their problems," "I can get along with most anyone," "I pride myself in providing courteous service," and "It is natural for me to be considerate of others' needs." The reliability for this scale was .77. CFA results again showed a reasonably good fit to the data:  $\chi^2 = 19.50$  ( $n = 246$ ;  $df = 5$ ,  $p = .13$ ), RMSEA = .10, CFI = .97, IFI = .97. Although this RMSEA value is relatively large, other researchers suggest that RMSEA should not be used as a single way of assessing model fit especially when other goodness-of-fit measures are satisfactory (Chen et al. 2008).

**Overall industry satisfaction.** We measured this construct by asking respondents to indicate the extent of their agreement with the following statement: "Overall, I am very satisfied with the hospitality industry." This measure of job satisfaction has been found to correlate highly with composite measures (Wanous, Reichers, and Hudy 1997) and has been used in prior studies (e.g., Donovan, Brown, and Mowen 2004; Song and Chathoth 2011). As Donovan, Brown, and Mowen (2004, 132) suggest, "the use of a global scale enabled us to capture an overall assessment without either focusing on any one of the several reported dimensions of job satisfaction or including many

**Exhibit 2:**  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations (N = 247).

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Study variables									
1. Intentions to join the industry	3.33	0.99	(.85)						
2. Satisfaction with the industry	3.45	0.89	.68**						
3. Emotional intelligence	3.42	0.47	.37**	.35**	(.87)				
4. Service orientation	3.95	0.58	.30**	.29**	.47**	(.77)			
Controls									
5. Gender <sup>a</sup>	0.30	0.46	.12	.01	-.01	.08			
6. Exam score	170.35	15.93	-.20**	-.18**	-.03	-.06	-.19**		
7. Negative affectivity	2.44	0.79	-.15*	-.03	-.18**	-.11	-.18**	.08	
8. Source <sup>b</sup>	0.72	0.45	-.55**	-.30**	-.25*	-.35**	-.24**	.32**	.22**

Note. Reliabilities are presented in the parentheses.

a. 0 = male, 1 = female.

b. 0 = United States, 1 = Hong Kong.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$  (two-tailed test).

items.” This advantage is important to our study because we want to measure students’ overall assessment about hospitality jobs, but there is no available measure of industry satisfaction in the existing literature. Thus, it would require another substantive study to develop such a scale.<sup>2</sup>

**Intentions to join the hospitality industry.** We measured intentions to seek a hospitality job using the following two items specifically developed for this study: “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in the hospitality industry” and “I will certainly join the industry upon graduation.” The reliability of this measure was .85.

**Control variables.** To test for differences arising from the two samples and the sampling procedures, we used a dummy variable (0 = United States, 1 = Hong Kong) in all analyses. We also controlled for respondents’ cognitive intelligence, using their exam scores, and their gender (0 = male, 1 = female), which has been found to correlate with hospitality students’ career intentions decisions (Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins 2010). We did not control for age because the variance of this variable was small. Because we relied on self-reported data, we also included negative affectivity as a control variable (Spector 1994). This was measured as a stable individual trait based on the ten negative affectivity statements from the positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988). Other than the source, gender, and exam score variables, all items were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

## Results

Although both service orientation and emotional intelligence have an influence on students’ desire to enter the

industry, we found that emotional intelligence had a much stronger effect. We also found a strong mediating effect of industry satisfaction. Exhibit 2 presents the results of the descriptive analysis, and Exhibit 3 shows differences among the two samples. It is interesting to note that the U.S. students scored higher on all four key study variables (i.e., emotional intelligence, service orientation, overall satisfaction with the industry, and intentions to join the industry). Exhibit 4 presents the results of the multiple regression analyses. As can be noted in Exhibit 4, Model 1 examines the influences of the control variables (i.e., gender, exam score, negative affectivity, and source of sample) on overall industry satisfaction. Confirming our review of descriptive differences in our two samples, results suggest that the source variable has a significant effect on overall industry satisfaction ( $\beta = -.27, p < .01$ ), with the U.S. students potentially having much higher levels compared with their Hong Kong counterparts. As we discuss later, we may be seeing the effects of cultural differences.

