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QUALITY OF WORKING LIFE AND ENGAGEMENT IN HOSTELS

Abstract

Purpose: Hostels' competitiveness relies heavily on unique and genuine service and, thus, counts on employees actively creating a social, welcoming environment and, at the same time, caring about – and being loyal to – their hostel. This research investigated whether retaining employees who care about their hostel and refrain from destructive behaviours implies that these workers need to have a better work environment, as well as whether work engagement mediates this relationship.

Design/methodology/approach: The methodology consisted of two complementary phases: qualitative and quantitative. The former sought to capture hostels' reality and human resource management by interviewing managers and employees currently working in 40 Lisbon hostels. Survey data also was analysed and used to test the hypotheses.

Findings: The results reveal that quality of working life has a strong negative impact on employees' exit behaviours and a positive effect on their loyalty. In addition, work engagement was found to mediate fully the relationship between quality of working life and both employee voice and neglect, as well as partially mediating exit intentions.

Originality/value: This study extended prior research in two ways. First, most theoretical and empirical studies in the hospitality and tourism industry have focused on hotels, so this research targeted a new context (i.e. hostels). Second, this study offers a clear indication of the relationship between employees' quality of working life, work engagement and behaviours, thus offering valuable insights for management and hostel staff.

Keywords: Employee behaviours, Hostels, Quality of working life, Work engagement

Article classification: Research paper

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry, particularly the lodging sector, is an evolving industry in which trends and customer demands are changing rapidly. Some recent trends are the rapid growth of the hostel business, increased levels of competition and guest heterogeneity evolving as a by-product of an established trend in low cost carriers, that is, the expansion of the experience economy (Pan *et al.*, 2008). Hostels have traditionally been formatted to fit the youth market, embodying a hybrid product that combines accommodation services with an informal, friendly atmosphere (Brochado *et al.*, 2015). However, hostels are becoming more upscale, catering to customer segments no longer limited to youth travellers. Travellers are increasingly looking for sociability and more authentic experiences, so they often choose hostels as their accommodation (Hecht and Martin, 2006).

According to Brochado and Rita (2016), of all hostel service quality dimensions, the quality of hostels' staff has the strongest influence on guests' willingness to recommend hostels and likelihood to return in the future. Given the rising standards of European hostels, they are inevitably bound to face new challenges when managing their human resources. Customers' expectations create twofold demands on hostel employees: to provide high quality service while maintaining the authenticity of the hostel environment. Increasing quality and rising standards, in other words, do not mean that hostels have begun to imitate the formality of hotels' customer service. Instead, hostels can be considered trendsetters in the lodging industry as they are responding to emerging customer needs. In any case, regardless of many hotels' formality, service quality is a key aspect of achieving and sustaining competitive advantage throughout the hospitality industry.

Relatively few studies have been conducted on human resource management (HRM) in hostels, with a few exceptions such as research by Papis (2006) and Cetinel *et al.* (2008). Papis (2006) examined factors that contribute to hostel staff motivation based on Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory. The cited author highlighted that running budget accommodations requires multi-tasking and that a favourable working environment is of utmost importance. Cetinel *et al.* (2008) studied HRM practices in small- and medium-sized hotel enterprises, including hostels, and concluded that they do not incorporate formal practices (e.g. recruiting, selecting, training, evaluating performance and analysing jobs), which compromises these companies' professionalism. Other literature on HRM has highlighted the role of quality of working life (Grote and Guest, 2017), work engagement (Paek *et al.*, 2015) and employee behaviours (Lee *et al.*, 2015).

To link together current hostel trends and HRM related variables, more emphasis needs to be placed on how (1) hostel employees experience work and rewards (e.g. quality of working life [QWL]), (2) their work engages them (e.g. job engagement) and (3) these variables affect the critical behavioural decisions employees make on a daily basis.

Therefore, the goal of the present study was to test this mediation model (i.e. QWL-work engagement-behavioural options at work) in the hostel industry.

2. Literature review

In order to define the underlying theoretical rationale, this study included a literature review that first focused on the role of HRM in the hospitality and tourism industry, in general, and, more specifically, in the hostel industry. The review then focused on three useful variables in HRM: quality of work life, work engagement and behavioural outcomes. After a description of the review findings, the model and hypotheses are presented and discussed in the following sections.

2.1 Role of HRM in the hospitality and tourism industry

The perception of hospitality itself is primarily associated with employee actions (Sim *et al.*, 2006). The hospitality and tourism industry is a labour-intensive service sector in which employees are part of the core service experience (Paek *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, hospitality jobs are characterised by greater autonomy and scope for individual initiative. From the customers' point of view, employee performance constitutes the service (Gronroos, 1984; Hartline *et al.*, 2003), and the perception of service quality depends on satisfaction with what is provided and how front-line employees deliver it (Chapman and Lovell, 2006; Crick and Spencer, 2011). Therefore, excellent employee performance is critical to achieving competitive advantages by enhancing host-guest relationships (Paek *et al.*, 2017).

