MTU
Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Mumhan
Munster Technological University

THRIC 2024

Dingle, Co. Kerry

Abstracts

Room 4:
Work Related Issues

Morning Session

Title: Retention Strategies for Employees within the Hospitality and Tourism Industry

Authors: Claudia Stephanie Mcnamara, *Technological University of the Shannon*

Keywords: Hospitality, tourism, turnover.

Abstract:

Purpose:

With the advanced technological evolution and the vast user base, online platforms offer significant advantages for attracting talented employees and generating a competitive edge, the internet has become a pivotal tool in talent acquisition for the Hospitality and Tourism (H&T) industry (Boscal, 2015). The expansion of this research focuses on the effectiveness of Online Recruitment Platforms and Retention Strategies (ORPRS) in the H&T industry.

Originally, the purpose of this research was to provide H&T businesses in the Midwest Region of Ireland, with an in-depth understanding of the ORPRS, its impacts and contributions and a guide for H&T's businesses in developing such a strategy. A thorough literature review was developed which examined the impacts, opportunities and use of ORPRS within H&T businesses. An industry analysis emphasised the importance of ORPRS and the use of social media recruitment platforms for recruitment. A review of H&T related case studies and their use of ORPRS verifies the findings of the literature and contributed best practice examples of ORPRS which will assist in strategy development (Albashiti, et al. 2021; Castro, 2022; Chen, et al. 2022).

Methodology:

An exploration into the best practice examples of 25 H&T businesses in the Midwest Region of Ireland was conducted through a content analysis of the platforms Indeed and LinkedIn followed by 14 semi-structured interviews with H&T Human Resource Managers (HRMs). The findings from the research conclude to a step-by-step guide for H&T businesses in developing an effective ORPRS strategy.

Findings:

Furthermore, the potential exists to extend this research (to a PhD level), demonstrating its importance in presenting HRMs with the findings conducted in 2023. The identical content will be scrutinised in 2024, involving the same interviewees, allowing for a comparative analysis of the results which will contribute to advancing the ORPRS strategy within H&T businesses, offering valuable insights for further enhancement.

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Title: Navigating Tattoo Stereotypes: Promoting Inclusivity in the Tourism & Hospitality Workforce of the Future

Authors: Brooklyn Bond, Technological University of the Shannon and Catriona Murphy, Technological University of the Shannon

Keywords: Tattoos, Aesthetic, Labour, Inclusivity, Diversity.

Abstract:

As the tourism and hospitality industries of Ireland evolve to meet the demands of a changing world, the workforce of the future must embrace diversity and inclusivity to remain competitive and relevant. One aspect of diversity often overlooked is the presence of tattooed individuals in the workforce and the stereotypes and unconscious bias they face. This submission explores the impact of aesthetic labour, specifically regarding tattoo stereotypes, on the tourism and hospitality industry and offers strategies for promoting inclusivity in the workforce of the future. Methodologies include in-depth interviews with industry professionals to gain insights into current attitudes and practices concerning tattooed employees.

Introduction

Tattoos have long been associated with counterculture and rebellion, but in contemporary society, they are now mainstream forms of self-expression. Despite their prevalence, tattooed individuals continue to face significant stigmatisation, especially in customer-facing roles within the tourism and hospitality sectors. This stigmatisation often manifests as stereotypes associating tattoos with unprofessionalism, criminality, and other negative traits, deeply rooted in historical associations of tattoos with marginalised groups. These stereotypes can severely limit career opportunities and negatively impact the experiences of tattooed individuals in the workplace, where the concept of 'aesthetic labour'—the practice of screening, managing, and controlling workers based on their physical appearance (Mears, 2014)—is increasingly relevant. In industries where customer service and image are paramount, addressing these stereotypes is crucial for fostering a truly diverse and inclusive workforce.

Understanding Tattoo Stereotypes

Tattoo stereotypes encompass a range of perceptions, from associating tattoos with deviance and unprofessionalism to viewing them as symbols of authenticity and creativity. These perceptions can lead to unconscious bias in hiring, promotions, and daily interactions, where tattooed individuals are often judged not on their skills or professionalism, but on their appearance. This stigmatisation can result in tattooed employees being overlooked for roles that require direct customer interaction, or being subjected to stricter dress codes and other forms of aesthetic labour aimed at concealing their tattoos. The industry's ability to challenge and dismantle these

stereotypes is essential to creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for all employees.

Promoting Inclusivity in the Workforce

To promote inclusivity in the tourism and hospitality workforce of the future, it is essential to implement strategies that challenge tattoo stereotypes, address the pressures of aesthetic labour, and create opportunities for tattooed individuals to thrive without bias. This can include:

Education and Awareness: Conducting comprehensive training and education programs for employers and staff on the diversity of tattoo culture and the impact of stereotypes on the workplace. These programs will involve real-life testimonies from tattooed individuals and case studies illustrating the harmful effects of aesthetic bias, thereby fostering understanding and tolerance.

