

LABOR CHALLENGES IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR: EXPLORING ETHICAL EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines some of the labour issues affecting the hospitality industry, including high turnover rates, low wages, and unethical employment. The hospitality industry is one of the backbone industries of the world economy, but it is facing critical problems in sourcing and maintaining human capital because of the organizational problems in the system, such as unfair wages, low job satisfaction, and lack of promotions. The paper explores how these challenges affect businesses and employees as well as the ethical perspectives of low wages and exploitation, especially for foreign employees. It also discusses corporate social responsibility in relation to upgrading labour relations and the significance of workforce training in raising skills and work satisfaction. Utilizing case scenarios and bench-marking principles, the paper provides methods for ethical employment strategies, methods for avoiding high turnover rates, and approaches to incorporating workforce development systematically into business models. The results imply that these problems need to be resolved to maintain a healthful and effective human capital demand for the hospitality industry.

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry is one of the biggest economic pillars that constitute the global economy, and it comprises sub-sectors including tourism, hotel and accommodation firms, restaurants and bars, and other firms that deal in recreational services. The field constitutes a highly dynamic and absorptive sector, a major source of employment, and a key GDP element in many countries. As highlighted by Legrand et al. (2022), the sector depends on its performance in providing quality services that are largely determined by the workforce. The necessity to maintain reliance on human capital as a key asset emphasizes the sector's vulnerability to labor-related issues, especially as it seeks to retain relevance and adapt to the shifting regional economic landscape.

Labor factor is a critical factor as relates to the hospitality business since personnel interface with the customer, shape the overall perception

of the business among customers, and also influence the internal operation of the business. According to Murray and Holmes (2021), affirmative and engrossed employees contribute to the sustainability of the workforce, which is a core foundation of every organization's development (Murray and Holmes., 2021). However, there is a problem of employee turnover, low wages, and even poor ethical practices within this sector. All these challenges not only have a negative impact on the employees' quality of life but also on the sector's stability to maintain an adequate and committed human resource, which impacts service delivery and profitability.

Reduced turnover rates are again a significant problem in the hospitality industry in which customer care employees tend to change jobs frequently because of the lack of promotion opportunities, low wages, and high work stress.

According to Ghani et al. (2022), organizations operating in such contexts need to put special efforts into the retention of talents, which involves engaging the workers through career development activities (Ghani et al., 2022). Likewise, low wages have remained a debatable topic despite the fact that they can intensify economic inequality and decrease employee satisfaction levels. Other social issues that are also closely related to labor relations include discrimination, sexual harassment, and exploitation of Migrant workers are added to these worries. This paper aims to focus on the working hardships of the hospitality industry with a focus on turnover, wage rates, and standard employment practices. The purpose is to draw attention to the role of ethical employment practices and skills development of the workforce as strategies to deal with these challenges, and ensure sustainability and social justice. Through a literature review and case analysis, this study will reveal practical knowledge for enhancing equality in the workplace of the hospitality industry.

This paper is divided into several sections in order to provide a clear picture of the topic selected. Leveling from this introduction, section 2 presents a detailed analysis of different challenges faced by the employee in hospitality employment and their causes and consequences. Section 3 focuses on ethical employment practices and consists of case studies and outlines of actions to be taken. In Section 4, the utilization of training, innovative practices, and policy initiatives for workforce development is stressed. Section 5 provides recommendations on how to overcome the labor issues that emerged and contribute within the framework of this subject. Section 5 concludes the novel and gives further research directions. Finally, this paper aims to offer a comprehensive review of various labor issues affecting the hospitality industry with a particular focus on the ethical approaches to employment and human capital development to support sustainable business models. It builds on the literature of Ghani et al. (2022), Murray and Holmes (2021), Tanveer et al. (2024), and Legrand et al. (2022) and offers insights toward an ongoing conversation about constructing fair and sustainable employment relations in this important sector.

2- Labor Challenges in the Hospitality Sector

Workers constitute and are highly valued in the hospitality industry, but the labor issues continue to threaten the industry's sustainability and development. This section explores key labor challenges, including high turnover rates, low wages, unethical employment practices, and disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. From addressing the causes, effects, and how they vary across regions, this discussion underscores the solution, equity, sustainability, and ethical that should be applied in the sector.

