Workforce Resilience and Staff Retention Strategies at the Front of House (FOH) Department: A Case Study of Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur

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| Information of Article	ABSTRACT
Article history: Received: Revised: Accepted: Available online: *Keywords:* Workforce Resilience Staff Retention Front of House (FOH) Hospitality Industry Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur Employee Satisfaction	The hospitality industry faces significant challenges in workforce resilience and staff retention, particularly in the Front of House (FOH) department, where high employee turnover can impact service quality and operational efficiency. The research offers detailed insight into workforce resilience along with staff retention strategies at the FOH department highlighting Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur. An overview of the Hospitality Industry has been provided for a better understanding of the topic. It also includes various research techniques along with methods considering ethical norms and rules. This study illustrates the potential of Ascott Hotel's employees in developing workforce resilience and staff retention strategies. This research has incorporated primary qualitative data collection methods by interviewing 5 key stakeholders of Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur. The data has been analysed using the thematic data analysis method. The findings of this study have emphasized that employees need to have a positive inclination toward the workplace to develop long-term loyalty. In that case, growth opportunities, and career development routes, can help the leaders of Ascott Hotel retain employees in the future. This study also highlights the importance of psychological well-being, life-work balance and recognition programs in fostering employee loyalty. The insights gained contribute to the development of practical recommendations for improving staff retention in the hospitality industry.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

Workforce resilience and staff retention play an extremely notable role in the hospitality sector in maintaining service quality and operational efficiency. Resilience refers to the efficient adaptation to adversity in life based on mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility. Workforce resilience, a more holistic concept, encompasses not only people and organizations but also highlights that technology, processes and systems should also be resilient (Kantaş, 2023). Workforce resilience requires more than motivation, culture, and knowledge, particularly in the hospitality sector. Retention can be expressed as systematic efforts to make and sustain an environment that still inspires employees to work while enforcing norms and procedures, adjusting according to their varied needs. Staff retention then, is an art regarded as delaying or inviting employees to stay on in the firm for as long as possible. Staff retention is a technique that helps organizations maintain a competent workforce to realize operational objectives (Ghani *et al.* 2022). It acts as an incentive to persuade staff to remain with the firm until project completion.

The Front of House (FOH) department, being the first point of interaction between guests and the hotel, is particularly impacted by high turnover rates and workplace challenges. This study takes a closer look at how to boost workforce resilience and improve staff retention strategies in the FOH department at the Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur. The goal is to pinpoint the key factors that play a role in keeping employees on board and enhancing resilience-building efforts at the hotel. This study seeks to provide insights into effective policies that enhance employee satisfaction, reduce turnover and strengthen workforce stability.

1.2 Rationale

It can be seen that since the COVID-19 pandemic, the retention rate of employees has been decreasing by the year. This is reflective of the lower resilience and staff retention capacity of hotels, emerging into a staff shortage issue.