As part of our test for mediation, Model 2 shows the impact of service orientation and emotional intelligence on overall industry satisfaction. Results suggest that both individual variables are significant predictors of satisfaction ( $\beta = .15, p < .05$ , for service orientation, and  $\beta = .22, p < .01$ , for emotional intelligence). Taken together, they explain 9 percent of the additional variance ( $p < .01$ ) in overall industry satisfaction over and above the effects of the control variables.

Model 3 is the baseline model for intentions to join the hospitality industry, with the four control variables included in the equation. The source variables again have a significant effect on intentions to join the industry ( $\beta = -.54, p < .01$ ). As shown in Model 4, when service orientation and emotional intelligence are added, the results suggest that emotional intelligence significantly predicts intentions to join the

**Exhibit 3:**  
The Sample Statistics by Country.

Source	N	M	SD	t Test
Emotional intelligence				
Hong Kong	183	3.32	0.41	$t = -5.45$
United States	69	3.69	0.51	$p = .000$
Service orientation				
Hong Kong	179	3.87	0.55	$t = -3.82$
United States	69	4.18	0.60	$p = .000$
Overall satisfaction with the industry				
Hong Kong	184	3.29	0.78	$t = -4.33$
United States	69	3.87	1.00	$p = .000$
Intentions to join the industry				
Hong Kong	184	3.06	0.80	$t = -9.69$
United States	69	4.20	0.89	$p = .000$
Gender				
Hong Kong	184	0.24	0.43	$t = -3.77$
United States	69	0.48	0.50	$p = .000$
Exam score				
Hong Kong	184	173.35	12.18	$t = 5.24$
United States	69	162.17	21.07	$p = .000$
Negative affectivity				
Hong Kong	184	2.56	0.79	$t = 3.70$
United States	69	2.17	0.74	$p = .000$

**Exhibit 4:**  
Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Students' Intentions to Join the Industry (N = 247).

	Dependent Variables				
	Overall Satisfaction with the Industry		Intentions to Join the Industry		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Controls					
Gender	.02	.04	-.02	-.01	-.03
Exam score	-.09	-.11 <sup>†</sup>	-.03	-.05	.02
Negative affectivity	.04	.07	-.03	-.01	-.05
Source <sup>a</sup>	-.27**	-.15*	-.54**	-.45**	-.37**
Study variables					
Service orientation		.15*		.11 <sup>†</sup>	.03
Emotional intelligence		.22**		.15*	.03
Overall satisfaction with the industry					.55**
R <sup>2</sup>	.10**	.19**	.30**	.35**	.60**
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.09**		.05**	.25**

a. 0 = United States, 1 = Hong Kong.

<sup>†</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . (two-tailed test).

industry ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .05$ ), while the predictive power of service orientation is only marginal ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p < .10$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is supported, while Hypothesis 2 is only marginally supported. Following Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach, the marginally significant impact of service

orientation on intentions to join the industry indicates that the results offer no support for Hypothesis 3B. That said, emotional intelligence and service orientation together explain five percent of the additional variance ( $p < .01$ ) in intentions to join the industry.

Finally, in Model 5, we entered overall industry satisfaction as the mediator in the equation. The results suggest that satisfaction is a significant predictor of intentions to join the industry ( $\beta = .55, p < .01$ ), while the impact of emotional intelligence and service orientation becomes insignificant in this model. Thus, Hypothesis 3A is fully supported. Overall, industry satisfaction accounts for 25 percent of the additional variance in students' intentions to join the industry over and above the effects of the control and independent variables.

### Supplementary Analyses

We performed three supplementary analyses to check the validity of our conclusions and to explore the interaction of emotional intelligence and service orientation. First, we further examined the results from Model 4, which did not support our prediction that service orientation would promote intentions to join the industry. Although the correlation analysis in Exhibit 2 suggests that service orientation is significantly associated with intentions to join ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ), the regression results suggest that service orientation has a limited effect when emotional intelligence is also taken into account. One reason for this could be that individuals with higher emotional intelligence also have a stronger orientation to serve and interact with other people. As a result, service orientation and emotional intelligence may share a significant amount of the variance when predicting intentions to join the industry. In fact, the results reported in Exhibit 2 suggest that the two variables correlate at  $.47 (p < .01)$ . We thus performed a supplementary analysis including only service orientation as a predictor of intentions to join the industry (together with all control variables), and we did find a positive relationship between the service orientation and intentions to join ( $\beta = .18, p < .01$ ).