Policy Development: Implementing robust anti-discrimination policies that specifically address appearance-based discrimination, including tattoos. These policies should be developed in consultation with both industry professionals and tattooed employees to ensure they are effective in limiting unnecessary aesthetic labour and promoting fairness.

Celebrating Diversity: Actively embracing diversity by celebrating the unique identities of employees, including those with tattoos. This could involve initiatives that highlight the cultural and historical significance of tattoos, thereby diminishing negative associations and promoting a positive, inclusive workplace culture.

Creating Safe Spaces: Establishing safe spaces where employees feel comfortable expressing their individuality through their physical appearance, including visible tattoos. Reducing the emphasis on uniformity and aesthetic labour will help to attract and retain a diverse and creative workforce.

Conclusion

Addressing tattoo stereotypes is essential for promoting inclusivity in the tourism and hospitality workforce of the future. By challenging these stereotypes, addressing the pressures of aesthetic labour, implementing inclusive policies, and celebrating diversity, organizations can create environments where all employees feel valued and supported. Embracing tattooed individuals as integral members of the workforce not only promotes individuality and creativity but also enhances the industry's ability to meet the diverse needs of customers in an ever-changing global landscape where the number of tattooed people is growing exponentially.

Title: Complaint Handling in Hotels: Addressing the Skills Gap in Frontline Staff in Resolving Guest Complaints.

Authors: Suzanne Kennedy, *Shannon College of Hotel Management*

Keywords: Hotels. Guest complaints. Skills training. Frontline staff. Empowerment.

Abstract:

Introduction

Drawing on associated literature and empirical research, this paper explores the ability of staff in hotels to handle complaints with confidence, leading to more satisfactory resolutions for the customer and a move away to negative reviews online.

Industries such as hospitality and tourism, and specifically hotels, have become ever more challenging servicescapes for staff to navigate. Hotel guests continue to demand service experiences that exceed their expectations. When these expectations are not met, the resultant service failure can be difficult for hotel staff to resolve. Grönroos (1984) argues that unpacking 'good' customer service, is achieved by comparing the customer expectations about the service, with their experience of the service, once they have received it. In the context of hotels, studies highlight that there is a milieux of criteria, such as, the grade or category of hotel, which can influence guest perceptions and expectations and therefore, levels of satisfaction with their experience. For example, budget hotels, versus upscale or luxury hotels (Yavas & Babakus, 2005). As a result, guests may have different complaints depending on the hotel category. Specifically, Hu et al. (2019) found guest complaints about budget hotels relate to issues with facilities. Whereas, for upscale hotels, complaints are more focused on service-related issues. Research also draws attention to how the purpose of travel may impact on the nature and criteria for guest complaints in hotels. Guests with different travel purposes have different hotel evaluation criteria and expectations (Radojevic et al., 2018). For instance, leisure guests depend on personal preferences for hotel attributes, whereas business guests are often influenced by a hotel's location. Furthermore, there is also the issue that services delivered by people to people, bring into play the interpersonal interactions that take place during the service delivery. These interactions can be perceived positively or negatively by the customer. Negative interactions can also have an impact on overall customer satisfaction. For example, linguistic styles are important. Li et al. (2024) found that a concrete management response portrays a "competent" brand.

RQ: This paper poses the question, when customers complain, can staff dealing with the complaint, if professionally trained and confident in complaint handling, rescue a service failure and bring the complaint to a satisfactory resolution for both the customer and the hotel in question?

Anecdotal evidence suggests that presently, staff working in the hotel sector are finding it increasingly difficult to deal with customer complaints, from what is perceived as 'more demanding customers' and lack the skills necessary to deal with customer complaints.

Methodology

To address the apparent skills gap, this paper has adopted a phenomenological approach to exploring complaint handling in Hotels. Secondary research in the form of TripAdvisor reviews from hotels in Ireland indicates an apparent deficiency in hotel staffs' proficiency, in managing and addressing guest complaints. These shortcomings are the result of insufficient training in complaint handling and a lack of confidence by frontline staff in engaging with guest complaints. As a result, unhappy guests are increasingly posting their complaints online.

In response to this apparent skills-gap, Shannon College of Hotel Management (Shannon College) has created a specialist elective module in public speaking for final-year hotel management students in response to this problem. The aim of this module is to equip hospitality students with the necessary knowledge and skills to handle guest complaints in person and with confidence. Analysis of the initial feedback from the students studying the module in Shannon College suggests that they benefit from learning how to handle complaints and improve their confidence. Moreover, qualitative feedback from the students' module evaluations indicates that over the course of the module, their communication skills improve, whilst also empowering them and making them feel more confident in dealing with guest complaints. However, as these findings are from a small sample of hospitality student's generalizations cannot be drawn at this early stage of research.

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Title: Middle Managers and Change – an Exploratory Study of Servant Leader-induced Change within a Hotel Organisational Context.