The quality of service products is clearly highly dependent on the skills of the associated human capital. Employees' knowledge, skills and attitudes are seen as intangible assets, difficult to imitate and, thus, a competitive advantage (Altinay and Altinay, 2006; Chand, 2010; Jolliffe and Farnsworth, 2003), so employees are currently considered the most important source of sustainable competitive advantage (Guest, 1997). In the literature, this is known as the 'service-profit chain'. In this chain, employee satisfaction is linked to customer satisfaction, resulting in customer loyalty and, finally, profits for companies (Crawford and Hubbard, 2008; Browning *et al.*, 2009).

HRM, therefore, can help businesses become more effective and achieve competitive advantages (Wright *et al.*, 2001). In addition, according to the resource-based view, rare internal resources that have inimitable value can grant sustainable competitive advantages and organisational effectiveness (Barney, 1995; Lado and Wilson, 1994). Nonetheless, an extensive review of the literature on HRM best practices implementation showed that the use of high-performance work practices constitutes the exception rather than the rule (Kusluvan *et al.*, 2010). Bearing this in mind, organisations need to invest in HRM to motivate employees to adopt desired attitudes and behaviours and, collectively, to help to achieve their organisations' strategic goals (Bowen and Ostroff, 2004; Si and Li, 2012). Employees can thereby contribute to firms' performance and guarantee their long-term success.

Hospitality HRM, in specific, is under pressure to engage qualified employees on a long-term basis, so companies must meet three key challenges. First, hospitality enterprises need to find the right balance between coordination and flexibility in HR behaviours (Ogaard *et al.*, 2008). The coordination of tasks is essential in order to maintain consistency in services, yet delegating a significant amount of authority to employees is also critical, as the behaviour of customer service representatives is directly related to customer satisfaction (Wieseke *et al.*, 2011). Second, these companies face the challenge of reconciling part-time versus full-time HR policies (Lundberg *et al.*, 2009), a balance directly related to hospitality businesses' level of standardisation and efficiency. More customisation obviously means less efficiency, whereas a high degree of standardisation might require a trade-off in terms of motivated and committed employees (Ogaard *et al.*, 2008).

Third, hospitality enterprises need to choose whether to fight or integrate seasonality into HRM planning (Jolliffe and Farnsworth, 2003). They can attempt to extend their season by, for instance, offering extra services or taking advantage of pricing strategies during the low season – covering employee wages for a portion of the season through government subsidies. Alternatively, companies can embrace seasonality by operating only during the high season and focusing on hiring students or other temporary staff. In the latter option, maintaining service quality with a high proportion of temporary workers again becomes a challenge.

2.2 *The case of hostels*

Hostels have traditionally been thought of as small shabby buildings with dormitories crammed with uncomfortable bunk beds and minimal facilities. That notion has evolved so that, currently, communal style living no longer has a negative connotation and hostels have become more upscale (Papis, 2006). As in other areas of travel and tourism, hostel customers are increasingly looking for unique experiences. Hence, it is possible now to find hostels that are eco-friendly, designed by interior architects and converted from old buildings and/or that represent some of the newest design trends: so-called 'boutique' and 'designer' hostels. It is becoming less apparent what distinguishes a hostel from a hotel, but the most obvious difference remains that hostels represent some form of communal living.

Hostel accommodations originally targeted customers known as 'backpackers' – traditionally, young, budget-minded and independent travellers (Chitty *et al.*, 2007) ranging from young adults seeking a 'rite of passage' to people in their 20s and 30s taking advantage of opportunities for long-term travel (O'Reilly, 2006; Shaffer, 2010). Along with these young adventurers, older travellers and families are increasingly taking advantage of communal style accommodation, which places greater demands on hostel accommodation providers to improve services and add value in order to remain competitive (Hecht and Martin, 2006).

For these guests, social atmosphere is a core dimension of service quality that is crucial to creating a sense of overall quality and encouraging positive word-of-mouth (Brochado *et al.*, 2015). In addition, staff quality is extremely

important when seeking to enhancing guests' overall hostel experiences and increasing the likelihood of guests' recommendations and hostels' success (Brochado *et al.*, 2015; Brochado and Rita, 2016; Murphy, 2000; Musa and Thirumoorthi, 2011). Staff behaviour is thus a specific functional dimension in the context of hostels that is even more important than the services themselves (Chitty *et al.*, 2007; Dawson *et al.*, 2011). Employees are increasingly becoming organisations' image in the hospitality sector (Nickson *et al.*, 2005), and they have thus become increasingly active elements in companies' brand strategy (Brexendorf and Kernstock, 2007).