Second, we used the Sobel test to provide a more accurate assessment of the mediation hypotheses. The results supported industry satisfaction's fully mediating role in the link between emotional intelligence and intentions to join ( $z = 3.07, p < .01$ ; indirect effect =  $.25, p < .01$ ; remaining direct effect =  $.07, ns$ ; and the proportion of total effect that is mediated = 79%). A similar pattern was found for the role of overall industry satisfaction in the link between service orientation and intentions to join ( $z = 2.26, p < .05$ ; indirect effect =  $.14, p < .05$ ; remaining direct effect =  $.05, ns$ ; and the proportion of total effect that is mediated = 75%). As a result, both Hypotheses 3A and 3B were supported via the Sobel test results.

Finally, we performed a series of additional analyses separately for the five emotional intelligence dimensions.<sup>3</sup> Appendices A and B show the impact of separate emotional intelligence dimensions on post-internship students' overall industry satisfaction and intentions to join the industry. As can be noted in Appendix A, all five emotional intelligence dimensions somewhat positively impacted students' overall satisfaction with the industry; the dimensions of understanding

emotions ( $\beta = .13, p < .05$ ) and self-management of emotions were especially strong predictors ( $\beta = .20, p < .01$ ). As can be noted in Appendix B, again, all five emotional intelligence dimensions positively influenced students' intentions to join the industry; however, understanding emotions was the only dimension that was significant ( $\beta = .12, p < .05$ ).

## Discussion

### Theoretical Implications

Overall, results suggest that individuals' emotional intelligence significantly predicts their intentions to join the hospitality industry, and that this process occurs due to the students' satisfaction with the industry. We see that people with greater emotional intelligence may find hospitality jobs an ideal way to put their strengths to work and build successful careers. This idea is certainly supported in work that examines the role of person–job fit in predicting career choice (see Lent et al. 2002). At a minimum, these individuals likely handle the demands of service-based work more effectively than those lower in their emotional intelligence. The realization that their chosen field will enable them to thrive may be instrumental in fostering the overall industry satisfaction of these students and their intentions to join the industry upon graduation (e.g., Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins 2010; Teng 2008).

Our additional analyses of the emotional intelligence dimensions suggest that individuals' ability to understand and to manage their emotions is particularly important in predicting overall satisfaction with the hospitality industry. Working in hospitality can be simultaneously rewarding and difficult, and individuals who can understand how and why they react to situations, as they resist the negative or draining emotions inherent in the service delivery process, may find working in the industry inherently more satisfying. So too, our results suggest that once again, self-awareness, especially as it relates to how individuals emotionally react to others, influences the likelihood that students see a potential fit for themselves in the hospitality industry.

The influence of emotional intelligence somewhat overshadowed service orientation, but our supplementary analyses suggest that the indirect effect of service orientation is indeed significant (MacKinnon et al. 2002; Preacher and Hayes 2008). Independent of emotional intelligence, higher levels of service orientation may help employees put their natural customer-service skills to work. At a minimum, those higher in their service orientation seem to have greater intentions to join the industry. Indeed, those who are oriented toward helping others may find a career in hospitality a way to satisfy this desire. Moreover, organizations can certainly create conditions that support and enhance their employees' orientation toward service orientation in ways that only strengthens the job fit connection. From a career perspective, this study shows the importance of doing so.

In answering the call to better understand why students are not interested in joining the hospitality industry, we add to a growing body of literature investigating this issue (see Chang and Tse, forthcoming; Chuang and Dellmann-Jenkins 2010; Song and Chathoth 2008; Song and Chon 2012). This is the only study we know of that examines personality traits inherent to the service delivery process and thus central to a service organization's success. This is important because the two traits tested here might encourage individuals to join and develop careers within the industry despite some negative external influences, such as sufficient but not extraordinary pay, and inflexible hours. We do know that those higher in emotional intelligence choose careers that are more suited to their skills sets, handle challenges at work better, and ultimately have lower turnover intentions than those lower in their emotional intelligence (Carmeli 2003; Di Fabio and Kenny 2011; Emmerling and Cherniss 2003; Jordan, Ashkanasy, and Hartel 2002). Thus, beyond issues of fit, these findings also suggest that the industry would benefit from encouraging applications from individuals high in emotional intelligence. As the nature of the industry is not likely to change a great deal, it is wise for organizations to understand the types of individuals that may be best suited toward it and have the temperament to work within its challenging structure.

