

Charming the system: Exploring organizational ingratiation through hotel employee narratives

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Abstract

This study investigates how hospitality employees perceive and experience organizational ingratiation, a subtle and underexplored aspect of workplace behaviour that can shape professional dynamics and outcomes. Addressing a notable gap in organizational behaviour literature, the research focuses specifically on the hospitality sector—a highly interpersonal and service-driven industry where ingratiation may be especially prevalent. The study adopts a qualitative design, utilizing in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 26 hotel employees in North Cyprus. Interview data were thematically analyzed and further triangulated using Leximancer software to enhance validity and reduce researcher bias. The analysis revealed seven major themes related to ingratiation: Networking, Performance Rating, Self-Promotion, Career, Work Environment, Manipulation as well as Inequality. While some themes such as networking and career advancement—were associated with perceived benefits, others like manipulation, inequality, and negative impacts on the work environment highlighted critical drawbacks. By capturing the dual nature of ingratiation through employee narratives, this study provides practical insights for hospitality management and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of organizational behaviour in service-oriented industries.

Keywords: Organizational ingratiation, Flattering, Impression Management, Hotel employees, Hospitality, Qualitative method, Leximancer

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1. Introduction

Ingratiation, broadly defined as a deliberate effort to influence others by increasing one's likability (Liden & Mitchell, 1988, p. 572), is a subtle yet powerful form of impression management within workplace settings (Cheng *et al.*, 2023). It encompasses behaviours such as flattery, opinion conformity, and self-promotion—strategies that individuals employ to gain favour with supervisors, peers, or clients. While often viewed as harmless or strategic, ingratiation can carry both functional and dysfunctional consequences, depending on the organizational context in which it occurs (Bailey, 2015; Wu *et al.*, 2025).

Within the field of organizational behaviour, ingratiation has been widely examined in relation to leadership dynamics, power relations and career advancement (Kao *et al.*, 2020; Kim *et al.*, 2018; Yang *et al.*, 2024). Scholars have explored how ingratiatory behaviours such as flattery, opinion conformity, and strategic compliance—can influence performance evaluations, foster managerial trust, and reinforce hierarchical structures. However, much of this research adopts a top-down perspective, emphasizing the views of supervisors and decisionmakers, while largely neglecting the day-to-day experiences of employees who engage in or observe ingratiation within workplace settings (Krivacek *et al.*, 2024).

This gap becomes especially relevant in the hospitality industry a highly interpersonal, service-driven sector characterized by fast-paced environments, close customer contact, and hierarchical organizational structures. In such contexts, employee behaviour not only influences operational efficiency but also plays a vital role in shaping organizational culture and guest experience (Kao *et al.*, 2020; Kim & So, 2022). One particularly subtle yet impactful behaviour in this setting is organizational ingratiation which is the strategic use of impression management tactics aimed at gaining favour from superiors or colleagues. While ingratiation may function as a social lubricant or coping mechanism in high-pressure settings, it can also generate tensions, perceptions of unfairness and reinforce power imbalances within the workplace.

Generally, ingratiation has been extensively interrogated in organizational behaviour writing, regularly relating it to career advancement, workplace relationships, and performance evaluations (Sibunruang *et al.*, 2016; Wu *et al.*, 2013). On the other hand, much of the prevailing studies concentrate on ingratiation from the viewpoint of superiors/managerial staff, leaving a research lacuna in comprehending how employees perceive and experience these behaviours in the context of their work environment (Wu *et al.*, 2025), particularly in service-oriented sectors like hospitality.

The distinctive features of the hospitality industry, for instance, high customer contact, team synchronization, as well as hierarchical structures, provide fertile ground for ingratiatory behaviours. Yet, limited attention has been given to how ingratiation demonstrates in this domain, as well as how it impacts organizational consequences, employee morale, or customer service quality. As hotel employees generally work under pressure to maintain high service values, comprehending their views on ingratiation might reveal significant visions into the drives as well as consequences of these behaviours within the hospitality context. Understanding ingratiation from the employee perspective offers both theoretical and practical value, particularly for service-oriented sectors like hospitality. For managers recognizing how ingratiatory behaviours are perceived might help foster transparent and inclusive workplace cultures also reducing the potential for misinterpretation, favouritism or strained peer relationships. By addressing these dynamics, leaders can cultivate environments that prioritize fairness, authenticity and psychological safety. Additionally, insights from ingratiation research can inform training and development programs by encouraging employees to engage in sincere, ethical communication rather than strategic impression management. This not only improves interpersonal

dynamics but also enhances overall employee morale and service quality, which are critical in customer-facing industries.

This study aims to fill this lacuna by exploring ingratiation from the view of hospitality employees via in-depth qualitative interviews. By seizing their experiences as well as viewpoints, the current study adds to the literature on organizational behaviour and provides practical implications for managing employee dynamics in the hospitality sector. Furthermore, it adds to the limited body of knowledge on ingratiation in non-corporate settings, offering a fresh perspective on how these behaviours operate in service-oriented industries.

