

Assignment Title: Human Resource Management and Employee Engagement in the Hospitality

Industry

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Abstract

Human resource management is the key factor in defining the engagement and motivation of employees, especially in hospitality industries, where the quality of services offered by an organization cannot be done without employee performance. Chronic issues in the UK hospitality industry, including poor labour turnover and skills shortage, and unpredictable demand has added to the pressure of having effective HRM practices that breed commitment, satisfaction and discretionary effort on the employees. This essay critically evaluates how HRM helps to increase the level of employee engagement and motivation in hospitality businesses with critical reference to strategic human resource practices such as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management and reward systems as well as the relationship with employees. Using the recent academic sources, official UK industry reports, and accepted HRM theories, the research takes a qualitative analytical approach in evaluating the contribution of HRM in attaining psychological engagement and long-term motivation. The results indicate that, although the HRM has a huge potential to enhance engagement performance, its success depends on how well the organisational strategy, leadership competency, and organisational culture are aligned. The essay concludes that hospitality businesses in the UK have a long term need of integrated, employee centred HRM systems that will contribute to competitiveness and the ability to deliver excellent services.

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Introduction

Being among the most labour-intensive industries of the UK economy, the hospitality industry employs more than three million individuals and has a vast impact on national income and the development of tourism (UKHospitality, 2023). Hospitality business, in contrast to capital-based industries, involves a lot of human interaction, emotional labour, and service experience to generate customer value. Therefore, not only is employee engagement and motivation considered internal human resource issues, but is a strategic determinant of service quality, customer satisfaction and organisational performance.

Human Resource Management is the policies, practices and systems that determine the behaviour of employees, their attitude and their performance. The HRM in the hospitality industries has special challenges such as odd working hours, low salaries, seasonal employees as well as high turnover of employees. Such situations tend to destroy motivation of employees and the emotional attachment towards organisations. Consequently, most UK hospitality employers find it hard to retain committed and engaged staff especially at the frontline service positions.

Employee engagement is defined as the level of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural attachment an employee gives to his/her work and organisation, and motivation deals with the internal and external factors that affect the level of effort and persistence. There is growing evidence that indicates that engaged employees are more productive, offer improved customer service and are unlikely to leave their organisations (Albrecht et al., 2021). In hospitality, where employee behaviour is a direct determinant of the experiences of guests, the strategic importance of HRM in creating the conditions of engagement and motivation is particularly essential.

This essay discusses the role of HRM in employee engagement and motivation at hospitality businesses in the UK environment. It examines theoretical points of view, empirical data, appraises pertinent practices of HRM, and critically evaluates their success in solving sector-related problems.

Literature Review

Conceptualising Employee Engagement and Motivation

Employee engagement has developed out of previous notions of job satisfaction and organisational commitment to signify a more comprehensive psychological state. According to the engagement theory of Kahn, meaningfulness, safety and availability are the attributes that motivates the employees to commit their all in their jobs. In modern researchers, engagement is a view of a long-term emotional bond that motivates discretionary effort and not compliance (Albrecht et al., 2021).

One of the underlying theoretical perspectives regarding the concept of engagement is the engagement theory by Kahn, (1990) that delineates engagement as the levels of physical, cognitive and affective involvement that are expressed by individuals in the process of role performance. Kahn found three antecedent psychological conditions, which are meaningfulness, safety and availability that result in engagement. Psychological meaningfulness refers to the belief that one has a job worth doing and it is appreciated, psychological safety is the perception that one can express themselves and not fear anything terrible will happen to him or her, and psychological availability is the material and emotional resources to be able to do the job. The specified conditions are particularly relevant to the hospitality setting, where employees are compelled to interact with customers directly, control emotional labour and remain professional and maintain the quality of services.

Modern day scholarship takes this conception further to describe engagement as a long-term relational and affective relationship that builds amongst employees and their respective organisations. Albrecht et al. (2021) argue that engaged workers go beyond compliance and bring creativity, commitment, and problem-solving behaviours that would lead to organisational effectiveness. Engagement has a direct impact on service quality, customer satisfaction and organisational reputation in hospitality industry where customer experience highly depends on the behaviour of the employees.