Moreover, this is the first study we know of that considers the role of industry satisfaction. The idea of satisfaction with an industry, as opposed to one's job, has not been examined previously, especially in predicting career intentions. Our results suggest that this is a phenomenon worth exploring, especially as it influences the decisions of those higher in their emotional intelligence, as well as those stronger in their service orientation. Satisfaction, or the state of fulfillment, seems to play a role in the career decisions for those whose traits more naturally fit with the notion of service.

### *Managerial Implications*

The chief managerial implication from this study is that hospitality educators and practitioners would benefit from developing the emotional intelligence and service orientation of their students or employees, given that both can be developed, strengthened, or learned (e.g., Elfenbein 2006; Peter and Brinberg 2012; Wong et al. 2007). In particular, hospitality educators would be wise to develop their students' emotional intelligence through courses that teach the concept and simulations that can develop students' emotional intelligence skill sets.

In addition, educators (and companies as well) might also benefit from discussing with students their rationales for or against joining the industry. Although this study examined students who presumably had a realistic view of

the industry from their internships, such discussions might help uncover assumptions that students are making about the service experience and the challenges associated with managing it well, at both the staff and supervisory levels. Opening such a dialogue can help students see how their emotional intelligence strengths can be successfully applied to the industry, and enhance their potential for developing successful careers within it.

So, too, the field would benefit from hospitality educators developing their students' service orientation. Ways to do so include incorporating experiential learning into course materials to encourage students to widen their frames of reference and examine the benefits that return to them when they enhance the experiences of their peers. This type of framework could be extended to their work serving customers and also employees. While many would consider these learning activities as building softer, nice-to-have-but-not-necessary skills, our results suggest otherwise. Beyond the notion that developing leadership and enhancing interpersonal skills are important for the students' future success, we show the pedagogical importance of emphasizing emotional intelligence and service orientation. Through highlighting these traits, students can see how their own personal characteristics can help them build successful careers in this industry.

The results of this study also suggest that emotional intelligence and service orientation should be incorporated into human resource selection and training initiatives—a step already taken in some companies. For example, Disney (Reyers and Matusitz 2012) and Sheraton Studio City Hotel (Freedman 2011) have trained their employees on the importance of emotional intelligence. Organizations are also examining the ways in which they can apply human resource practices to promote service orientation in the workplace through developing more supportive work environments (Homburg, Hoyer, and Fassnacht 2002; Johns, Chan, and Yeung 2003; W. G. Kim, Leong, and Lee 2005). Overall, there are rich possibilities and payoffs if both hospitality programs and organizations can select these traits, and further develop the emotional intelligence and service orientation of both their employees and future employees.

### *Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

A chief limitation of this study is that it is based on a sample of hospitality students. Although all had completed internships, it would still be useful to investigate whether similar findings would occur in a sample of hospitality employees to see whether, for example, employees with higher emotional intelligence and service orientation also have stronger intentions to remain within the industry.

A second limitation is the well-known issue that intentions do not always translate into actual behavior (Ajzen 1991; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). While the nature of our research question dictated that we examine our respondents'

opinions, it would be both interesting and useful to examine whether these hospitality students actually pursued a job in the industry after graduation. If that were not the case, we would need to understand why their behaviors may have deviated from their stated intentions by understanding the drivers of graduates' actual career choices. So, too, it would be useful to better understand the factors that cause alumni of hospitality education programs to subsequently leave the industry, after beginning their careers within it. Studies that focus on these issues would provide a deeper understanding of the reasons why the hospitality industry loses its appeal.

In addition, while we focused on overall industry satisfaction as a mediating link, concepts such as engagement, training, and family support may also act as other possible variables impacting students' hospitality career aspirations. Thus, future research should continue to explore other possible mediating mechanisms and build more comprehensive models.<sup>4</sup> So too, it is possible that other external factors (e.g., economic climate, educational experiences) also drive students' career aspirations. This study is solely an examination of individual traits, albeit influential ones.

An unexpected finding is that the U.S. students scored higher on all dimensions than their Hong Kong counterparts, especially in their intentions to join the industry. One possible cultural reason for this result is that it is more common for students in the United States to work in service-based jobs while they are in secondary school, providing them with a familiarity with the hospitality sector before they select their undergraduate programs. In contrast, Hong Kong-based students usually do not have similar exposure

and may be more likely to experience "industry shock" after they first experience hospitality work. Rigorous research could test our conjecture on this issue.