2.1. High Turnover Rates and Employee Retention Issues

High turnover is still a major problem among the issues that have faced the hospitality sector. It is revealed that low wages, bad physical surroundings, and lack of promotion opportunities are the most common causes of turnover (Alberti & Iannuzzi, 2020). Stress factors in hospitality positions involve long working hours, physical pressure, and emotional labor, which deepens employees' unhappiness. Diminishing organizational commitment is compounded by inadequate training and mentoring and thus hampers career mobility and, consequently, retention initiatives. Moreover, most of the employees in the hospitality industry are offered temporary or seasonal appointments hence less job security. People who are employed may sometimes lose their jobs and therefore look for secured jobs in an increased number. According to Winchenbach et al. (2021), elements of job insecurity and poor wages erode the worth and density of hotel workplace, thus killing employment loyalty (Winchenbach et al., 2021). High turnover is costly to organizations as it delays productivity, results in high costs of recruitment and training, and degrades the quality of service delivered. High turnover negatively impacts working teams and customers because regular interactions contribute to customer retention. From an organizational perspective, turnover threatens organizational stability and constrains the accumulation of professional competencies among the workforce. Bhutto et al. (2021) also explained that Low creativity and inventiveness are common in organizations with high turnover, as employees hardly have time to dig deep into their work (Bhutto et al., 2021). This

cycle mainly results in low morale and slows organizational development.

The turnover rates are different depending on the region because of cultural, economic, and legislative differences. For example, countries with better labor laws and enforcement have relatively lower turnover levels than those with weak employee rights from developing nations and weak employment regulations. In areas that heavily depend on migrant workers, the turnover rate is notably high, resulting from unfair treatment and weak legal protection (Alberti & Iannuzzi, 2020). These differences indicate the need for regionalization in the management of retention strategies.

2.2. Low Wages and Economic Inequality

Employment compensation is also another area that is heavily underpaid, particularly in the hospitality business, where most employees receive wages that are comparatively close to the minimum. Part-time employees and those in the informal sector mostly depend on wages to which fluctuating factors like tips can be added. According to Siyal et al. (2023), such a wage structure results in financial insecurity for temporary employees, especially frontline workers who have little or no access to basic employment privileges such as healthcare or pensions (Siyal et al., 2023). In contrast to technology or finance industries, hospitality is actually highly uncompetitive in terms of wages. This scenario has led to the reduction of talents joining the hospitality industry and also has contributed to the negative image of the sector as a low-value employer. According to Bhutto et al. (2021), wage structures can be uplifted to increase job appeal and discourage turnover, allowing the sector to retain professional staff.

Tipping, which is practiced in most countries, is seen as a way of addressing the issue of low wages but has merit issues. Thus, the responsibility of fair compensation is transferred from the employers to the customers, which aggravates income disparities. Wood et al. (2021) note that using tips as a source of income means workers are exposed to risk by earning little or nothing during any time of reduced consumer traffic or poor economic conditions (Wood et al., 2021). Restoring proper measures in tipping and

guaranteeing minimum wages might help to level the pay difference.

2.3. Unethical Employment Practices

The tourism industry involves a significant number of migrants, in particular those countries that are visited by large numbers of tourists. However, they are vulnerable to low wage rates, long working hours, and no employee rights (Alberti & Iannuzzi, 2020). Many of these practices are not only dangerous for the workers but are eroding the overall ethicality of the industrial practices. Gender discrimination, ethnicity, or any social differentials continue to be evidenced in the hospitality industry. More specifically, women and minorities are most vulnerable and experience harassment and equal treatment. Thus, according to Winchenbach et al. (2021), it is crucial to pay attention to the creation of an inclusive organizational culture to combat these challenges. It is apparent that these issues should be resolved by implementing ethical leadership and diverse organizational policies (Guo et al., 2021).