Some specific employee attributes considered important to hostel customers include employees' personal attitudes towards guests, their ability to make guests feel at home and the staff's efforts to be both sociable and to encourage socialising among guests (Musa and Thirumoorthi, 2011). Hostel employees are expected to deliver services with courtesy, provide individualised attention and show willingness to help guests and provide relevant knowledge. The staff's motivation to perform – and genuinely enjoy – their work has an impact on customers' emotional state (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2006).

Brochado and Gameiro (2013) concluded that staff quality has the most influence on satisfaction during hostel stays for both male and female backpackers from a variety of age groups. The cited authors highlight the importance of front line employees to satisfying hostel guests. Therefore, recruiting and training staff who share hostels' missions and values is vital. Brochado *et al.* (2015) developed a scale to assess service quality in hostels and concluded that significant staff-related variables include qualities such as efficiency, appearance, friendliness and quickness in service delivery. The staff proved to be the most important service quality variable explaining both guests' willingness to recommend and likelihood to return in the future (Brochado and Rita, 2016).

With regards to HRM, hostels as a type of accommodation closely resemble other small- and medium-sized accommodation providers, and they thus share similar organisational characteristics. For instance, their organisational structure is generally more limited, company culture is more relaxed and decision-making more centralised (Cetinel *et al.*, 2008). This relaxed culture and flexible organisational structure makes employee-customer relationships more personal. Centralised decision-making, in contrast, can restrict employee performance since their behaviour is strongly dependent on the owner or manager's values and attitudes. Hostels' characteristics also imply that, as in all small business industries, human resource practices vary considerably among organisations, reflecting the uniqueness of each owner's ideology (Cetinel *et al.*, 2008).

2.3 QWL

QWL has been regarded as the most crucial construct for organisations wishing to attract and retain employees (Kiernan and Knutson, 1990; Lee *et al.*, 2015; Sirgy *et al.*, 2001). It was designed to evaluate 'the extent to which the work environment, job requirements, supervisory behaviour and ancillary programmes in an organisation are

perceived to meet the needs of an employee' (Sirgy *et al.*, 2001: 241). QWL, therefore, assesses the effect of work on employees and organisational effectiveness (Nadler and Lawler, 1983; Lee *et al.*, 2015).

QWL is a subjective construct that deals with the well-being of employees in the workplace and characterises their broader job-related experience (Champoux, 1981; Sirgy *et al.*, 2001), such as satisfaction of multiple needs. QWL, in turn, affects job satisfaction; family, leisure, social and financial life; other non-work domains; satisfaction with overall life; personal happiness and subjective well-being (Lee *et al.*, 2015; Sirgy *et al.*, 2001). QWL also leads to organisational commitment (Sirgy *et al.*, 2001). Although the first studies on QWL focused on the manufacturing sector, more recent literature has targeted the service sector, due to its importance to the economy (Grote and Guest, 2017). Sirgy *et al.* (2001) identify seven types of needs including health and safety, economy and family life, social life, esteem, self-actualisation, knowledge and aesthetics. Each need has corresponding elements, for a total of 16 need dimensions.

The basic notion behind QWL is that, when employees perceive that their needs are being fulfilled through work in their employing organisation (i.e. using the resources provided by the latter), these workers experience satisfaction with their job and other life domains. This, in turn, creates satisfaction with life, in general (Champoux, 1981; Crohan *et al.*, 1989; Lee *et al.*, 2015; Schmitt and Mellon, 1980; Sirgy *et al.*, 2001), and has a significant impact on employee behavioural responses such as exit, voice, loyalty and neglect (EVLN) behaviours (Rusbult *et al.*, 1988). QWL enhances organisational identification, organisation commitment and job satisfaction, involvement, effort and performance. QWL also reduces intention to quit, organisational turnover, personal alienation, absenteeism, costs related to claim compensation and insurance and medical costs (Efraty and Sirgy, 1990; Efraty *et al.*, 1991; Sirgy *et al.*, 2001).

QWL promotes workers' well-being and autonomy (Grote and Guest, 2017). Overall, happy employees are more productive, dedicated and loyal employees (Greenhaus *et al.*, 1987; Sirgy *et al.*, 2001). According to the service-profit chain model, satisfied employees provide quality service, which in turn leads to customer satisfaction (Hestkett *et al.*, 1994; Lee *et al.*, 2015) and, finally, to organisations' improved financial performance (Gallardo *et al.*, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, QWL is a useful variable in HRM for identifying and understanding specific employee needs and, at the same time, identifying strategic gaps in organisations and taking action to enhance employees' QWL. This ensures they are satisfied, committed and productive on the job (Lee *et al.*, 2015; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2007).