Figure 1: Number of People Employed in Malaysia's Hotel and Accommodation Industry
(Source: Siddharta, 2024)
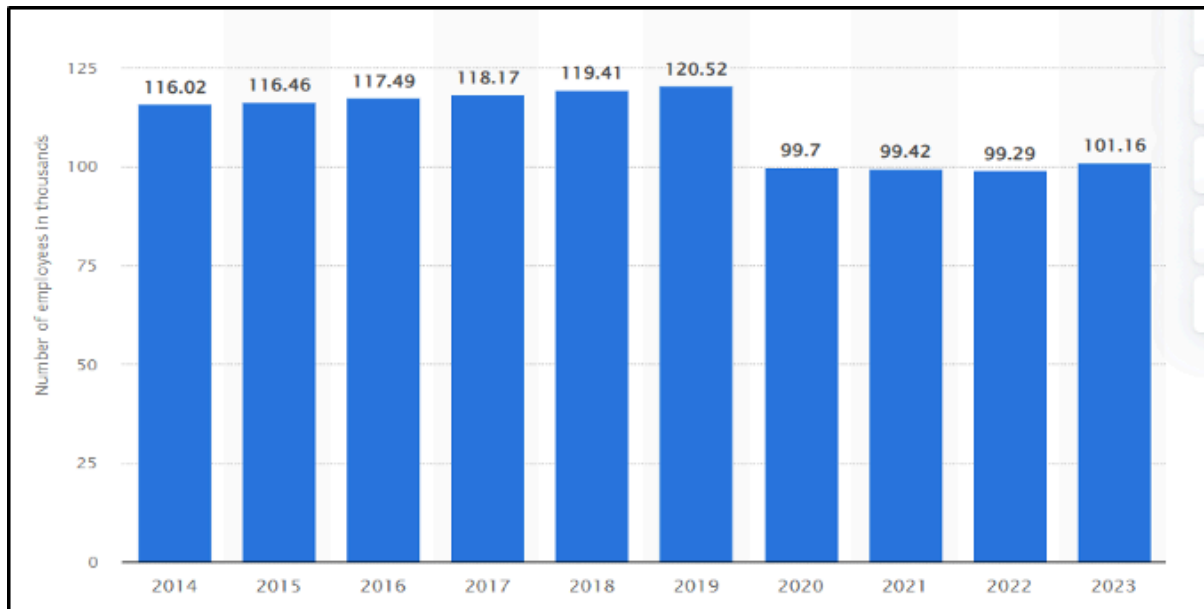
As per the above graph, the number of people employed in the accommodation sector of Malaysia has been decreasing since the emergence of the pandemic. Only in 2023 did the numbers start to rise, and staff retention has slightly improved compared to the fall during the pandemic. As of 2023, the Malaysian accommodation industry employs almost 101,000 people (Siddharta, 2024). However, a high turnover rate among employees is a concern in this age of staff shortage.

The accommodation and hotel service industry is going through a major staff shortage. The hotel industry across the world is grappling with rising staff turnover and a major labour gap (Eposnow, 2024). Amidst this situation, it is necessary to understand which factors are affecting the staff retention issue at the Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur. Especially the staff retention patterns and implications of the front-of-house (FOH) department have been discussed in this research for better clarity. This research aims to examine workforce resilience and staff retention strategies in the FOH department of the hotel to address high turnover rates and workplace challenges. By identifying effective retention practices, this study seeks to enhance employee satisfaction, reduce attrition and improve service quality in the hospitality industry.

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

Aim

This research aims to understand workforce resilience and staff retention strategies applied by the Ascott Hotel's FOH department in Kuala Lumpur.

Objectives

- To investigate the elements that affect the employee retention strategies of Ascott Hotel's FOH staff
- To define the effectiveness of the training programs provided by Ascott Hotel in Kuala Lumpur
- To identify the impact of building workforce resilience and developing long-term loyalty of employees
- To propose strategies to Ascott Hotel's leaders to retain staff and reduce employee turnover

1.4 Research Questions

- What are some key elements that affect the FOH employees' retention rates in Ascott Hotel?
- How do the training programs of Ascott Hotel affect the employees in the long term?
- How do resilience-building initiatives help Ascott Hotel's leaders gain long-term employee loyalty and satisfaction?
- Which strategies can be embraced by Ascott Hotel's leaders to enhance employee retention and reduce employee turnover in the future?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview of the Hospitality Industry

Across various countries, the hospitality sector is fundamental for economic survivability. According to Limna (2023), hospitality consists of all functions relating to receiving and nurturing guests. Primary hospitality services include food, drinks, and lodging in both commercial and non-commercial establishments. The hospitality genre consists of the hotel industry, the tourism industry, the food and beverage industry, and the meeting and events industry. The hospitality sector, being a people business, is heavily reliant on representation and customer reviews, and thus affects the life-work balance of hotel sector workers. Jung et al. (2023) offer insight into the connection between psychological well-being and job satisfaction, considering the impacts and effects of the life-work balance of the staff.

The study examines the staff's well-being, considering professional and personal lives in the hospitality industry. From the viewpoint of Pavlovic (2023), life-work balance is one of the significant components of the feasibility of organizations in the hospitality industry, depending on both young and older generations. It also involves human values as a component for analysing different groups of human resources. The study by Chandran and Abukhalifeh (2021) discussed that in the current trends of hotel and hospitality human resources (HR), life-work balance may be influenced by organizational policies that address family responsibilities rather than merely stating family-friendly policies. Examples to consider include flexible work arrangements that would furnish staff with working options to strive for a suitable balance between work tasks and home duties. Within such a context, life-work balance stands for a personal level of engagement viewed to be rewarding enough to work in harmony with the different roles required in a person's life, whilst still finding an overall sense of balance or stability.