Given this research gap, the present study sought to examine the narratives shared by hospitality employees. The two primary objectives of this study were:

- (1) *to identify the main themes that describe overall impressions of organizational ingratiation; and*
- (2) *to find out the themes most closely aligned with satisfaction and dissatisfaction.*

2. Literature review

2.1. Organizational ingratiation

Ingratiation, described as a subtle and non-intrusive influence tactic, was first identified as an organizational strategy characterized by behaviours such as “acting humble” and “making others feel important” (Kipnis *et al.*, 1980). According to Liden and Mitchell (1988), ingratiation refers to a behaviour by an individual seeking to ‘increase his or her attractiveness in the eyes of others (p. 572). Ingratiation also described as one kind of impression management response that might boost one’s interpersonal value in the eyes of others and, eventually, encourage better inclusion. Scholars have found that social rejection is linked to ingratiation (Scott *et al.*, 2015). Individuals use these tactics in the workplace primarily to gain personal advantages, aligning with the objectives of impression management. Therefore, ingratiation is often seen as a form of impression management (Cheng *et al.*, 2024). It frequently occurs in interactions between subordinates and their superiors, where subordinates engage in flattering and influence-driven behaviours aimed at gaining favour and approval from those who control important rewards (Appelbaum & Hughes, 1998).

Ingratiation practices comprise offering praises, associating with others' views, as well as doing favours (Sibunruang & Kawai, 2016). In general, ingratiation has been shown to enable favourable outcomes ranging from positive performance appraisals, career improvements, and enhanced probabilities of nominations to boards (Azeem *et al.*, 2021; Sibunruang & Kawai, 2016; Keeses & Westphal, 2017). This is an extremely important tactic for three reasons. First, ingratiation aids employees in maintaining good working relationships with their supervisors (Azeem *et al.*, 2024) because it is of an interpersonal nature (Treadway *et al.*, 2007). Constructive relationships enable employees to gain support in the form of expressive networks for their supervisors as well as constructive feedback for their own development (Wu *et al.*, 2013). Thus, ingratiation allows one to maintain these relationships while obtaining resources that are of extreme importance for career development (Sibunruang & Kawai, 2016). Secondly, ingratiation helps employees generate positive emotions in their supervisors, fostering trust. This trust facilitates navigating informal connections with supervisors (Long, 2021). Through these relationships, employees gain a deeper understanding of their work environment, including its norms and boundaries, which enables better use of resources for career advancement. Lastly, ingratiation is a goal-oriented behaviour, often motivated by personal career ambitions. By aligning ingratiation efforts with the use of expressive network resources and developmental feedback, employees can direct their behaviours toward achieving career growth (Sibunruang & Kawai, 2016).

While ingratiation has been established as an important aspect of organizational dynamics (Wu *et al.*, 2013), previous studies have largely viewed the integration of such behaviour from either a managerial or organization perspective while ignoring how these behaviours are experienced by employees themselves, as has been shown in previous studies (Ahmad *et al.*, 2024; Azeem *et al.*, 2023). The line mostly drawn in literature is between coming up with measures of ingratiation as either a tool for career advancement or as strategic behaviours, and scanty attention has been paid to the much-neglected aspect of its detrimental effects (Azeem *et al.*, 2023; Wu *et al.*, 2025). Contradictions are also present regarding whether ingratiation create long-term benefits for organizations as opposed to short-term personal gain, presenting the need for more contextual exploration (Appelbaum & Hughes, 1998; Kim *et al.*, 2018). Of significance, very few studies, if any, have examined ingratiation among high-touch service industries, such as hospitality, with tensions (Manzur & Jogaratnam, 2007; Yan & Ho, 2017). This limited empirical focus on employee perspective, particularly in hospitality set-up, creates a major gap which the current study intends to address. Extant research has not directly questioned how ingratiation impacts the organization or employees but, they have scrutinized its palliative impact on certain counterproductive work behaviours (Cheng *et al.*, 2024) which is volitional acts by employees that potentially violate the legitimate interests of, or do harm to, a firm or its stakeholders (Marcus *et al.*, 2016). As an act performed to impact individuals, ingratiation's effectiveness shows dissimilar characteristics. This is for the fact that effective ingratiation needs the pioneer to have robust abilities that lead them to efficiently perform a flattering attitude (Wu *et al.*, 2012).