Failure to enforce the labor laws deters and thus hampers unethical practices in many regions. Employers are notorious for avoiding minimum wage and overtime pay standards and also disregarding workplace safety standards or laws. Improving the legal environment along with guaranteeing strict measures against noncompliance are the actions necessary to support the rights of employees.

2.4. Impact of COVID-19 on Labor Challenges

The COVID-19 pandemic brought significant change in the workplace and devastating effects for the hospitality workforce, including layoffs and furloughs. When travel and lockdowns limited people's needs for services, many establishments could not adapt and struggled to survive. According to Alberti and Iannuzzi (2020), it argued that the increase in job losses impacted increasingly vulnerable groups of workers, including part-time workers and migrants (Alberti and Iannuzzi., 2020). While some were laid off, others had to continue working but had to do so at a heightened productivity. Due to staff layoffs, employees had to take up several functions, which caused job burnout and dissatisfaction. According to Guo et al. (2021), there is evidence that psychological empowerment during such crises

must be encouraged to reduce the adverse effects and enhance work-related strength (Guo et al., 2021). The pandemic has changed the expectations for employees to focus on their well-being and job stability and respecting their rights. Employees are more likely to engage themselves in companies that care for their health and provide options such as remote work. According to Wood et al. (2021), it is critical to meet these shifting expectations in order to secure and maintain human capital in the post-COVID-19 world.

3. Ethical Employment Practices in the Hospitality Sector

Business ethics are important to use in cultivating decent and equitable employment relations in the hospitality industry. It involves payment of employees a fair wage by providing them with safe work conditions and recognizing their rights and welfare. Reasonable wages are important in employment that is ethical. Lack of competitive wages and employee benefits have been widely accused in the hospitality sector, which affects the employee remuneration status and their satisfaction level in the job. Fair wage practices include paying not less than the living wage standard and offering other benefits such as insurance, pensions, and incentives. For example, based on job-demand resources theory, which has been discussed by Lei et al. (2021), it is imperative that adequate resources such as fair wages are provided because they motivate employees and help them achieve their career aspirations in Chinese hotels.

Safety at work, as well as equal opportunities or equal employment opportunity, is another important aspect of ethical employment. A safe workplace reduces the likelihood of injury and death and equality promotes dignity for all people, tolerance, and diversity. Appropriate places at the workplace empower employees and bring more innovation and productivity to employers. Lin et al. (2020) stressed that both meaninglessness and respect play an important role in increasing employee satisfaction and retaining non-standard employees, such as food deliveries (Lin et al., 2020). Employee rights are well protected by obtaining legal compliance, providing break time for the employees, and providing opportunities for career development. There will always be concerns for employees' well-being in the

organization, including their mental health, work-life balance, and acknowledging their work. Suliman et al. (2023) discussed how green transformational leadership positively impacts the environmental performance of the employees and related green leadership's role in ethical employment in hospitality.

3.1. Case Studies of Ethical Employers in Hospitality

Many organisations have excelled in ethical employment in the hospitality industry out of which many have come out as winners. For Instance, Marriott International has adopted training and development, diversity, and environmental sustainability policies. Likewise, Hyatt Hotels has highlighted payment remunerations and development facilities that are in synergy with the company's mission, which concerns 'Caring for people.' Such initiatives enhance the satisfaction of the employees and enhance their commitment to the organization (Tian and Suo., 2021). Another important example is the Green Key Global programme, which has been implemented by different hotels to incorporate the principles of environmental responsibility into their organizational practices. This initiative associates the ethical employment of people with environmental concerns, as Tian and Suo (2021) pointed out the implications of responsible leadership for activating pro-environmental behavioural change.

Thus, leadership training, clear communication, and comprehensive employee recognition programs remain the key activities pursued by these organizations. Marriott has been known to provide career opportunities and equitable evaluation procedures to offer high levels of employee engagement that a company should pursue and align corporate objectives with the employees' personal goals. Besides, Asghar et al. (2021) pointed out that perceived organizational support mitigated work engagement and decreased turnover intention, which has a positive impact on ethical employment.