2.4 Behavioural outcomes

Theoretical discussions of behavioural outcomes have produced an integrative model (i.e. the EVLN model) of responses to job dissatisfaction, offering a typology of four specific response categories of employee reactions. [1]

This includes intending to leave (exit), speaking up (voice), waiting for things to improve (loyalty) and being disregarding of duties (neglect) (Bellou, 2009; Rusbult *et al.*, 1988; Si and Li, 2012).

Exit means ‘leaving an organisation by quitting, transferring, searching for a different job or thinking about quitting’ (Rusbult *et al.*, 1988: 601), regardless of whether the latter becomes action or not (Bellou, 2009). Voice refers to ‘actively and constructively trying to improve conditions through discussing problems with a supervisor or co-workers, taking action to solve problems, suggesting solutions, seeking help from an outside agency like a union or whistle-blowing’ (Rusbult *et al.*, 1988: 601). Loyalty includes an implicit feeling of attachment to an organisation (Bellou, 2009) and ‘means passively but optimistically waiting for conditions to improve [by] giving public and private support to the organisation, waiting and hoping for improvement or practicing good citizenship’ (Rusbult *et al.*, 1988: 601), as well as displaying extra-role behaviour (Bellou, 2009). Neglect is implicitly careless behaviour, followed by withdrawal behaviours. It includes passively allowing the employment relationship and conditions to deteriorate and fade away (Bellou, 2009) ‘through reduced interest or effort, chronic lateness or absences, using company time for personal business or increased error rate’ (Rusbult *et al.*, 1988: 601).

These four categories of behavioural options relate to one another in a systematic way, falling along the interaction of two axes in a continuum: active versus passive crossed with constructive versus destructive (Rusbult *et al.*, 1988). Overall, voice and loyalty are constructive and positive behaviours in which employees attempt to revive or maintain satisfactory employment conditions, whereas exit and neglect are more destructive and negative (Bellou, 2009; Rusbult *et al.*, 1988; Si and Li, 2012). In addition, exit and voice are (pro)active behaviours through which employees attempt to deal with dissatisfaction (Spencer, 1986), whereas loyalty and neglect are more passive, reactive and diffuse (Bellou, 2009; Rusbult *et al.*, 1988; Si and Li, 2012).

A key outcome of employee satisfaction is the effort employees are willing to put into positive behaviours at work. This involves both customers (e.g. willingness to help) and the organisation itself (e.g. constructive feedback to management). Since individuals’ interactions with their employing organisation have a significant impact on their attitudes and behaviours, the EVLN model needs to be taken into consideration. This is a way for management to increase employees’ constructive and positive behaviours and decrease their destructive and negative ones.

2.5 Work engagement

Work engagement, an emerging psychological concept in positive organisational behaviour (Karatepe, 2013a, 2013b; Karatepe and Demir, 2014), is a motivational construct that refers to a general enduring, positive, fulfilling, work-related and affective-cognitive state (Karatepe, 2013a, 2013b; Karatepe and Karadas, 2015; Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). Presbitero (2017) found that improvements in HRM practices (e.g. training and reward management) can increase the level of work engagement among hotel chain employees. In the field of hospitality and tourism, work engagement has

been shown to either partially (e.g. Paek *et al.*, 2017; Yeh, 2013) or fully (e.g. Karatepe, 2014; Karatepe *et al.*, 2014) mediate the relationship between antecedent and consequent variables (see Paek *et al.*, 2017 for a complete review).

According to Schaufeli *et al.* (2002: 74), work engagement 'is characterised by vigour, dedication and absorption'. The first dimension, vigour, is 'high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work and persistence even in the face of difficulties' (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002: 74). Dedication refers to employees being strongly involved in their work and experiencing 'a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge' (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002: 74). Finally, absorption is characterised by 'being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work' (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002: 75).

Employees who feel vigorous at work and who are dedicated and immersed in their work have positive job outcomes, such as good job performance, organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Bakker *et al.*, 2008; Karatepe, 2013a, 2013b; Karatepe and Karadas, 2015). Engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities, perceiving themselves as able to deal well with the demands of their jobs. These employees also have lower turnover intentions (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). They invest their cognitive, emotional and physical energy simultaneously in the full performance of their role (Rich *et al.*, 2010), and they can, therefore, deliver superior service quality and make customers satisfied by going beyond their formal job-related responsibilities (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008; Karatepe, 2011; Karatepe, 2013a, 2013b). Retaining engaged employees in frontline service jobs is thus critical for organisational success and survival (Karatepe, 2013a, 2013b; Karatepe and Olugbade, 2009; Kim *et al.*, 2009).