The theories of motivation provide an important analytical instrument to understand engagement. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2020) distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation comes out of enjoyment, personal growth and the feeling of achievement, but extrinsic motivation comes out as a result of rewards, recognition or outside

pressures. SDT emphasizes that three fundamental psychological needs in the form of autonomy, competence, and relatedness have to be fulfilled in order to generate intrinsic motivation and, therefore, long-term engagement.

In the hospitality industry, the intrinsic motivation plays a particularly relevant role since the staff is regularly encouraged to be positive, empathetic, and attentive. The emotion labour as the control of feelings according to the job requirement is the ubiquitous feature of hospitality work. Intrinsically motivated employees are therefore more willing to deliver genuine service experiences that increasingly customers are seeking personalised and memorable experiences.

The theories of motivation offer a theoretical perspective, through which engagement can be viewed. Self-Determination Theory differentiates intrinsic motivation which is motivated by personal development and enjoyment and extrinsic motivation which is motivated by rewards and external forces. Intrinsic motivation is also highly relevant to provide authentic service in the hospitality settings, where emotional labour is necessary (Ryan and Deci, 2020). The two-factor theory by Herzberg also indicates that the hygienic factors like remuneration and workplace conditions help to avoid dissatisfaction but do not always produce engagement, which overcomes the necessity of developmental and relational human resource practices.

Even though it has been recognised that engagement is gradually becoming a strategic imperative, researchers stress that its deployment is relative on multiple contextual factors including organisational culture, leadership style, and job design. As an example, transformational leadership which is characterized by inspiration, vision, and an individual approach has been shown to increase employee involvement through the development of trust and motivation. On the other hand, the authoritarian or transactional leadership styles can hinder engagement because of restriction of autonomy and initiative.

Besides, the concept of engagement must be viewed as a dynamic and changing construct instead of an absolute. The level of engagement of employees can vary depending on the variable workload, stress, organisational change or exogenous economic pressures. The hospitality industry is a highly seasonal demand industry with work patterns that are not predictable and thus, to maintain the constant degree of engagement, it is necessary to uphold a high level of vigilance in the managerial practices and adopt the practices of adaptive human resource management.

Overall, employee engagement is a multifaceted psychological condition which is shaped by deliberate work, conducive settings, and effective motivation techniques. The three theoretical frameworks based on Kahn engagement model, Self-Determination Theory, Two-Factor Theory by Herzberg, and Social Exchange Theory combine together to provide a solid conceptual base in explaining engagement in the context of hospitality. These models highlight the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the organisational predicaments that support the excellent performance of employees.

HRM Practices in Hospitality Contexts

The HRM in hospitality has been historically transactional with emphasis to staffing, scheduling, and compliance. Nevertheless, recent sources highlight the move to strategic HRM, in which the practices aim to serve long-term organisational goals and the welfare of employees (Armstrong and Taylor, 2023). It has been proposed that recruitment and selection practices that focus on the person-organisation fit can increase engagement by co-aligning the values of the employees on service culture.

The HRM functions are very vital in hospitality because of high levels of customer contact and variations in services. Research shows that ongoing training enhances the confidence of employees, understanding of their role, and motivation, especially at the frontline (Baum et al., 2020). Higher engagement levels are also attributed to performance management systems that offer frequent feedback and developmental appraisal, although too goal-focused systems can increase stress and decrease intrinsic motivation.

The Strategic Human Resource Management aims at aligning HR practices to those of the organisation, enabling employee growth, and ensuring long-term sustainability. In the hospitality industry, the paradigm shift has been driven by the heightened competition, the increased customer expectations as well as the appreciation that employee behavior directly influences the quality of services. Therefore, organisations are putting more resources in HR programs that improve employee engagement, retention and performance.

The first stage of the employee lifecycle is the recruitment and selection process that has a serious impact on the engagement. The available empirical data suggests that recruitment procedures focused on person-organisation fit have the potential to increase engagement due to participation in recruitment programmes focused on the alignment of values of employees with those of an

organisation. The inter-relational competence and adaptability of employees and their service orientation can enhance customer experience and employee satisfaction especially in hospitality where teamwork and customer orientation are invaluable aspects that need to be considered during the selection of candidates.

Training and development are also core HRM practices which play a part in engagement. Training that is continuous helps the employees to develop new skills, gain confidence and internalise organisational expectations. Training frontline hospitality employees is especially significant because it is these workers who have to deal with a variety of customer demands and unpredictable circumstances (Baum et al., 2020). Competent trainee programmes do not only increase competence but also translate organisational investment in the employees thus strengthening commitment and motivation.