3.2. Role of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is now an essential means of enhancing labour practices in the hospitality industry. Some examples of CSR

activities are education sponsorship programs, the company's support of the community's welfare activities, and diversifying the workforce. CSR also creates awareness of other social problems, including economic injustice and environmental degradation, thereby relating ethical employment to sustainable organizational performance. For instance, According to Tian and Suo (2021), hotel practices on responsible leadership have crucially contributed as paths to green behaviour and positive culture (Tian and Suo., 2021). These efforts have been realized as the ability to merge ethics, sustainability, and the well-being of employees.

The effects of CSR initiatives on the satisfaction level of the employees of a company can be assessed by feedback, absence of turnover, and performance reviews. Suliman et al. (2023) also showed that green transformational leadership, in compliance with CSR principles, enhances the higher engagement of employees, which leads to better organizational performance. Likewise, Shukla et al. (2023) also pointed out the ways in which leadership intervention during a crisis like COVID-19 impacted ethicality in labor relations, morale, and resilience.

3.3. Challenges in Implementing Ethical Practices

The main difficulty the organization faces when it comes to the ethical implementation of employment practices includes the cost and profits trade-off. Measures like the payment of moral wages, incentives and training usually come with a lot of money involved. Hospitality firms, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, face difficulties in setting aside dollars for such functions on a cost-effective basis. However, studies show that ethical strategies lead to more sustainable monetary returns. For instance, organizations with a good CSR policy enjoy enhanced staff turnover as it lowers hiring and training expenses (Lei et al., 2021). However, it is important to state that there are certain initial costs that make this a challenge for companies especially for those companies that struggle to make a slim profit. Another challenge that contributes to the implementation of ethical employment practices is resistance to change. External and internal cultures provide little support to the idea of change and constantly push

for improvement in the company's profits at the expense of the employees' safety. For example, autocratic management practices characteristic of some geographical areas might be incompatible with emergent leadership.

In their work, Shukla et al. (2023) pointed out that leadership in the hospitality industry needs to overcome these cultural barriers through communication, awareness, and a slow process of integration of effective, ethical solutions. Ethical behavior requires a change in culture and maximum organizational commitment and support from the employees and all the stakeholders (Shukla et al., 2023). Ethical employment practices in the hospitality industry are pertinent to launching and maintaining sound, fair, and healthy workplaces. Essential components of these practices include paying workers a fair wage, ensuring safe workplaces, and respecting the rights of employees. Examples of best ethical practices include Marriott and Hyatt initiatives, which show that establishing ethical employer and worker relationships leads to such positives as employee engagement and loyalty. SR initiatives address the social responsibilities of organizations, and proper management systems of employee relations contribute positively to societal values and organizational performance. However, such issues as cost and an organization's resistance to change are some of the barriers that make ethical reform a challenge.

The findings presented in the literature show that ethical employment is not only a question of ethical considerations but rather an effective tool that a company can use to improve its performance while also increasing the satisfaction of employees. In the future, ethical value insertion into labor practices will be essential in coping with emerging issues and satisfying the stakeholders.

4- Workforce Development in the Hospitality Sector

Human resource development is a crucial component of the hospitality sector's strategic direction, guaranteeing that the organizations have the right human resources with knowledge, skills and flexibility to operate in a volatile customer-oriented market. This section discusses the nature of workforce development, training and education,

new approaches in training, and the part played by government and political action.

4.1. Importance of Workforce Development

Human capital development is being carried out for the development of employee skills and performance that has a direct impact on service delivery and organizational performance. The industry of hospitality entails service delivery to the customers and, hence, personnel who need an understanding of technical and social competencies. Kloutsiniotis and Mihail (2020) note that the integration of high-performance work systems increases employee productivity and can achieve reliable service quality in the hospitality industry (Kloutsiniotis and Mihail., 2020). The process designed to develop functional and technical skills enables workers to manage multiple applications and customer relationships and adopt new IT solutions at work. Furthermore, through the training and development of its employees, the different organizations are equipped with the readiness to change their ways in line with the market and available technologies. For instance, when training and development programs involve sustainability strategies, it avails skills that meet green customers' expectations and support organizational objectives as well as employees' growth.