2.2 Career Opportunities for Employees in the Front-of-House (FOH) Department

Workforce resilience and staff retention have become a concern for the accommodation sector across the world. The front of house (FOH) department is somewhat the face of a hotel and needs to be adequately prepared to greet the guests and serve them on notice when needed. However, the recent decline in the labour gap is reflective of the high turnover in the hotel industry. Mentorship and training opportunities can open a new door for frontline employees to improve and gain better productivity at the workplace. On the other hand, Jung and Yoon (2021) opine that providing frontline employees with flexible work shifts has resulted in better employee retention along with effective employee engagement activities. Abdou *et al.* (2022) have noted that permanent employment in the hotel industry is perceived as a negative brand image and poor chances of career development. Naturally, this notion needs to change for the employees, as there are changes for limited career opportunities with this.

FOH employees contribute an important array of resources to the FOH service station. Their functioning, experience, proficiency, skill, and both internal and external connections are important for enhancing the overall guest satisfaction and experience. Their capabilities align with policies and practices inherent in their working cultures. As per the viewpoint of Mokhine and Geyser (2020), FOH supports these skills to empower employees to express their expertise, suggestions, and concerns. FOH service providers' approaches, behaviour, and knowledge are necessary to promote positive relationships and to ensure guest satisfaction in hotels.

The study further elaborated that given that individuals spend a lot of parts of their lives in their workplaces, and that most of the hotel industry employees are women, it is mandatory for managers that they accept human elements in their search for long-term stability and excellence in highly competitive hotels. Understanding these demographic factors can help female FOH employees effectively assist human resources professionals in supporting and managing staff within the hotel industry. This can be obtained by developing talent management strategies such as policies and interventions, which create potential chances for female FOH staff to enhance their skills through specific in-house training activities and programs for various hotel departments. These insights can also inform the retention strategies of the employees, allowing the female FOH personnel to intervene with the special employee groups.

2.3 Workplace Determinants and their Effect on Employees' Stress Reduction

In the post-pandemic situation, the accommodation industry is applying new workplace determinants to reduce employees' stress and encourage proactive work behaviour. As per the views of Wang and Yang (2021), empowering leadership has a positive influence on the employee's work behaviour. Positive work behaviour can be established through job embeddedness, which is reflective of an innovative approach to work. Employees can be engaged through active work policies by developing a positive workplace relationship with the leaders. Proactive work behaviour and better relationships with leaders can reduce the employees' work stress and open new pathways for employee-leader engagement. Hence, vouching for empowering leadership in the hotel industry can help to reduce workplace stress and generate a proactive workplace attitude among employees.

Stress is a bodily and psychological condition that wears on an individual's health, productivity, effectiveness, and quality of work. Certainly, perceived workers' pressure is a rattling and legitimate reason for workers to decline their level of job-related satisfaction and to undermine the quality of workers' work performance. According to Kim and Jung (2022), workplace stress arises from various causes like workplace conflict, family responsibilities, ambiguity or uncertainty in roles, overload of work, and toxic or hostile workplace environments. Regardless of the origin of stress in the workplace, high-stress levels affect workers' levels of engagement, burnout, and performance.

Organizations should create special programs to help reduce stress in the workplace. Workplace stress can impact employees' health, happiness, and how well they perform their jobs. When stress is managed well, employees tend to become more productive. There are several effective ways to reduce stress. These include

attending seminars on job burnout, participating in training sessions, practicing yoga, and promoting a supportive work environment. Additionally, engaging in social activities with co-workers can also be beneficial. These activities and programs not only help employees perform better at work but also improve their personal lives. By engaging in these stress management efforts, employees can become more productive, develop better relationships with their co-workers, remain with the company longer, take fewer days off work, and enjoy improved mental and physical health.