Another important aspect of HRM is the performance management systems. The modern performance management methods focus on round-the-clock feedback, coaching, developmental appraisal as opposed to emphasis on evaluation and control. Periodic feedback will help employees to know what is expected, comprehend their performance, and what is necessary to improve. However, overly strict or goal-oriented performance systems can also increase stress and reduce intrinsic motivation particularly where service is high pressure.

One of the most controversial aspects of HRM in the hospitality industry is reward management. Although monetary payment is critical especially in an industry that is characterised by a relatively low wage rate, non-monetary payment is being recognized to be equally important. Employee satisfaction and engagement is achieved through recognition programmes, career progression opportunities, flexible working arrangements and work-life balance initiatives. As CIPD (2022) argues, employees are getting more demanding about significant work, supportive management, and developmental opportunities in addition to financial remunerations.

Communication and employee relations are also crucial towards engagement. Trust and psychological safety are fostered through openness in communication channels, employee voice mechanism and participative decision-making. The style of leadership plays a central role as well; with the help of supportive and inclusive leadership, a positive environment is created at the workplace, and the lack of effective communication and uneven management practices may trigger disengagement and high turnover.

HRM in hospitality is also being changed by technology. The digital scheduling system, e-learning platform, performance analytics tools allow organisations to schedule employees more effectively and offer them more personalised opportunities to develop. Nevertheless, overuse of technology without maintaining human contact can undermine personal relationships and have a negative impact on interactivity.

Even with these developments, strategic HRM in hospitality is still a difficult concept to implement. A large number of enterprises in the industry are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that have limited financial and managerial resources. According to UK industry statistics, about 99.6 percent of hospitality firms are SME and the majority of them do not have formal HR department. This organisational feature restricts the implementation of advanced HRM practices and can result in the unequal experiences of employees in organisations.

The field of reward management is also a controversial aspect of hospitality HRM. Although money is also necessary in a low-paying industry, non-monetary incentives like recognition, career growth and work-life balance are becoming more important to employees (CIPD, 2022). Trust and psychological safety that are key in engagement are further enhanced by good employee relations through communication mechanisms, voice mechanisms and enabling leadership.

UK Hospitality Labour Market Challenges

The hospitality industry in the UK is characterised by structural labour issues that are worsened by Brexit and COVID-19. Competition among talents has increased due to skills deficit, declining labour mobility, and escalating living standards (ONS, 2023). Such pressures have increased the level of necessities of HRM as a retention and engagement device as opposed to a recruitment tool.

Literature indicates that most hospitality organizations are finding it hard to adopt regular HRM practices because of the financial constraints and the complexity involved in running the businesses. Small and medium-sized businesses that prevail in the industry do not always have formal HR departments, which results in uneven engagement results (Baum et al., 2020). This makes one question the real-world application of HRM models in practical hospitality environment.

The other major issue is the fact that there are a high number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the industry. These companies often do not have formal human resources (HR)

frameworks, which interferes with the uniform execution of HRM practices and strategies of engaging their employees. In addition, limited financial resources usually limit investment in training and career development and hence reduce employee motivation and retention. The economic uncertainty and unstable demand also undermine the employment stability. Hospitality facilities are very sensitive to the changes in consumer expenditure, tourism patterns, and general economic factors. Rising cost-of-living and inflationary pressures have constrained discretionary expenditures at certain points forcing companies to cut costs and downsize the number of workers.

Although these challenges exist, opportunities to develop single-parent programs exist. Some organisations are investing in employer branding, training and employee wellbeing programmes with the view of attracting and retaining employees. Others are adopting technological advances and automation to reduce labour reliance and improve efficiency in operations. However, these strategies require an investment that might be prohibitive to small businesses. In last, the labour market in the UK hospitality is characterized with structural issues, economic strains, and labour gaps that directly affect employee engagement and the HRM practices. The aforementioned conditions highlight the urgency of strong HR strategies that would help to not only meet the organisational goals but also respond to the needs of the employees.