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

The data for this study were collected using a qualitative research approach. In-depth interviews were conducted with 26 employees working in the hospitality industry in Northern Cyprus. The sample included 10 female and 16 male participants (Table 1). Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, providing a comprehensive exploration of the participants' experiences and perspectives on ingratiation within their organizations. To ensure convenience and accommodate participants' preferences, interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via phone (Zhang *et al.*, 2021). All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Participation was limited to individuals currently employed in hotels who expressed a willingness to take part in the study. A non-probability purposive sampling method was adopted, whereby participants were selected based on their relevant knowledge and experience concerning the research topic (Vatan & Dogan, 2021). In line with the qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection tool to explore participants' personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs regarding ingratiation (Zhang *et al.*, 2022). The researchers developed the interview questions following a comprehensive review of the relevant literature to ensure alignment with the study's objectives (Vatan & Dogan, 2021).

In addition, notes were taken before, during, and after the interviews to apprehend oral as well as non-verbal aspects of the interviews. Given the potential power dynamics between the researcher and participants particularly the perception of the researcher as an academic or authority figure deliberate steps were taken to foster a safe and open environment. Interviews were conducted in neutral, quiet locations or via phone to increase participant comfort and privacy (Nimmi *et al.*, 2024). Prior to each interview, the participants were guaranteed for confidentiality of their responses with an assurance that there were no perfectly right or wrong answers. The researcher maintained a friendly tone which was without any judgmental disposition and encouraged openness through an active listening approach. The participants were also reminded that they could skip any question or withdraw from the interview altogether without any consequences. The entire interview was recorded with the respondents' consent, as well as the confidentiality of the responses was assured. Research was done once a saturation phase

was reached, and new responses were reinforced from those that had already been collected (Christou *et al.*, 2018).

Table 1. *List of Interviewees' demographic features.*

#	Participants	Gender	Years of experience	Working unit	Age
1	Zeus	Male	5	Front Office	27
2	Pontos	Male	4	Sales Office	33
3	Pegasus	Male	3	Casino	31
4	Demeter	Male	5	Kitchen	29
5	Juno	Female	4	Restaurant	34
6	Elpis	Female	3	Kitchen	34
7	Eros	Male	3	Kitchen	26
8	Venus	Female	2	Restaurant	24
9	Nereus	Male	3	Restaurant	28
10	Hephaestus	Male	5	Casino	32
11	Aphrodite	Female	1	Restaurant	22
12	Hestia	Male	4	Front Office	33
13	Juventas	Female	3	Sales Office	23
14	Persephone	Female	4	Sales Office	28
15	Hades	Male	3	Restaurant	23
16	Hypnos	Male	4	Kitchen	26
17	Nike	Male	2	Kitchen	22
18	Daphne	Female	3	Sales Office	23
19	Iris	Male	4	Kitchen	26
20	Xenia	Female	3	Casino	22
21	Selene	Male	8	Kitchen	34
22	Gaia	Male	4	Front Office	23
23	Minerva	Female	4	Front Office	25
24	Rhea	Male	3	Sales Office	26
25	Thanatos	Male	4	Restaurant	23
26	Nemesis	Female	10	Sales Office	35

The recorded interviews are done with the iRecorder application on Apple's iOS and then transcribed into Microsoft Word. As part of criteria for validity and reliability of data, all participants reviewed their transcripts before the actual exercise of data analysis so that they could confirm that their views had been accurately represented (Saydam *et al.*, 2022). Respondent validation, in this case, adds to the credibility of qualitative research data (Boley & Gaither, 2016).

3.2. Data analysis

In the current study, Leximancer software was utilized in order to analyze interviews. Leximancer utilizes automatic algorithms to pinpoint dominant themes as well as concepts from written content. This software has several advantages in comparison to other computer-assisted qualitative data analysis. Leximancer significantly diminishes researcher intervention in the analysis phase (Arasli *et al.*, 2023; Degirmencioğlu *et al.*, 2023; Sotiriadou *et al.*, 2014). In addition, this software provides us the opportunity to check/connectivity between the themes and concepts (Arasli *et al.*, 2023). The said

software not only provides visual maps that show links between concepts but also adjusts bulky contents, making it scalable for wide-ranging qualitative research (Saydam & Altun, 2023; Olorunsola *et al.*, 2023). By diminishing possible bias as well as augmenting objectivity, Leximancer ensures reliable outcomes (Altun *et al.*, 2024; Saydam *et al.*, 2024; Ozbasar *et al.*, 2024; Sotiriadou *et al.*, 2014). Concept nodes are heat-mapped, in that hot colors (red, orange) mean the most relevant concepts, and cool colors (blue, green), denote the least mentioned (Thomas, 2014).

4. Findings

As stated above, existing research utilized Leximancer software to analyze interview data collected from 26 hotel employees. The software enabled a systematic and objective examination of the text, highlighting key themes and concepts that emerged from the participants' experiences. By analyzing the co-occurrence and connectivity of these themes, Leximancer provided valuable insights into the underlying patterns of organizational ingratiation and employee experiences. This method allowed us to uncover nuanced relationships between these themes, offering a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping employee perceptions within the hospitality industry.