In this context, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) evaluates the work engagement construct by means of the above-described three dimensions: vigour, dedication and absorption. Originally, the UWES included 24 items, but after psychometric evaluation, seven unsound items were eliminated so that only 17 items in three scales remained (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). Schaufeli *et al.* (2006) further reduced the UWES to nine items, three for each dimension's scale. Managers also need to bear in mind that work engagement has been found to operate as a mediator between some HR perceived variables and employee behaviours (Karatepe and Karadas, 2015; Ram and Prabhakar, 2011; Yeh, 2013).

2.6 Model and hypotheses

Based on the above literature review, the following hypotheses were defined for the present study:

H1. QWL relates positively to loyalty (a) and voice (b) and negatively to exit (c) and neglect (d).

H2. QWL relates positively to work engagement.

H3. Work engagement relates positively to loyalty (a) and voice (b) and negatively to exit (c) and neglect (d).

H4. Work engagement mediates the relationship of QWL with loyalty (a), voice (b), exit (c) and neglect (d).

The resulting research model is displayed in Figure 1 below.

Insert Figure 1 here.

3. Method

3.1 Research context and target population

Lisbon is well-known for its high quality, contemporary style hostels. Their continuous success means that they rank among the best hostels worldwide (i.e. in the HOSCARS awards). This success is based on the reviews that customers leave after staying in a hostel, rating them on character, location, staff, security, cleanliness and fun (see Hostelworld.com). For the above reasons, Lisbon hostels were considered an excellent study sample for the purposes of the present research. The hostels chosen for the study included all the Lisbon hostels working in partnership with Hostelworld.com in 2013, that is, 48 hostels, of which 40 agreed to participate in this study. The survey was completed by at least 2 staff members from each hostel (i.e. 2 from 28 hostels and 3 from 14 hostels). Accordingly, the target population for this study was the staff of Lisbon hostels.

3.2 Research design

The methodology employed in this study consisted of two complementary qualitative and quantitative phases. The first was designed to pretest the survey and understand the reality of hostels and their HRM by interviewing managers and employees currently working in the sector. Altogether, eight in-depth interviews were conducted – five with employees and three with managers. Each manager had either a full or shared ownership of the hostel, and they had been in their position since the early years of the Lisbon hostel industry. The employees also came from different hostels. Two were full-time employees working during the day, one was a part-time employee working at night and the remaining two were completing an internship, in this case, working in exchange for food and accommodation.

All the interviews were semi-structured and conducted by one of the present article's authors. The hostels selected for this step had been included in those receiving Hostelworld awards (i.e. the Hoscars award) based on their guests' Web reviews. The main themes covered in the manager interviews included their views regarding the international success of Lisbon hostels, current challenges facing the hostel industry and specific challenges with regards to HRM in hostels. In the employee interviews, the following issues were explored: quality of relationships with managers, colleagues and customers; feelings during an ordinary working day; physical health and quality of sleep; satisfaction with salary and benefits; intended duration of employment and reasons for changing jobs. Finally, all the participants made

suggestions for how to improve the first draft of the survey questionnaire. The wording of the questions was changed accordingly.

One of the research team members contacted each hostel, explaining the objectives of the study and asking hostels to participate in the survey. Those that accepted the invitation received the survey in a paper format. The researcher returned to pick up the completed questionnaires and thanked the hostels for their participation. The survey data were used to do analyses and test the hypotheses. In order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of employee perceptions of HRM in Lisbon hostels, the survey was adapted to this context based on the three constructs of the above-mentioned model and their respective measures: QWL (Sirgy *et al.*, 2001); work engagement (the UWES from Schaufeli and Bakker [2003]) and behavioural options at work (Rusbult *et al.*, 1988). As previously mentioned, the results of the first step of the research (i.e. the interviews) were used to improve the wording of each survey question.

QWL covered the following seven major needs that employees bring to the workplace: (1) health and safety, (2) economic and family needs, (3) social needs, (4) esteem needs, (5) actualisation needs, (6) knowledge needs and (7) aesthetic needs. QWL was modelled as a second order construct (Sirgy *et al.*, 2001). Work engagement, on the other hand, was assessed with the UWES, which comprised the three components mentioned earlier: vigour, dedication and absorption (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003). Although the three-dimensional model for the nine-item version of UWES performed better than the one-dimensional model, the second model also fit the data well.