2.4 Talent Management in Retaining Employees in the FOH Department

Talent management has become a vital element of the FOH department in hotels in retaining employees and fostering a positive workplace environment. According to Ghani *et al.* (2022), workplace employee retention is dependent on the employees' satisfaction rate. In other words, an employee who is satisfied with their work conditions is less likely to leave the workplace. Keeping that in mind, employers need to provide the hotel employees with a flexible work environment that can help to empower them in the long term. Furthermore, acknowledging the efforts of the employees can also help to retain them in the long run and create better workplace conditions for them. These opportunities in the workplace can significantly encourage employees to stay in a workplace for a longer period and create the ideal workplace environment for growth and self-actualization.

The procedure of attracting and retaining talent is what talent management is all about. From the perspective of Ununger (2021), talent management focuses on attracting high-quality, high-performance employees who are motivated to enhance their performance and skills to build a motivated workforce that will stick with the firm and make it more profitable, especially in the FOH department. Poor allocation of pay, training, and development resources can create unwanted turnover, low morale, and performance issues.

Skilled employees are highly valued for their exceptional performance in achieving organisational goals, and they tend to be more committed towards the company because they are deeply motivated to perform their tasks. This creates a substantial competitive advantage and increases productivity and profit. The study further suggested that to bridge gaps in knowledge and enhance employee competency in the hotel industry, companies need to screen high performers for potential new roles and continue developing and training them. Companies should focus on executing talent management because it will be able to aid in reaching strategic goals such as developing an environment of learning and high performance, as well as improving organizational value.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Figure 2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
(Source: Adapted from Anuyah *et al.* 2023)
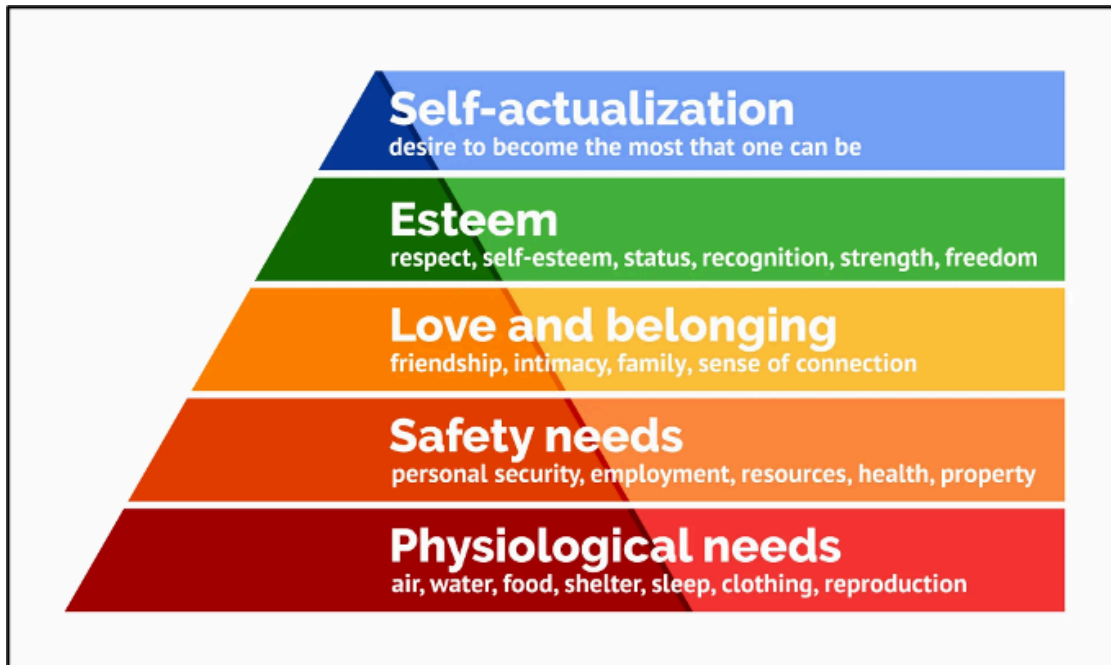
Maslow's hierarchy of needs presents five distinguished needs that are needed to survive in a workplace. According to Anuyah *et al.* (2023), these needs are physiological, safety needs, a sense of love and belonging, esteem needs and self-actualization. All of these needs make up for the basic, psychological, and self-fulfilment needs of an individual.