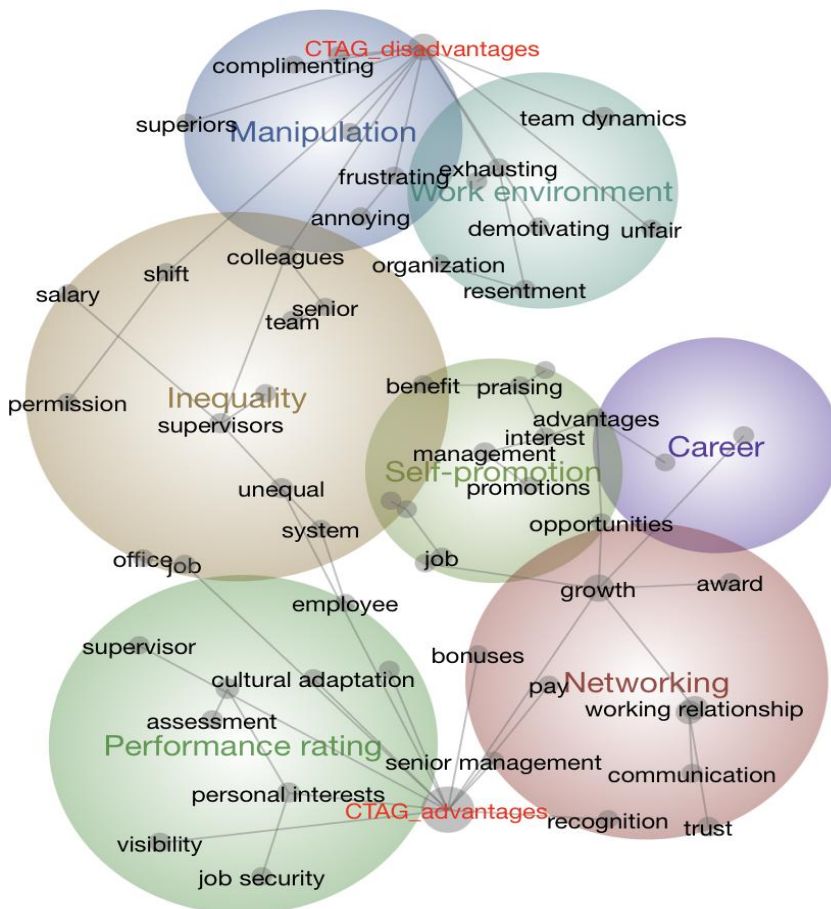


Figure 1. Concept Map.

The findings from additional analysis revealed a detailed narrative description for each identified theme. The predominant themes, as depicted in Figure 1, include Networking (71%), Performance rating (59%), Self-Promotion (39%), Career (28%), Work environment (27%), Manipulation (12%), and Inequality (10%). Table 2 presents these dominant themes along with their respective degrees of

interconnectedness, illustrating the strength of their associations and their relevance within the overall data set. Leximancer's degrees of connectivity reflect the relationships between different themes. It evaluates the strength of the connections between themes based on how often they co-occur within sentences. By analyzing the frequency and closeness of theme appearances, Leximancer determines how strongly the themes are linked to one another (Saydam & Altun., 2023).

Table 2. Themes and their degrees of connectivity

Themes	Connectivity
Networking	71%
Performance rating	59%
Self-promotion	39%
Career	28%
Work environment	27%
Manipulation	12%
Inequality	10%

As seen in Table 2, there exists a frequency count matrix that has collated the relation of themes associated with workplace dynamics including those such as networking, performance ratings, self-promotion, career advancement, work environment, manipulation, and inequality. The data suggest that networking is the most salient dimension in shaping career opportunities and perceptions of inequalities, whereas performance ratings have been shown as being strongly associated with both advancement in career and general environments for work. Self-promotion has considerable bearing on the performance assessment and experience in a workplace. Above all, this can be said to be significantly affected with the help of manipulation. Overall, the matrix underscores the complex interplay among ingratiation-related themes, illustrating how behaviours such as networking and strategic performance alignment not only influence career outcomes—such as promotions and recognition—but also contribute to shaping broader organizational dynamics, including culture, fairness perceptions, and employee morale. These findings highlight the need for deeper inquiry into how ingratiatory behaviour functions within workplace hierarchies and how it may reinforce or challenge existing power structures. The software-generated word count occurrence scores (the number of times that the words occur in three sentences of the other) (Logan *et al.*, 2016) backup the thematic link outcomes are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency count matrix.