Therefore, Schaufeli and Bakker (2003) recommend researchers use the one-dimensional model to avoid multicollinearity issues in regression equations. The cited authors state, '[P]ractically speaking, rather than computing three different scores for VI, DE, and AB, researchers might consider using the total nine-item score as an indicator of work engagement' (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003: 712). The behavioural options at work (Rusbult *et al.*, 1988) included in the present study were thus exit, voice, loyalty and neglect (i.e. the EVLN model). Some minor modifications were made, based on the pretest, to the original questionnaire to improve clarity and conciseness and to adapt it better to the hostel environment. A Likert-type scale from 1 ('totally agree') to 5 ('totally disagree') was used.

4. Results

4.1 Summary of interviews

4.1.1 Summary of manager interviews

The manager interviews made it evident that certain aspects of the Lisbon hostel industry have changed substantially since its beginning. Initially, the success of a hostel was largely based on the owners' freedom to be creative and ability to provide excellent service in a family-like, fun and relaxed environment. These aspects reflect the general welcoming nature of the Portuguese people, which still, undoubtedly, accounts for much of the international success

of Lisbon's hostels. However, lately, this freedom has been largely restricted by increased competition and government-imposed regulations. Unlike at the beginning, now there is less room for mistakes and even a few negative customer reviews can critically damage a hostel's popularity. Besides Portuguese hospitality, managers explained Lisbon hostels' success as due to their modern, clean interiors and their small size, making them more efficient and adding to their family-like environment.

The changing industry trends and conditions have inevitably created challenges calling for innovative ways of managing HR in hostels. According to the interviewees, it appears that the desired personal skills and qualities of hostel employees are mostly the same as those of hospitality employees in general: excellent people and language skills, a passion for travel and knowledge of the host city. Of these qualities, in particular, people skills and sociability are highly appreciated. This, however, imposes another kind of challenge in the current environment: according to one of the managers, it is sometimes difficult to find individuals with the right balance of sociability and responsibility. As previously described, hostel employees are often expected to socialise with guests and encourage socialising among guests – but, obviously, without forgetting their other duties and without diminishing their general efficiency at work.

The evolving nature of the hostel industry clearly influences the workforce. Currently, hostels receive job applications from individuals with varying educational backgrounds and, also increasingly, from people who have formal training and experience in the hospitality industry. The managers' views on the ideal job candidates varied widely. On the one hand, they see it as advantageous to hire people from the hospitality industry, as they are truly customer focused, used to the erratic working hours and likely to stay longer in their job. On the other hand, some managers pointed out that the nature of work in a hostel differs from that of other hospitality organisations (e.g. hotels) to such an extent that the same working methods may not apply, including maintaining a level of formality in customer service or training for specific job roles. These diverging views can be partly explained by the fact that hostels are already being segmented according to their character. Hence, there is no one description of an ideal employee.

4.1.2 Summary of employee interviews

Employees, too, emphasised the sociability aspect of their work, which they highly appreciate for quite clear reasons. By working in hostels, staff are able to connect and forge friendships with people from all around the world. Due to the relaxed and friendly environment of hostels, employees can truly realise their passion for the industry. In hostels, relationships with guests are genuine and often quite personal, and, thus, many employees feel rewarded by the opportunity to help and guide people who are new to the host city. Despite these apparently positive sides of their work, many employees, nevertheless, regard hostel work as their second best option. Thus, common reasons for changing jobs include career growth opportunities and better pay.

The way the employees view the demands of their work depends to some extent on the type of contract they have. For instance, the employees completing an internship consider it challenging to separate work and leisure time as they feel they are always on call. For these employees, the work is more mentally than physically tiring. In contrast, for the employee working a night shift, physical tiredness is the most strenuous aspect. The employees working day shifts consider the occasionally tricky situations with guests as the most challenging side of their work. Another interesting aspect pointed out during the interviews is that hostel employees perform various job roles simultaneously (e.g. being a receptionist, tour guide, friend and janitor). This aspect is, however, regarded, in the main, as a positive rather than a negative feature.

4.2 Survey results

4.2.1 Sample profile

The survey was conducted in Lisbon, and it encompassed 98 employees from the 40 hostels out of the 48 in this city that agreed to participate. The sample includes 57 female employees and 41 males. Their mean age was 27.21 (SD = 6.72). In regard to their education level, the majority of the staff hold an undergraduate degree (53%), around 16% a master's degree, 27% from 9 to 12 years of schooling and only 4% 9 years of schooling. The staff include 21 different nationalities. However, 65% are Portuguese, 17% from European countries and 6% from Latin America. Around 62% of the sample had full-time contracts and 25% part-time contracts, while 12 were trainees. The majority worked a day shift, 9% at night and 33% did both.

4.2.2 Measurement model

The model discussed previously and presented in Figure 1 was estimated by means of partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modelling (see Hair *et al.* [2016] for a description of the method), which is widely used in marketing research (Hair *et al.*, 2012). The assessment of the measurement model results included an analysis of internal consistency reliability, individual indicator reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity. As, in the EVLN scales used, loyalty, voice and neglect failed to pass the required threshold of 0.7 for composed reliability, two items of the first two scales were deleted and one from the third, based on their loadings.