Methodology

The essay methodology used is a qualitative literature-based approach that will be based on the analysis of secondary information. This methodological decision is determined by the aim of the study to summarize the existing knowledge about employee engagement, motivation and HRM practices in the hospitality industry rather than creating the primary empirical information. Academic journals published since 2019 were given priority to make the discussion reflect the current trends especially in regard to the post-pandemic labour-market situation and changing labour-market demands. Besides, the sources such as official UK sources, including government labour statistics, reports of professional-specific bodies, and industrial analysis were used to provide contextual and policy-relevant information. Methodical review of the literature was done using a thematic analysis. This entailed establishing recurring themes, concepts, and relationships in the sources that have been selected especially those related to recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, reward systems, and employee relations. Thematic analysis consequently allows comparative analysis of the studies and helps to reveal patterns and

contradictions. Besides, it allows combining theoretical models, including engagement theory and motivation theories (with empirical outcomes of research in the hospitality industry).

In its analysis, the particular target is UK hospitality industry, thus making it possible to consider contextual aspects, including regulatory frameworks, labour-market conditions, and cultural expectations that define HRM practices and experience of employees. The study in question provides a more consistent and pertinent explanation of the literature due to its focus on a specific national setting. Instead of trying to measure employee engagement by use of primary empirical measurement this paper synthesizes the results of various empirical and theoretical resources in order to determine the strengths and the weakness of various HRM practices. This approach of interpretation enables one to critically understand the conceptualization and application of engagement in real life hospitality setting, not only identifying the challenges that can be encountered in the practical setting, but also considering the places of improvement.

Findings

Recruitment, Selection, and Onboarding

This analysis has shown that the practices of HRM that start at the recruitment stage have a great impact on the engagement of employees. Hospitality companies with realistic job preview and value-based selection have a higher chance of attracting intrinsically motivated employees to work as service employees. Successful onboarding programmes also enhance engagement through role ambiguity and promoting social integration.

Nevertheless, hospitality companies in the UK are heavily dependent on fast staffing in order to overcome the labour shortage challenges at the expense of selection. This method can be effective in the short term in meeting staffing requirements but harms long-term motivation and retention, resulting in intermittent disengagement and attrition.

Training, Development, and Performance Management

The concept of training and development becomes one of the key motivating and engaging factors. Employees that have a sense of skills development and career growth give higher reports of commitment and job satisfaction. Coaching and developmental feedback-based performance

management systems promote intrinsic motivation especially in cases where such systems are aligned with service values.

On the contrary, systems of performance that emphasize only on the cost control or customer measures may cause pressure and emotional exhaustion. The results imply that HRM should be accountable and supportive to maintain engagement in high-demand hospitality settings.

Reward Systems and Employee Relations

Reward systems have a double purpose in motivation. Competitive remuneration and benefits can be used to meet the fundamental needs, whereas recognition, flexibility, and participation in decision-making contribute to psychological involvement. The motivation is further supported by strong employee relations, which is represented by the open communication and supportive supervision thus building trust and belonging.

However, their financial capabilities restrict the capacity of most hospitality companies to provide competitive rewards. Under these circumstances, the relevance of relational HRM practices is especially crucial in addressing the material constraint by compensation.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a significant role in facilitating employee engagement and motivation within hospitality organisations, while also revealing substantial challenges in implementation. The literature suggests that engagement is not produced by isolated HR practices but rather by an integrated system that addresses employees' psychological, social, and developmental needs. In the UK hospitality sector, where work is often physically demanding, customer-facing, and sometimes unstable, these structural disadvantages must be actively addressed through supportive HRM strategies, fair working conditions, and opportunities for development.

A key issue emerging from the analysis is the importance of strategic alignment. HRM practices are most effective when they are closely aligned with organisational culture, leadership behaviour, and operational practices. Policies alone are insufficient if they are not consistently implemented in daily work environments. Line managers play a crucial role in translating HR policies into

employees' lived experiences, as they directly supervise staff, provide feedback, and influence workplace climate. This highlights that the success of HRM depends not only on well-designed systems but also on the competence, communication skills, and leadership approach of managers responsible for implementation.

Another important theme concerns equity and sustainability in engagement practices. While engagement-focused HRM can enhance performance, customer satisfaction, and retention, there is also a risk that organisations may unintentionally intensify workloads or place excessive emotional demands on employees in the pursuit of higher service standards. In hospitality roles that already involve emotional labour, this may lead to stress, burnout, or reduced well-being if adequate support mechanisms are not provided.

Therefore, ethical and sustainable HRM requires balancing organisational performance objectives with employee well-being. Practices such as realistic performance expectations, supportive supervision, fair rewards, and access to training and development are essential in ensuring that engagement initiatives contribute to both organisational success and long-term workforce sustainability.