Themes	Performance rating	Self-promotion	Career	Work environment	Manipulation	Inequality
Networking	7	6	9	6	5	8
Performance rating	-	8	10	10	5	7
Self-promotion		-	7	4	4	5
Career			-	9	7	4
Work environment				-	7	8
Manipulation					-	8
Inequality						-

In examining the second objective of this study, Leximancer was used to identify the advantages and disadvantages of organizational ingratiation as perceived by hospitality employees. The analysis revealed several themes associated with dissatisfaction, notably “manipulation,” “work environment,” and “inequality.” Employees expressed concerns that ingratiation could lead to manipulative behaviours, fostering a toxic work environment where favouritism prevails and contributing to feelings of inequality among staff. These insights highlight the potential negative implications of ingratiation on employee morale and workplace dynamics. Conversely, employees also

articulated several positive aspects of ingratiation, including “networking,” “performance rating,” “self-promotion,” and “career advancement.” These themes suggest that hospitality employees perceive ingratiation as a strategic tool for building professional relationships, enhancing their performance evaluations, and facilitating career growth. Overall, the findings present a nuanced view of organizational ingratiation, underscoring its complex role in shaping employee experiences within the hospitality industry.

Table 4. Themes and sub-themes from interview responses

Themes	Sub-themes	Responses
Networking	Working relationship (count = 11, likelihood = 31%), communication (10, 20%), growth (10, 19%), pay (9, 17%), senior management (9, 17%), bonuses (8, 12%), recognition (8, 12%), and trust (7, 11%).	<i>It's not enough to just do your job well around here; you have to know how to do things. I've seen colleagues go out of their way to compliment supervisors or agree with their ideas just to stay on their good side. It's a form of ingratiation, but it works (Hypnos, M).</i>
		<i>I've seen colleagues go out of their way to compliment the bosses or act like they agree with every decision, even when it's clear they don't. I've done it too—laughing at jokes that aren't funny or pretending I'm on board with an idea just to keep the peace (Zeus, M).</i>
		<i>Recognition around here is often depend on how good you are at buttering up the manager. I've seen people who are constantly sucking up get more recognition than those who are just quietly doing their jobs (Daphne, F).</i>
Performance rating	Personal interests (count = 7, likelihood = 15%), assessment (7, 12%), cultural adaptation (6, 12%), job security (5, 11%), supervisor (5, 10%), and visibility (4, 9%).	<i>Some think being too friendly is fake, but in this job, it's all about connections. If I get on good terms with managers or regulars, I get better shifts, more tips, even job referrals. It's not fake, it's smart (Nereus, M).</i>
		<i>Honestly, buttering up the right people has its perks. I've learned that being on good terms with chefs can positively influence your performance rating. It's not just about doing your job—it's about making sure your effort is visible (Selene, F).</i>
		<i>I've always been focused on my career progression, and one thing I've learned is that aligning with my boss's interests is key. Whether that's agreeing with their ideas or giving them positive feedback, it's part of how you get noticed (Thanatos, M).</i>
Self-promotion	Management (count = 8, likelihood = 15%), interest (7, 15%), advantages (5, 12%), praising (5, 15%), and benefit (4, 11%).	<i>I've seen people go out of their way to compliment others, act like best friends, just to get ahead. I've done it too (Hades, M)</i>
		<i>I'm not one to sit back and wait for someone to notice my hard work. If I've handled a tough situation or done something good, I'll casually mention it to my manager (Aphrodite, F).</i>
		<i>If I've done something really well, I'll casually bring it up, even in passing. It's about making sure people know you're delivering results. If you stay quiet, others will get ahead while you stay stuck (Hestia, M).</i>
Career		<i>When I do something well, I try to mention it. Like, 'Hey, I sorted that big group booking.' It helps them remember me when something better comes up (Nemesis, F).</i>
		<i>I've seen people offer to do little favours or give compliments, and before you know it, they're getting special projects or career opportunities. If you're not doing that, you're just another employee in the crowd (Persphone, F).</i>
		<i>Some might call it 'kissing up,' but I think it's more about being noticed. I've gotten promotions faster because I make sure my work stands out, but I also make sure I'm on good terms with the management. It's not just about being the best employee on paper, but also being the one they trust and feel comfortable around (Pontos, M).</i>