According to the figure shown above, Maslow's pyramid of needs is represented as a five-level pyramid with distinct levels. The first is physiological needs, which are survival needs and include water, food, and shelter. The next level discusses safety needs, mentioning the desire humans have for stability and security. The third is belonging needs, which entails the significance of relations and society. At the fourth level are esteem requirements, including self-respect and recognition by others. At the top of the pyramid is self-actualization, representing the pursuit of becoming one's best (Shi and Lin, 2021). Hence, meeting these needs in the workplace can encourage an employee to stay and develop a positive attitude towards work.

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Figure 3: Social Exchange Theory
(Source: Adapted from Ahmad *et al.* 2023)
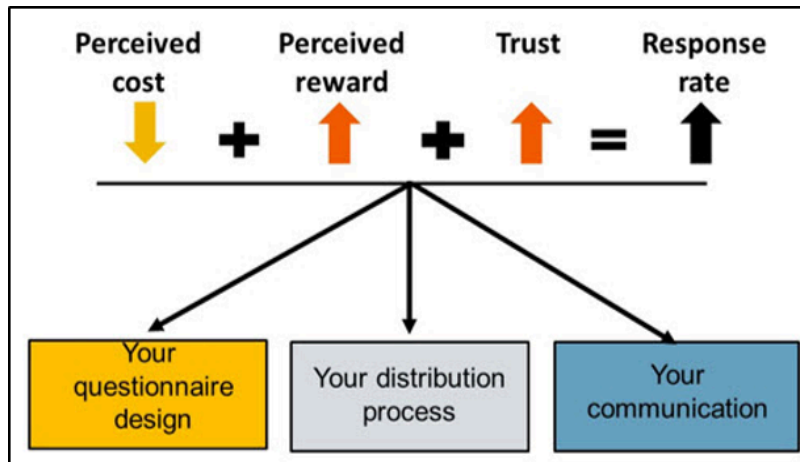
Social Exchange Theory is one of the standards to understand behaviour in the workplace. This is a common phenomenon that develops deeply in a person's daily life. SET presents the view that the response rate of an individual task can go up by increasing the perceived cost, perceived reward and trust in the workplace. According to Ahmad *et al.* (2023), providing these three factors in the workplace can help to increase the response rate of employees to an extent. Hence, workplace satisfaction of employees can be increased with this theory.

Herzberg's two-factor theory

Figure 4: Herzberg's two-factor theory
(Source: Adapted from Thant and Chang, 2021)
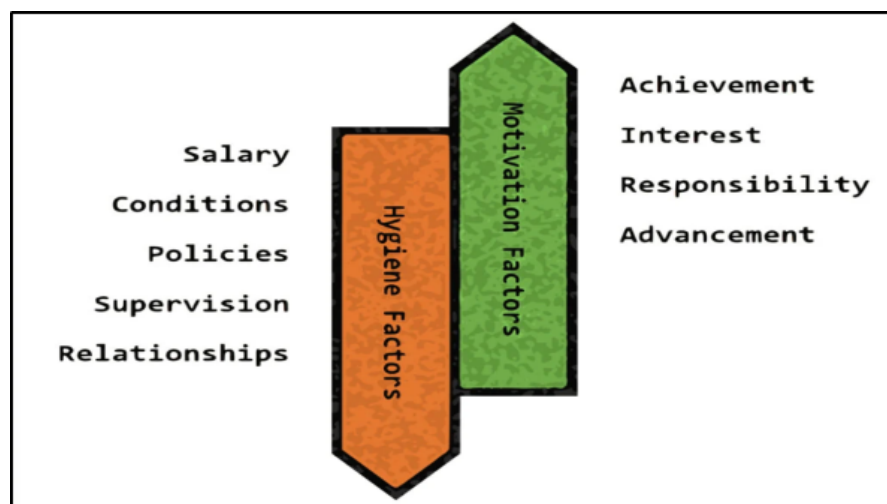
Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation looks at what motivates employees at work. Developed from research in the 1960s, this theory explains that certain factors can make staff feel happy and satisfied with their jobs (Peramatzis and Galanakis, 2022). These include potential chances for achievement, responsibility, and growth. On the other hand, different factors can cause dissatisfaction if not addressed, such as company policies, supervision quality, and working circumstances. These two sets of components—those contributing to satisfaction and those related to dissatisfaction—operate independently of one another. Herzberg's two-factor

theory provides the notion that employees can be either satisfied with intrinsic (motivational) or hygiene factors in the workplace. As per the views of Thant and Chang (2021), factors such as salary, policies, and relationships, along with workplace achievement and advancement, are applicable to increase people's satisfaction in the workplace. Thus, the provision of motivational and hygiene factors in the workplace can provide better chances for employee satisfaction in the workplace.