Conclusion

This essay has discussed how Human Resource Management can lead to employee engagement and motivation in the hospitality businesses in the UK. Referring to the modern literature sources and the evidence of the industry, it proves that the HRM practices affect the way employees perceive their work and their contribution to the quality-of-service provision greatly. Good employee relations, viable training, developmental performance management, equitable rewards as well as effective recruitment all contribute towards engagement and motivation. The structural issues facing the hospitality industry, however, make the application of these practices consistent a stretch. The essay also concludes that the only way to ensure sustainable engagement and organisational success is to have employee-centred, strategically aligned HRM systems. The future HRM in the hospitality industry should not be based on the transactional method but on relational and developmental models that value the employees as the key source of competitive advantage.

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Appendix

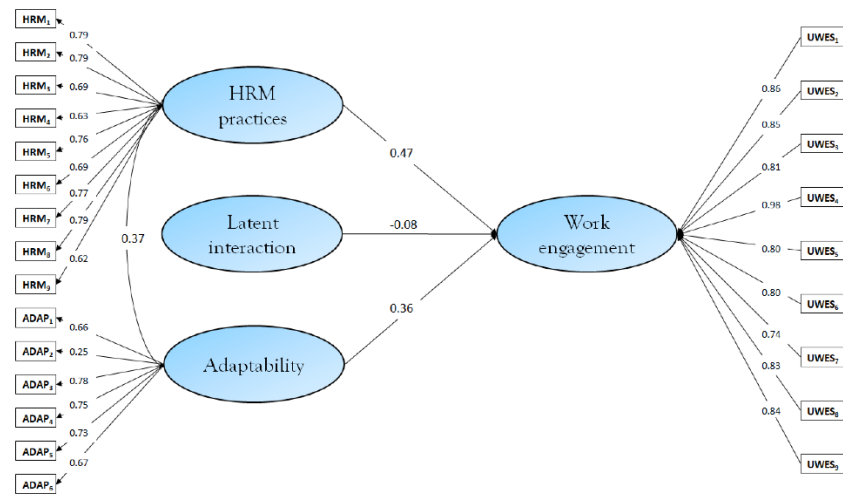


Figure 1: Conceptual relationship between HRM practices and employee engagement

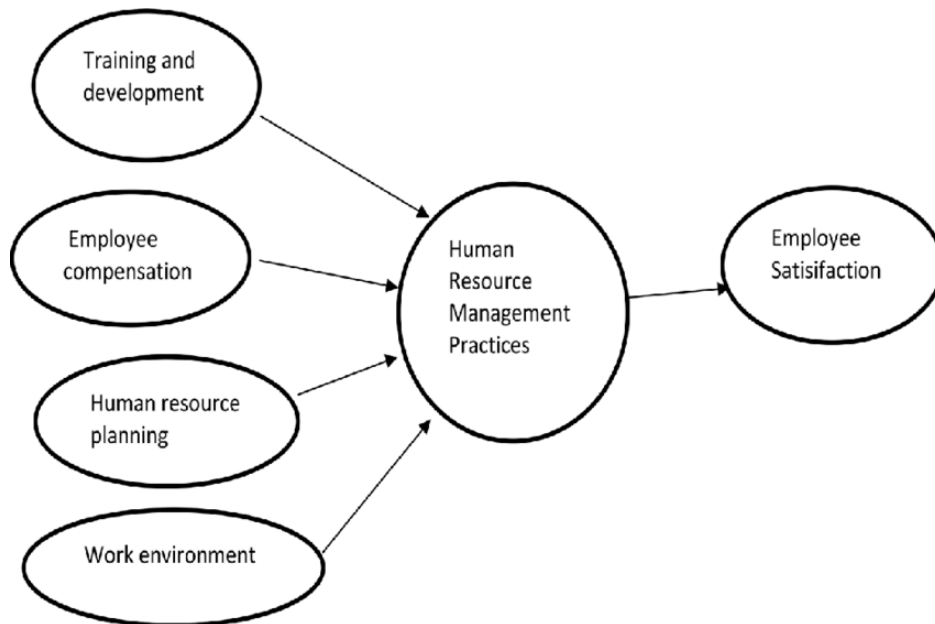


Figure 2: HRM Practices-Employee satisfaction link model