In order to ensure convergent validity, three items from the QWL construct and two from the work experience construct were deleted, as they exhibited loadings of less than 0.4. In addition, one item from the QWL and one from the work experience construct with loadings between 0.4 and 0.7 were removed, thus increasing the average variance extracted (AVE) and enhancing composite reliability. Next, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was applied to test for discriminant validity. The results reveal that the square root of the AVE for each construct is higher than the highest correlation with any other construct.

Insert Table 1 here.

Insert Table 2 here.

4.2.3 Structural model

The maximum value of the predictor construct's tolerance (i.e. variance inflation factor [VIF]) is 3.181 (M = 1.882). As the VIF values are above 5.0, collinearity is not an issue. The structural model's standardised path coefficients (i.e. ranging between -1 and +1) were then considered. Whether a coefficient is significant depends on the standard error that is obtained by means of bootstrapping, which allows a calculation of the empirical t-value and p-value. After assessing the significance of the relationships, the significant relationships' relevance had to be examined.

Insert Table 3 here.

In order to evaluate the structural model, R^2 and Q^2 values were retained for analysis. The coefficient of determination (i.e. R^2 value) is a measure of a model's predictive accuracy. Work engagement has the highest value, followed by exit and loyalty. The lowest values were obtained for voice and neglect. The Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value was also examined as a measure of predictive accuracy obtained by means of the blindfolding procedure. Work engagement and exit hold higher predictive relevance than loyalty, neglect and voice.

Insert Table 4 here.

4.2.4 Mediator effect testing

The research model assumes that work engagement intervenes between QWL and loyalty, voice, exit and neglect. Based on Baron and Kenny's (1986) approach, work engagement functions as a mediator between QWL and loyalty, voice, exit and neglect if it meets the following conditions:

- (1) Variations in the level of QWL account significantly for variations in work experience.
- (2) Variations in work experience account significantly for variations in the dependent variable.
- (3) When the indirect effect is controlled, the direct effect changes its value significantly.

In regard to the mediator effect of work engagement on loyalty, the observed direct effect QWL → Loyalty is significant when the mediator variable is excluded from the PLS path model (path coefficient [PC] = 0.456; t = 4.357; p = 0.000). The path Work Engagement → Loyalty is not statistically significant (PC = 0.012; t = 0.068; p = 0.946). Therefore, Work Engagement is not a mediator between QWL and loyalty.

Concerning voice, the direct effect QWL → Voice is significant when the mediator variable is excluded from the PLS path model (PC = 0.211; t = 2.493; p = 0.013). The path Work Engagement → Voice is statistically significant (PC = 0.548; t = 4.755; p = 0.000). In both two cases, a suppressor effect is observed, as the sign of the direct relationship changes after the mediator variable has been included in the model and the relationship is no longer statistically significant (PC = -0.191; t = 1.474; p = 0.141). Accordingly, there is a full mediation of work engagement between QWL and voice.

In relation to exit, the observed direct effect QWL → Exit is significant when the mediator variable is excluded from the PLS path model (PC = -0.520; t = 6.158; p = 0.000). The path Work Engagement → Exit is statistically significant (PC = -0.285; t = 2.033; p = 0.042). The variance accounted for (i.e. the size of the indirect effect in relation to the total effect) is 41.2%, confirming a partial mediation.

In regard to neglect, the direct effect QWL → Neglect is statistically significant when the mediator variable is excluded from the PLS path model (PC = 0.292; t = 2.875; p = 0.004). The path Work Engagement → Neglect is statistically significant (PC = -0.418; t = 2.736; p = 0.006). In this case, a suppressor effect is observed, as the sign of the direct relationship changes after the mediator variable has been included and the relationship is no longer statistically significant (PC = -0.023; t = 0.116; p = 0.907). Therefore, there is a full mediation of work engagement between QWL and neglect. To summarise, the results reveal that the hypotheses not empirically rejected are H1a, H1c, H1d, H2, H3b, H3c, H3d, H4b, H4c and H4d.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Theoretical contributions

Hostel staff is currently considered the most important reason for overall satisfaction among hostel guests (Brochado and Rita, 2016). The present study, therefore, examined the relationship between employees' quality of working life, work engagement and behaviour in the hostel industry. This study extended prior research in two ways. First, most theoretical and empirical studies in the hospitality and tourism industry have focused on hotels, so this research targeted a new research context (i.e. hostels). Second, the present research explored how QWL affects employee behaviour, as mediated by work engagement. Therefore, this study's findings offer a better understanding of the role of QWL in employees' active (i.e. voice and loyalty) and passive (i.e. exit and neglect) behaviours.