Themes	Sub-themes	Responses
Work environment	Demotivating (count = 8, likelihood = 16%), exhausting (6, 12%), unfair (6, 11%), and resentment (4, 09%).	<i>If you wanna move up, people need to notice you. I try to stay on their radar, be nice, show up, say the right things. It works (Minerva, F).</i>
		<i>I've worked hard to get recognized, but it seems like those who butter up the manager always get ahead. I've seen colleagues who aren't necessarily the best at their job get rewarded simply because they're always flattering the bosses (Nereus, M).</i>
		<i>I try to stay professional, but when you witness it day after day, it gets to you. It's not a healthy work environment because it makes you feel like the system is rigged (Rhea, M).</i>
Manipulation	Frustrating (count = 6, likelihood = 14%), annoying (7, 12%), complimenting (5, 11%), and superiors (5, 09%).	<i>There's this culture here where some of my colleagues just keep trying to take the attention of their manager, and it's affecting team dynamics. It creates this toxic environment where employees are not genuine, and instead of concentrating on the guests, they're more concerned about making themselves look good in front of the boss. It's exhausting to watch, and it's really demotivating for those of us who just want to do a good job and work as a team. This kind of behaviour divides us (Nemesis, F).</i>
		<i>You notice the same people always offering compliments to managers, not because they really mean it, but because they know it'll get them ahead. It feels manipulative, and it's frustrating for those of us who are just focused on doing our jobs. When you see that kind of behaviour being rewarded, it creates a lot of dissatisfaction (Minerva, F).</i>
		<i>It's hard to stay motivated when you see people getting ahead just for sucking up, especially when it's so obvious their compliments are fake. It makes the whole kitchen feel unfair (Nike, M).</i>
Inequality	supervisors (count = 11, likelihood = 14%), unequal (10, 12%), shift (6, 11%), permission (5, 09%), team (5, 09%), and system (4, 09%).	<i>It gets frustrating. Some folks barely do anything, but they're great at sweet-talking managers and boom, they get what they want (Nereus, M).</i>
		<i>The people who are good at flattering the boss always get the better shifts or special permissions, while the rest of us are left with whatever's left over. It's frustrating because it's clear that the system is working in their favour, not based on merit or teamwork. (Daphne, F).</i>
		<i>People who always try to stay on the manager's good side get all the perks—better shifts, more flexibility, even special treatment. It feels like the system isn't based on actual performance (Minerva, F).</i>
		<i>I've seen people get away with stuff others would be written up for, just 'cause they're in good with the boss. The rules aren't the same for everyone (Aphrodite, F).</i>

5. Discussion and conclusions

5.1. Discussion of findings

The findings revealed seven significant themes: Networking, Performance Rating, Self-Promotion, Career, Work Environment, Manipulation, and Inequality. These themes reflect the multifaceted ways in which ingratiation is understood and enacted by hospitality employees. The results can be meaningfully interpreted through the lens of impression management theory (Tedeschi, 1981), which posits that individuals consciously regulate their behaviour to shape how they are perceived by others in professional contexts. This theoretical perspective helps explain why participants described engaging in strategic behaviours such as networking, self-promotion, and managing performance visibility in an effort to enhance their image and gain favour with superiors. However, the presence of themes like Manipulation and Inequality also points to the more problematic aspects of ingratiation, particularly when such behaviours are viewed as insincere or unfair. This is because ingratiation is both a socially useful strategy and a potential source of organizational trouble. In general, it was network,

performance ratings, self-promotion, and career possibilities that conveyed main advantages of organizational ingratiation to employees; these in turn show that such ingredients facilitate professional development and lead to better performance. The dis-benefits associated with these include manipulation, a negative work environment, and inequality: the dark side of ingratiation that states that the tie may stand on favouritism and thus undermine trust among colleague.

However, in this kind of understanding, while ingratiation may serve as a strategic tool for individuals to succeed in the hospitality industry, it might also establish an environment for the manifestation of negative behaviours. Such ambivalence reveals the need in organizations to understand that although ingratiation does indeed have angles of risk, it must broker openness and fairness to transform any adverse impact.

These contrasting themes show that as ingratiation can be seen as a strategic tool for individual success within the hospitality sector, it can also foster an environment where negative behaviours flourish. This duality suggests the need for organizations to recognize the potential risks associated with ingratiation, encouraging transparency and fairness to mitigate its adverse effects.

The theme of Networking appeared as an advantage of organizational ingratiation within the hospitality industry, specifically via the lens of ingratiation. Employees stated that flattering their superiors/colleagues is a strategy they use to foster solid working interactions. This approach augments communication as well as enables the building of rapport, also permitting employees for more effective interactions with management. In addition, interviewees noted that such ingratiation can lead to opportunities for personal and professional growth, as strong connections with superiors often result in access to mentorship and skill development. Additionally, networking through ingratiation is perceived to influence bonuses and recognition, with employees believing that those who engage in ingratiation are more likely to be acknowledged and rewarded. These findings are also discussed in the study done by Lee *et al.* (2017) and it is stated that ingratiation is more effective for a long-term strategy to build cooperative relations than as an immediate influence attempt. Similarly, Sibunruang *et al.* (2014) added that employees might engage in ingratiation as a strategy to augment their interpersonal attraction with their supervisors who have a strong level of influence over their career progression.