Transformational Leadership Theory

Figure 5: Transformational Leadership Theory
(Source: Adapted from Greimel *et al.* 2023)
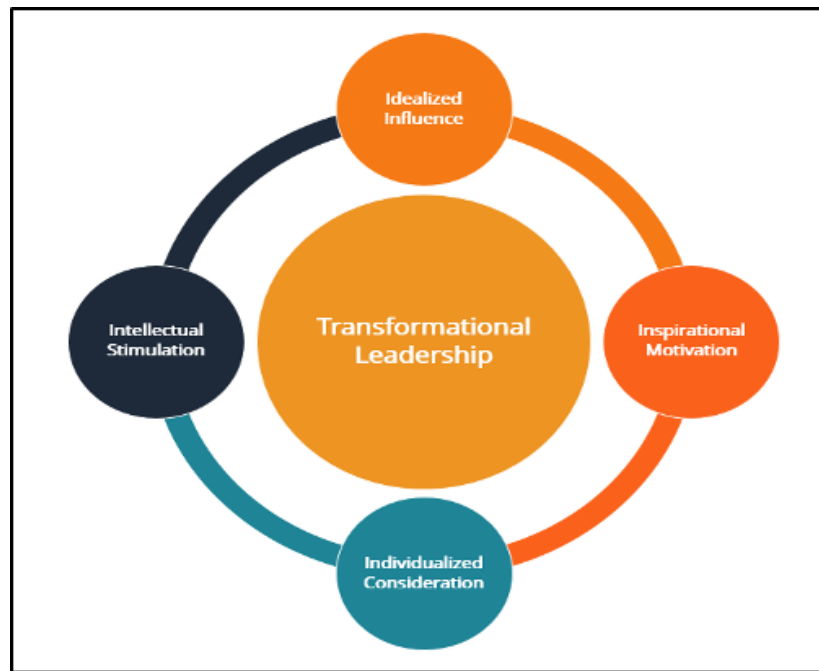
Transformational leadership requires the cumulative application of intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence from leaders. The conception of transformational leadership encapsulates several characteristics observed in leaders, similar as the awareness of future needs and problems, steering of long- term issues and opportunities thorough evaluation of internal and external rudiments about the company. It also includes addressing organizational issues from a broad perspective, heightening followers' mindfulness of the significance and value of specific job issues, the capability to motivate workers to put organizational interests ahead of personal interests and the ability to elevate their needs to higher level concerns. (Saad Alessa, 2021). According to Greimel *et al.* (2023), these factors are present in transformational leaders depending on their workplace circumstances. Hence, workplace satisfaction among employees can be increased by leaders adopting a transformational approach to their leadership.

2.6 Literature Gap

These literature reviews do not include the current challenges faced by the hospitality industry. Furthermore, the review also does not include a country-specific view of the Malaysian hospitality industry, nor does it include the practices of any specific hotels. Hence, these gaps will be filled by the findings of this current study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

The ***Inductive Research Approach*** has been used in the research procedure to acquire data along with the formation of hypotheses depending on the results of the analysis. This form of research approach enhances the collection of proceedings and observations through specific experiences to wide experiences (Kumar and Ujire, 2024). It helps in the production of new theirs, and concepts, improving knowledge.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The researcher has involved the use of the ***Interpretivism Research Philosophy*** to offer a philosophical and methodological framework, including subjective approaches. It includes the concept of sharing concepts, social settings, and circumstances of humans for determining the connection with the environment (Acharya, 2024). This involves a better understanding of the view on social occurrences. It offers evaluation and analysis of identifying various qualitative factors considering job satisfaction.

3.3 Research Design

Exploratory Research Design has emerged into the research procedure to introduce various under-discovered obligations that might occur in the research procedure. It is stated as expansive, change-adaptable, and versatile in focusing on its aims (Olawale et al. 2023). This helps in clarifying operational concepts, improving the design of the research, and setting objectives. This specific technique helps in offering progressive and chronological findings through the use of surveys and samples to achieve views.