Finally, future research could also examine the attitudinal and behavioral impact of emotional intelligence and service orientation on enhancing the customer experience, creating a positive work environment, and possibly influencing the success of young managers in supervisory roles. Doing so would deepen our understanding of the impact of two influential attitudes and behaviors in a context where individuals depend on one another to create and deliver an experience-based service. This study represents a beginning point in considering the role these important traits play in influencing the industry's future talent.

## Conclusion

Understanding hospitality students' motivation to join the industry is important to both educators and practitioners. The model presented here shows that emotional intelligence and service orientation positively impact students' career intentions through enhancing their industry satisfaction. Overall, findings suggest that educators would benefit developing their students' emotional intelligence and service orientation. While developing these traits and related skills could increase hospitality school graduates' intentions to develop careers within the industry, it could also lead to other desirable outcomes, such as improving service delivery, team-based skills, and supervisory skills, all elements to the crucial to the success of any hospitality-based business.

## Appendix A

### Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Students' Overall Satisfaction with the Industry (with Separate EI Dimensions, N = 247).

	Overall Satisfaction with the Industry						
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 2_1	Model 2_2	Model 2_3	Model 2_4	Model 2_5
Controls							
Gender	.02	.04	.04	.05	.05	.02	.05
Exam score	-.09	-.11 <sup>†</sup>	-.11 <sup>†</sup>	-.12 <sup>†</sup>	-.10	-.10	-.11 <sup>†</sup>
Negative affectivity	.04	.07	.06	.06	.06	.12 <sup>†</sup>	.07
Source <sup>a</sup>	-.27**	-.15*	-.19**	-.21**	-.19**	-.17*	-.18*
Study variables							
SO		.15*	.21**	.21**	.21**	.20**	.20**
EI		.22**					
EI (perceiving emotions)			.11 <sup>†</sup>				
EI (the use of emotions)				.12 <sup>†</sup>			
EI (understanding emotions)					.13*		
EI (self-management)						.20**	
EI (social management)							.11
R <sup>2</sup>	.10**	.19**	.16**	.17**	.17**	.18**	.16**
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.09**	.06**	.07**	.07**	.08**	.06**

Note. EI = emotional intelligence; SO = service orientation.

a. 0 = United States, 1 = Hong Kong.

<sup>†</sup>p < .10. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01 (two-tailed test).

## Appendix B

### Multiple Regression Analysis Results on Students' Intentions to Join the Industry (with Separate EI Dimensions, N = 247).

	Intention to Join the Industry						
	Model 3	Model 4	Model 4_1	Model 4_2	Model 4_3	Model 4_4	Model 4_5
<b>Controls</b>							
Gender	-.02	-.01	-.01	-.00	-.00	-.02	-.00
Exam score	-.03	-.05	-.05	-.05	-.04	-.03	-.04
Negative affectivity	-.03	-.01	-.01	-.02	-.02	.02	-.01
Source <sup>a</sup>	-.54**	-.45**	-.50**	-.50**	-.47**	-.47**	-.49**
<b>Study variables</b>							
SO		.11 <sup>†</sup>	.15**	.14*	.14*	.15**	.16**
EI		.15*					
EI (perceiving emotions)			.09				
EI (the use of emotions)				.11 <sup>†</sup>			
EI (understanding emotions)					.12*		
EI (self-management)						.11 <sup>†</sup>	
EI (social management)							.03
R <sup>2</sup>	.31**	.35**	.34**	.34**	.35**	.34**	.33**
ΔR <sup>2</sup>		.05**	.04**	.04**	.04**	.04**	.03**

Note. We did not show the mediating role of overall industry satisfaction in this analysis, because when overall industry satisfaction is entered into the equation, SO and EI (and its dimensions) have no impact on the dependent variable. EI = emotional intelligence; SO = service orientation.

a. 0 = United States, 1 = Hong Kong.

<sup>†</sup>p < .10. \*p < .05. \*\*p < .01 (two-tailed test).

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1. We thank one anonymous reviewer for this point.
2. For a discussion of this issue, please see Nagy (2002) and Scarpello and Campbell (1983).
3. We thank the editor for this suggestion.
4. We thank one anonymous reviewer for this point.

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