Another theme repeatedly stated by employees was performance rating. Interviewees highlighted that engaging in ingratiation is often driven by personal interests and aims to secure favourable assessments that reflect positively on their contributions. Performance appraisal ratings are therefore related to relations with supervisors, and their outcome could differ for employees by introducing a bias in the evaluation process. In line with the findings, Clarke *et al.* (2022) conducted a study in Saudi Arabia-the 'upward influence tactics' presenting bias in the rating by supervisors as they affect the quality of relation value between the supervisor and the employee. Further, they state, ingratiation had indirect effects through employee loyalty on supervisor job performance rates. Wu *et al.* (2013) found that when supervisors identified ingratiating behaviour in subordinates, they tended to give lower evaluations on job performance and promotability to these subordinates. Overall, despite the tendency toward interpreting ingratiation as a tactical way to obtain better evaluations through interviews, this approach significantly decreases fairness and objectivity in performance assessments across the organization.

Another theme that was found as a result of the interviews was *Self-promotion and Career*. Interviewees offered a nuanced perspective on these themes, with both positive and negative views. On one hand, many respondents viewed ingratiation as a deliberate strategy for advancing their careers, believing that presenting themselves favourably to supervisors could enhance their visibility and prospects within the organization. This aligns with the broader literature on career and self-promotion, where ingratiation is often seen as a tool to gain favour with management and increase one's chances for career

advancement. In line with current research results, Sibunruang *et al.* (2016) ingratiation mediated career adaptability. In addition, the findings of this research show similarity with the research by Ding *et al.* (2023) where leaders' behaviour might trigger employees' ingratiation, which in turn enables employees' objective career success.

In the interviews conducted with hospitality employees, the themes of inequality and manipulation appeared repeatedly when discussing ingratiation behaviours. Most of the employees emphasized how ingratiation was often used as a strategy to navigate power imbalances within the organization, particularly by those in lower hierarchical positions. They described ingratiation as a tool to gain favour with supervisors or higher-ranking individuals, thereby attempting to level the playing field in an environment perceived to be unfair or unequal. However, this practice was also framed as manipulative, with participants acknowledging that ingratiation could be used to distort perceptions, create false impressions, or gain unearned advantages. This duality highlights the complex role of ingratiation, where it is seen both as a means of survival in an unequal organizational structure and as a manipulative tactic that can undermine genuine merit-based recognition.

5.2. Theoretical implications

This research offers multiple theoretical implications by presenting novel insights.

First, this study contributes to the ingratiation literature by expanding the research focus to include hospitality employees, a group largely overlooked in prior studies. Most existing research examines how ingratiation moderates various organizational variables (Azeem *et al.*, 2021; Fitriastuti *et al.*, 2021) or explores the effects of ingratiation from the perspectives of either the initiators or the targets. However, these studies have generally neglected how hospitality employees perceive and react to organizational ingratiation (Cheng *et al.*, 2024; De Clercq and Pereira, 2023). By addressing this gap, existing research provides valuable insights into the unique dynamics of ingratiation within the hospitality sector, where interpersonal relationships and organizational hierarchies play a critical role in shaping employee experiences. By focusing on this understudied domain, this research extends the application of ingratiation theories to the hospitality industry, providing a novel lens through which to examine employee behaviours in service-oriented, hierarchical, and highly interpersonal work settings.

Secondly, current research sheds light on both the advantages and disadvantages of organizational ingratiation, providing a more nuanced view of this behaviour. While ingratiation may offer certain advantages, such as improved networking opportunities, career progression, and favourable performance evaluations, it also comes with notable disadvantages. Employees expressed concerns about the manipulation of perceptions and the creation of unequal workplace environments, suggesting that ingratiation can perpetuate negative outcomes like distrust and unfair treatment. These findings emphasize the need for a more balanced understanding of ingratiation as both a strategic tool and a potential source of workplace conflict and inequality, contributing to the broader literature on organizational behaviour and ethics.

Finally, the software program that used in this study was Leximancer software for automated content and thematic analysis adds a methodological contribution to the study of organizational ingratiation. By triangulating qualitative interview data with Leximancer's content analysis, researcher bias was minimized and ensured that the themes identified were derived directly from the narratives of the participants. This methodological approach enhances the rigor of the study, providing an unbiased and systematic means of analyzing ingratiation in organizational settings. As a result, future research can benefit from incorporating similar tools to explore complex social behaviours with minimal researcher intervention, contributing to the field's methodological advancement.

5.3. Managerial implications

The current study offers several practical implications. First, superiors should recognize the positive role that networking plays in organizational ingratiation. Employees who build strong internal networks are often more adept at navigating workplace politics and leveraging relationships to their advantage. Managers can capitalize on this by fostering formal networking opportunities, such as mentorship programs (Matsuo, 2024), which not only benefit individual employees but also contribute to a more collaborative and cohesive organizational culture. Second, the theme of performance ratings underscores the importance of transparency in evaluation processes. Ingratiation tactics can skew perceptions of employee performance, leading to unfair advantages for those who engage in self-promotion. To counteract this, managers should implement more objective and standardized performance metrics, ensuring that all employees are evaluated fairly based on their work rather than their ability to ingratiate themselves with superiors.