3.4 Data Collection Method

Relevance and accuracy are the most significant elements for the research procedure to succeed with indulging the ***Primary Qualitative Data Collection Method.*** It is the only method that is accurate, dependable, and impartial while acquiring the data through interviews consisting of retention strategies and work resilience. It requires 5 key stakeholders of Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur, considering FOH staff, FOH superior, training and education leader, HR manager, and operational manager. The information was obtained through the help of 6 open-ended questions in the form of a questionnaire.

3.5 Data Analysis Method

Considering the data collection method, the researcher has involved the ***Thematic Data Analysis Method*** to employ research procedures with comprehending habits, Ideas, and experiences that are real-time (Cernasev and Axon, 2023). It has enhanced the researcher's knowledge of employees and achieving objectives. Thematic analysis aims to benefit from integrating the dataset that further enhances multiple small themes aligning with the research questions.

3.6 Sampling Method

The ***Purposive Sampling Method*** has been included in the research procedure to judge the sampling considering a deliberate selection of the population (Hossan *et al.* 2023). This method of sampling enhances the qualitative research with selective interests according to the selected population. It is based on specifying the specific characteristics of the selection.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The researcher has considered various ethical norms that have offered the findings with relevance along with protection of data privacy from abuse, misuse, unauthorized access and breaches. It has also included various strict standards considering ethics for gathering information with psychological interventions. This ensures that the participants were involved with their consent which resulted in a better understanding of human behaviour.

4. Findings and Discussion

The main stakeholders of the FOH department within the Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur are the FOH regular staff, FOH Supervisor, Operation Manager, HR manager and Training leaders. These individuals have been interviewed to gain a better insight into Ascott Hotel's FOH operations.

4.1 Interview Transcript

Questions	Summary of Stakeholder Responses
Q1: "What are the factors you believe mostly affect the retention of FOH employees in the Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur?"	Equal wages, growth opportunities, positive interaction appreciation, and high-quality training opportunities are necessary to retain employees in the long run.
Q2: "What training and development program should be introduced for the staff members of the hotel?"	Effective training and coaching programs are necessary for the skill growth of staff. Unique training programs with the help of advanced technologies can be beneficial for staff engagement.
Q3: "How important is a positive work environment to give positive growth opportunities for your staff members at FOH?"	A healthy work culture and positive workplace environment create growth opportunities by boosting the morale and confidence of staff.
Q4: "What strategies would you recommend to reduce the turnover number at FOH?"	Providing work-life balance to employees through team-building activities can help to reduce employee turnover.
Q5: "How can you improve communication among the FOH employees to enhance the retention rate?"	Feedback forms can be a form of communication system to increase staff interaction and openness. The introduction of communication gadgets can also help develop employee interaction and communication.
Q6: "How can you strengthen the internal hiring of new staff managers at FOH aiming for better retention?"	Career advancement opportunities with clear plans and customized skill training programs can help to promote internal staff.

4.2 Themes Derived from Transcripts

Themes	Key Insights from Responses	Related Questions
Intervention for enhancing retention	Equal salary, growth opportunities, and high-quality training programs can increase the employees' satisfaction rate.	Q1: **"**What are the factors you believe mostly affect the retention of FOH employees in the Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur?"
Positive and sustainable work environment	A positive work culture fosters innovation, teamwork, confidence and productivity, which encourages skill development and employee loyalty.	Q2: "What training and development program should be introduced for the staff members of the hotel?"
Opportunities for sustainable growth	Defining the career routes of employees by providing chances for personal growth can promote long-term engagement with the organization.	Q3: "How important is a positive work environment to give positive growth opportunities for your staff members at FOH?"
Effective and sustainable communication	Clear interaction through frequent meetings, performance feedback sessions and daily briefings helps the staff of Ascott Hotel to develop sustainable communication channels.	Q5: **"**How can you improve communication among the FOH employees to enhance the retention rate?
Proposed model of selection and recruitment	Staff planning in the pre-recruitment stage, effective implementation strategies, onboarding and internal hiring are proposed to reduce staff turnover at the FOH department.	Q4: "What strategies would you recommend to reduce the turnover number at FOH?"
Sustainable recruitment and selection methods	A systematic and strategic approach to recruitment that is specific to the FOH labour segment helps to develop sustainable recruitment and selection at the FOH department of the Ascott Hotel.	Q6: **"**How can you strengthen the internal hiring of new staff managers at FOH aiming for better retention?"