Promotional prospects are paramount to maintain proficiency in employees and enhance workers' loyalty towards the organization. Talent management activities in organizational development include management training, coaching, and other developmental activities that qualify workers for higher levels in the company or enterprise. According to Sarwar et al. (2020), ethical leadership and work engagement are important in developing opportunities for career progression and increasing employee motivation and mood (Sarwar et al., 2020). Business organizations that focus on career mobility not only maintain their high performers but also build strong reputations as employers. Promotion is also related to satisfaction and organizational commitment. According to Ghaderi et al. (2023), perceived organizational justice is the key antecedent of employment commitment and job satisfaction that is pivotal for career advancement (Ghaderi et al., 2023). Thus, creating a fair organisational environment and appreciating

employees' efforts are the core aspects of supportive human capital development initiatives.

4.2. Training and Education Programs

Vocational training and certification are essential in the process of Human capital development because they offer specialized training for employment and bearing industry-relevant certifications. These programs are intended to satisfy highly specialized requirements of the hospitality industry, from professional cooking to restaurant and hotel administration. Certifications like ServSafe and Certified Hospitality Supervisor (CHS) provide credentials, scope, and mobility between the foods served and likely increase the personnel's career prospects. Other than certification, on the job training is good ways to enhance knowledge and develop work related skills. According to Xu et al. (2022), quality of work life and intrinsic motivation are key mediating factors to minimize employee turnover intention (Xu et al., 2022). The results of the training help increase the efficiency of employees' work, as well as create a work ethic, which in turn contributes to job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Organizational partnerships between hospitality organizations and educational institutions are crucial to creating the workforce. Such partnerships integrate learning from classroom activities to the skills required in the job market to facilitate the employment of the graduates. For example, the universities and colleges admitting students to their hospitality programs involve hotels and restaurants to offer internships, apprenticeships, and practical sessions. Besides, such relationships enhance the performance of research and innovation in developing the workforce. According to Hayat Bhatti et al. (2020), factors that involve knowledge sharing and ethical leadership are among some of the ways that can enhance the levels of worker health and productivity. In this regard, educational institutions can design educational curricula and training programs that may assist in the development of these qualities with reference to the difficulty experienced in the respective field by the learners.

4.3. Innovations in Workforce Development

Technology has greatly helped in the implementation of training strategies within the workforce development within the hospitality industry hence changing the aspect of training. Augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) enhance the real environment in the organization so that the learning process is further enhanced with better and more realistic training models (Kloutsiniotis and Mihail., 2020). For example, training employees using VR may be of value in scenarios such as anger management, teaching the receptionists how to manage customers' complaints, or teaching the housekeeping staff how to inspect certain rooms, react to emergencies, etc. Technological advancements also support off-site and independent education. Kloutsiniotis and Mihail (2020) have pointed out that components such as work-related training, performance measurement, and appraisal in high-performance work systems are frequently supported by digital solutions. These tools enhance learner autonomy hence enhancing enhanced retention of knowledge and aptitude to apply the knowledge in practice.

Online programs, as well as blended education opportunities, can address various requirements of hospitality employees who have busy working and personal lives. All these, including online courses, microlearning modules, and mobile apps, offer flexibility and can be taken without affecting employees' working schedules. This flexibility is especially helpful for people who work part-time or for the season and who can hardly attend a conventional training course (Sarwar et al., 2020). The integration of training both in person and online demarcates an equal measure of training that is required for balanced employees. Sarwar et al. (2020) highlight that increased appreciation of alternative forms of engagement is beneficial for the employee as engagement in learning improves performance and increases job satisfaction.

4.4. Government and Policy Interventions

The government has a significant influence over the strategy concerning the development of the workforce in the hospitality industry. Training policies and practices such as vocational training, apprenticeships, and lifelong learning provide a strong foundation for skill building. For example, the governments provide certain exemptions to companies that invest in the training of employees,

which in turn motivates organizations to invest in the training of human resources. Besides the monetary assistance, the legal requirements for the minimum qualifications serving in facilities offer the technical precision needed in the industry. According to Xu et al. (2022), policy support can be used to solve the problem of employee turnover and improve their satisfaction levels (Xu et al., 2022). Governments can also engage the stakeholders in the industry to come up with training regimes for a certain industry that meet market standards and future trends.