Third, while upward ingratiation may offer short-term gains, it can ultimately undermine productivity. Employees who prioritize pleasing superiors may focus more on flattery than performance, leading to a culture of hidden obedience and reduced authenticity. HR managers should recognize that excessive praise-seeking behaviours can drain time and energy, and emphasize the risks of encouraging such dynamics (De Clercq & Pereira, 2023).

Fourth, employees who can use ingratiation in their relationships/dealings with other individuals are better positioned to cope with the hardships. The skills associated with ingratiation tactics do not always have positive impacts. Elevated levels of ingratiation could be understood as superficial by its targets. However, ingratiation abilities are noteworthy tools that organizations can use to stay away from detrimental work activities by employees who seek to vent their disappointment with an organizational climate that indulges incivility (Azeem *et al.*, 2021).

Sixth, the imitability of ingratiation can damage the work environment by impacting even indifferent coworkers. Superiors of the organization should be instructed and qualified to identify ingratiation behaviours, comprehend their susceptibilities, and take actions to lessen bias toward ingratiating employees. To control ingratiation, top management of the workplace should concentrate on lessening value incongruence, as such behaviours thrive in politically charged environments, reducing the risk of ingratiation backfiring. Seventh, establishing safe, anonymous, and regular upward feedback opportunities empowers employees to communicate concerns without relying on indirect influence strategies. This can diminish the organizational need for ingratiation while promoting a culture of openness and inclusion.

Lastly, ingratiation behaviours, when widespread, can shape the broader organizational culture in subtle yet significant ways. Over time, a workplace environment that rewards flattery over merit may contribute to reduced transparency, hinder collaboration, and increase feelings of inequity among staff. This, in turn, can negatively affect overall productivity and lead to higher employee turnover. Organizations should consider implementing clear performance metrics and equitable recognition systems to ensure that career advancement is based on competence and contribution rather than interpersonal tactics alone.

5.4. Limitations and future research recommendations

Several limitations in this study are acknowledged and several directions for upcoming research are suggested. First, the sample size was limited to 26 participants, which, while suitable for qualitative research, may not capture the full diversity of experiences across the broader hospitality workforce. Second, the study was conducted solely in the context of North Cyprus, a region with its own unique cultural and organizational characteristics. As a result, the findings may not be fully generalizable to

other geographical or industry settings. These contextual and demographic constraints limit the scope of inference, but they also highlight opportunities for future research. Any collection method, such as in-depth interviews chosen to capture rich, personal narratives and allow for flexible exploration of sensitive issues tends to impose constraints on perspectives such as group dynamics that could be better captured by alternative methods like focus groups or ethnographic observation. Future studies could adopt mixed or comparative methodologies across different cultural and organizational settings to deepen understanding and enhance the results' generalizability. Upcoming research could enlarge the sample size and contain employees from different countries or industries to provide more wide-ranging comprehension. Second, the confidence in self-reported data via interviews might cause bias, as employees might downplay or overstress their thoughts with flattering. Prospective studies could use other approaches such as observation or triangulating results by collecting data from managers to lessen bias. Moreover, Leximancer software provided additional methodological rigor, in that it offered an objective, systematic analysis of textual data, yet its limitations must also be acknowledged. Being a system mainly designed for automated content analysis, Leximancer regards word frequency and co-occurrence patterns to derive concepts and themes. Leximancer is not concerned with the stylistic features, contextual cues, and implied tone of voice which could impart major meaning to qualitative data, thus overlooking subtle nuances, emotions, or narrative complexities that may be embedded in the responses of the participants. Third, a notable limitation of this study is the gender distribution of the participants, which consisted of 10 female and 16 male hospitality employees. While the study did not set out to explore gendered experiences specifically, the imbalance may have influenced the perspectives and narratives collected, particularly in relation to ingratiation strategies and workplace dynamics. Given that ingratiation may manifest differently across gender lines due to social expectations and role perceptions, future research could benefit from a more balanced or intentionally gender-focused sample. Lastly, this research utilized a cross-sectional approach, taking a particular moment in time. A longitudinal approach might be shepherded to investigate how ingratiation advances as well as its long-term effects on both employees and organizational consequences.

This study also provides future research directions. First, upcoming studies could explore how ingratiation affects organizational performance, specifically followers' motivation, output, and turnover, offering richer insight into its expenses as well as advantages. Second, studying how supervisors/managers distinguish as well as reply to ingratiation might assist progress policies to manage it meritoriously and also avoid undesirable effects on equality and self-esteem. Finally, research could study how different leadership styles influence the prevalence and effectiveness of ingratiation, adding understanding to enriched management practices.

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