4.3 Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that employee happiness and satisfaction are in retrospect with the employees' interest to work in an organization for a longer period. The level of satisfaction is a key determinant for developing better strategies for retaining employees in the workplace and reducing the turnover of FOH employees. The interview transcriptions have revealed a positive inclination of employee satisfaction with growth opportunities in the workplace. In other words, employees will be recruited and selected with a better pay scale, incentives, perks and benefits. Furthermore, such additional benefits also help people to develop employee loyalty that is directly linked with employee retention. Hereby, it is to be noted that a healthy environment is also necessary in the workplace to foster a positive workplace environment and initiate growth opportunities. Employees are likely to stick to an organization that offers positive career growth and employment opportunities. Promotion to the internal levels also helps to encourage employees to increase work opportunities in the future. Furthermore, positive communication with other departments in the workplace can help to increase employee engagement, which can, in turn, develop the employee retention rate.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Key Findings

Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur's FOH department serves as the research focus for investigating workforce resilience and staff retention strategies. The research discovers essential components, which include appropriate communication methods and defined recruitment protocols together with promotion opportunities from within and organized employee orientation programs. The important communication methods involved regular updates combined with engaging staff directly, which helped enhance team morale. New employee onboarding initiatives served as fundamental drivers behind minimizing first-year staff departures and enhancing staff readiness. The research findings demonstrate that resilient workforce approaches promote employee retention, leading to strong stability while allowing high-pressure hospitality services to continue consistently. The study focused on formal methods for staffing competency testing and talent development practices.

5.2 Contribution to Knowledge

The research analyses workforce resilience and employee retention patterns in hospitality through an examination of Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur's FOH department staff. The research fills literary vacancies about talent management by studying sustainable recruitment and retention methods. Research results demonstrate the effectiveness of structured employee planning systems as well as competency tests and employee welcome procedures for talent integration. Organizational stability as well as growth depends on internal selection followed by succession planning processes. The research delivers purposeful managerial insights by providing practice-based solutions to enhance organizational resilience and job satisfaction while minimizing high-pressure hospitality staff attrition. Enhanced communication methods that incorporate engagement in both ways and digital platforms help workers become more visible and boost their sense of organisational spirit. The findings of this study could inform policy-making within the hospitality industry, particularly in areas related to employee welfare, training and career development. It might also contribute to broader discussions on labour policies in Malaysia, especially in sectors with high turnover rates. It will provide both theoretical insights and practical solutions that can be applied by hotel managers, HR professionals and policymakers to address the persistent challenges of high turnover and employee burnout in the FOH department.

5.3 Recommendations

- Researching AI-powered approaches to recruitment and retention would help establish modern technological insights about hospitality human resources management.

- The research would benefit from enlarging its examination area to encompass additional hospitality segments, including resort hotels and economy-class accommodations, to yield comparative findings. It also will help to investigate hospitality workforce resilience together with staff maintenance, specifically regarding the FOH department.

- Long-term investigations of staffing strategies and their organizational performance implications should be conducted to gather more comprehensive knowledge. Research should investigate how culture impacts workforce resilience among teams operating in multinational hotels.

5.4 Final Thought

The research delivers the most significant knowledge about workplace resilience along with maintenance patterns in the hospitality sector. The research offers insight into recruitment and communication methods for staff improvement as one of the core elements for developing an adaptable workforce. The use of a structured research technique revealed proven strategies that organizations in hospitality should use to achieve long-term organizational success. It also helps in managing to enhance knowledge of human resource management practices by overcoming collection and analytical barriers in service sectors. It can be seen from this research that the hotel faces several challenges such as a high workload, irregular working hours and limited career advancement opportunities. With the implementation of the strategies gained from this research, Ascott Hotel Kuala Lumpur can refine its workforce management strategies to improve employee well-being and reduce turnover. Moreover, the findings serve as a valuable reference for other hospitality organisations seeking to enhance staff resilience and retention, ultimately leading to a more stable and motivated workforce in the industry.

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