Author: Pat Quinn, South East Technological University; Arthur Kearney, South East Technological University; Denis Harrington, South East Technological University; and Felicity Kelliher, South East Technological University.

Keywords: Middle managers, strategy and change, hotels

Abstract:

Manifest in digital transformation, radical societal change and diverse demographics, hotels are situated at the forefront of contemporary managerial change (Harney and Collings, 2021). Responding to such change are calls for styles of leadership which are responsible and human oriented (Korkmaz et al. 2022; Ostrom et al. 2021). Servant leadership exemplifies one such style, an approach to leadership through one to one engagement with followers, in a context emphasising the centrality of stakeholder demands (Bavik, 2020; Ling et al. 2016; Brownell, 2010). Framed by the systematic review of Eva et al. (2019: 114) we define servant leadership as: "An other-oriented approach to leadership manifested through one-on-one prioritising of follower individual needs and interests, and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organisation and the larger community".

Servant leadership has been associated with positive outcomes such as improved organisational (Sendjaya, 2015) and individual performance (Eva et al. 2019), innovation based competitiveness (Van Dierendonck et al. 2014) and wider societal engagement (Neubert et al. 2016). However, challenges include misunderstandings by followers; cognitive and emotional overload for the leader (Udani and Lorenzo-Molo, 2013); conflict of organisational and stakeholder goals (Aarum-Andersen, 2009) and ethical compromise under resource pressure (Kakavelakis and Edwards, 2020).

Positioned as vital to hotel organisational effectiveness, middle managers play a significant yet complex role in hospitality organisational contexts (Ling et al. 2016). Such managers act as lynchpins between the strategic and operational levels (Teulier and Rouleau, 2013; Burgess, 2013), often supported by deep networks of social capital. Hence, middle managers are central to servant leadership change, yet their interpretations of such change have not been fully addressed in the literature (Azambuja et al. 2023; Splitter et al. 2021) leading to the research question: How do hotel middle managers interpret servant leader induced change?

Theoretically the study is informed by sense-making theory (Kieran et al. 2020), supporting a focus on how things happen, in contrast to what happens. Taking the form of a qualitative case study located in the hotel of the researcher, the study focuses on a servant leader-induced change interpreted by middle managers. A cycle of three rounds of in-depth interviews with middle managers is currently underway after which emergent findings will inform strategic planning and change within the hotel.

Emerging from calls for research into middle manager interpretations of servant leader change the study contributes to theory development through providing a framework. For practitioners the framework offers a practical tool for those seeking to engage with servant leadership in practice. The engagement framework offers hotel industry policy makers an navigational tool to contemplate the middle management challenges and opportunities in engaging with a leadership style relevant to contemporary industry challenges.

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Title: INSPIRE: Promoting Post-Conflict Refugee Tourism Entrepreneurship

Authors: Tony Johnston, Technological University of the Shannon; Noelle O' Connor, Technological University of the Shannon; and Alex Yu, Technological University of the Shannon

Keywords: Post-conflict tourism, refugee entrepreneurship, social inclusion

Abstract:

Recent data from the United Nations (UN) Refugee Agency underscores the magnitude of displacement worldwide, with 110 million individuals forced from their homes, including 62.5 million displaced people, 36.4 million refugees, 6.1 million asylum seekers and 5.3 million other people in need of international protection (UNHCR, 2024). In response to the number of people in refugee like situations in Europe, and particularly in relation to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the European Union has attempted to implement coordinated policies, focusing on fair distribution among member states, enhancing border security, and addressing root causes in origin countries.

However, tensions persist among EU nations regarding the handling of asylum applications and the integration of refugees. Public opinion remains divided, with some advocating for more humanitarian aid and others expressing concerns over security and economic impacts. The situation calls for continued international cooperation and comprehensive policy measures to facilitate integration and self-sufficiency in host communities, alongside skills which facilitate entrepreneurship on return.

The aim of the Inspire project is to create materials which will support people in refugee like situations with tourism business start-ups after conflict, either in host countries or on return. These materials include a good practice user guide, in-person and online workshops, mentoring and a mobile application. The materials will be supported by a digital badge and a final resource will be the publication of a searchable databank of supports for refugee tourism entrepreneurs, including education and training supports, finance options, networking and business supports.

The project adopts a qualitative, inductive, exploratory methodology based on interpretivist paradigms. We present interviews conducted with 210 refugees, NGOs, educators and other stakeholders from the project partner countries of Ireland, Belgium, Croatia, Türkiye, & Ukraine.

The project outcome will be over 200 trained refugee tourism entrepreneurs, 300 downloads of our guide, 300 downloads of our mobile application and delivery of the project. We aim for a minimum of 1,000 hits on our website. The project will be disseminated across 5 international business networks. The key result will be that we train refugees in starting a tourism business, inspiring success. This will support societal integration and provide legacy through training of NGOs and academic staff.

The presentation at THRIC will present the Irish phase of the research, including our literature review, preliminary primary data findings from interviews and site visits with refugees and outline next steps in our project.