This paper aims to investigate how partnerships between the public and private sectors contribute to the development of the workforce. These collaborations make the best use of the strengths of both sectors in the development of viable and impactful training solutions. For instance, the government can offer revenues and facilities while other private organizations approach the issue with industrial expertise and experience. At the same time, they act as a platform for sharing knowledge and innovations in the development of the workforce. However, Ghaderi et al. (2023) found that both organizational commitment and perceived fairness are very important for employees' satisfaction and turnover intentions. Thus, public and private organizations can constructively combine their efforts to establish programs that would help to mitigate these factors and have a motivated and skilled population.

Recommendations for Addressing Labor Challenges

The exceptional labor issues include high turnover, lack of adequate, professionally trained employees, and ethical issues around employment in the hospitality industry. For these reasons, several practices can be carried out in order to achieve an efficient and committed workforce in the long term.

5.1. Best Practices for Ethical Employment

Ethical employment practices play a significant role in creating proper and motivated workforce energy. Examples of producing good policies include paying employees reasonable wages and granting them reasonable benefits, ensuring their employment security as well as providing a workplace that is free from discrimination and harassment. For instance, people working in

organizations are required to be paid fairly and have incentives based on their productivity at their places of work. Kuhn et al. (2021) note that ethical employment practices not only make the employees happy but also foster organizational success by boosting morale among employees and containing employee turnover (Kuhn et al., 2021). Moreover, providing a safe and harassment-free workplace is of high importance. Employers should be actively working on diversity and inclusion policies so that workers of all genders, ethnicities, etc, should be treated with dignity. This includes offering educational sessions on ways that workers can learn to recognize discrimination in the workplace and the steps to take to stop such behavior and create an environment that accepts diversity before promoting such discrimination.

5.2. Strategies for Reducing Turnover

To address turnover in hospitality, several interventions are necessary depending on the particular labor market. One solution is enhancing the level of employee involvement by providing prospects for career growth and rewarding performance. Islam et al. (2021) suggest that one can provide customized employment advice and training to help employees achieve their goals, thus improving satisfaction and retention levels among employees. Further, well-articulated information concerning career advancement and performance motives also helps in retaining the employees as they think that the company can help them have a better chance of being promoted (Islam et al., 2021). The second strategy is to build a pleasant work climate with a focus on the balance between work and free time. The best practices include allowing the employees to work during shift options, remotely, or even granting them leaves so that they can attend to issues related to household or other family concerns, among others are instrumental in reducing the rate of burnout and turnover.

5.3. Integrating Workforce Development into Business Models

Thus, one of the main approaches to solving labor issues is the integration of workforce development into business models. Managers should realize that investments in workforce development are not expenses but long-term investments. The

incorporation of training and development in the structure of a firm helps in its provision for the constant change in its stock of human capital. Organizational practices such as the provision of e-learning tools and talents, buddy systems, and accreditation can improve both skills and organizational results by improving general productivity because of the reduced turnover rates. Furthermore, connecting 'workforce development' to what businesses need will lead to skills formation needed to foster organizational success. It also contribute to the encouragement of the provision of staff training and development as well as innovation that would be beneficial to the individual staff members and the organization as a whole.

Conclusion

The hospitality industry is among the major sources of the Gross Domestic Product of the world but consists of different challenges in relation to turnover, wages, and ethics. In tackling these challenges, there is a need to look for a multi-dimensional solution that would include ethical employment, a workforce plan, and a sound strategy for employee retention. If companies pay their employees a fair wage, offer equal opportunities to all people, and make sure that they look after their health, people will stay with their companies and not run to the next company. Also, training, qualification, and professional development contribute to the preparation for the main changes in the industry and increase personnel productivity. Workforce development becoming a part of the organizational models supported by governments and the cooperation of states and companies provides a rather reasonable and long-term perspective on labor issues. Altogether, these practices may be helpful for the enhancement of reputation, productivity, and profitability of the organizations in the hospitality industry and for the striving for higher ethicality and sustainability in the workforce.

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