Previous research has contributed to an understanding of employees' needs at work (Sirgy *et al.*, 2001). More specifically, studies have found that QWL encompasses interactions among different actors (i.e. employees, employers and organisations) that can satisfy employees' multiple needs (Lee *et al.*, 2015). The present results, in turn, provide evidence that QWL is strongly related to hostel staff's EVLN behaviours (see Table 5).

Insert Table 5 here.

The QWL construct has the largest impact on work engagement, including an overall positive and significant effect on employee loyalty and voice and a negative impact on employee exit and neglect. Regarding the total influence of QWL on EVLN behaviours, the largest coefficient was observed for employee exit behaviours, namely, searching for a different job or thinking about quitting. This was followed by the coefficient for loyalty, that is, feeling attached to the employing organisation. The results also reveal that a direct path exists between QWL and loyalty.

Therefore, a high fulfilment of needs, such as aesthetics, knowledge, esteem and social requirements, will lead to employees developing an attachment to their organisation and leaders, which means employees adopt passive constructive behaviours. In contrast to what was expected, the relationship between work engagement and loyalty is not statistically significant. However, the interviews' results offer a possible reason for this finding. Most hostel employees do not perceive their work as a job for life, so they consider engaging in job searches to find career growth opportunities and receive better pay.

Moreover, work engagement is a full mediator between employees' QWL and voice and neglect behaviours, as in most hospitality studies (e.g. Karatepe, 2014; Karatepe *et al.*, 2014). Those employees who are actively and constructively engaged with their work usually attempt to improve conditions by discussing the existing problems (e.g. voice) and being less likely to neglect their duties, namely, not adopting passive destructive behaviours. In regard to exit behaviours, the mediation by work engagement is partial, as observed by Yeh (2013) and Paek *et al.* (2017). Therefore, work engagement can drive hostel staff's EVLN behaviours. The present results provide preliminary support for work engagement's mediation of the relationship between employees' QWL and behaviours. This means that, if work engagement is influenced by other factors such as HRM practices, employees' behaviours will change as well (Presbitero, 2017).

5.2 Managerial implications

The Lisbon hostel scene, in particular, may have reached a saturation point at which innovations and constant improvements are an integral part of hostel management's efforts to differentiate their hostels from competitors. Thus, a key objective of hostel HRM needs to be to provide working environments in which employees' voices are heard and their opinions are considered as a means of facilitating change and innovation. This study's findings should encourage hostel managers to increase employees' constructive and positive behaviours and decrease destructive and negative ones. As the strongest total impact of QWL is on exit behaviours, by identifying their staff's specific needs and attempting to fulfil these, hostel managers can avoid actively destructive behaviours.

With regards to QWL development, this is significantly correlated with work engagement (i.e. vigour, absorption and dedication). This indicates the career stage at which hostel employees envision themselves. A frequently expressed view in the employee interviews is that hostel jobs are not for life. In this early and temporary career stage, development is, in itself, a reward. The second strongest impact of QWL is on loyalty – a passive constructive behaviour. Given the working environment in hostels – a family-like atmosphere in which employees are required to balance different job roles and make effective decisions on their own – a certain amount of creativity, learning and recognition is needed.

5.3 Limitations and avenues for future research

Some limitations of the present study should be noted. One obvious limitation is sample size. However, as the study focused on employees (i.e. hostel staff in Lisbon), the feasibility of a quantitative approach was not compromised, *ab initio*. Nonetheless, the results should not be generalised to larger populations. In addition, this research treated work engagement as a single construct. Future studies based on a larger sample could use variations of the present scale with more items and could test for the existence of a second-order construct. This will determine whether the components of work engagement reported in the literature (i.e. vigour, dedication and absorption) can have a different mediating effect on employees' behavioural outcomes.

Other directions for future research could include the influence of personality on employee engagement and voice behaviour in hostels. This is an issue often brought up in the interviews – how to find people who have the ability to be sociable without neglecting their responsibilities. This requirement is explained by the fact that conscientious individuals are often more dedicated to achieving goals, and they look for greater personal control in their job. Another opportunity for future research would be to examine different management styles and their influence on employee behaviour in hostels, in which the scale of operations management need to cope with varies – from family-owned businesses to more formal management hierarchies in larger hostels or chains.

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Endnotes

[1] Hirschman (1970) originally introduced the exit, voice and loyalty categories to explain costumers' responses to organisations, thus defining the model's basis. The category of neglect was added later on by Farrel (1983) and Rusbult *et al.* (1988), who integrated it into the employment relationship setting (Bellou, 2009).

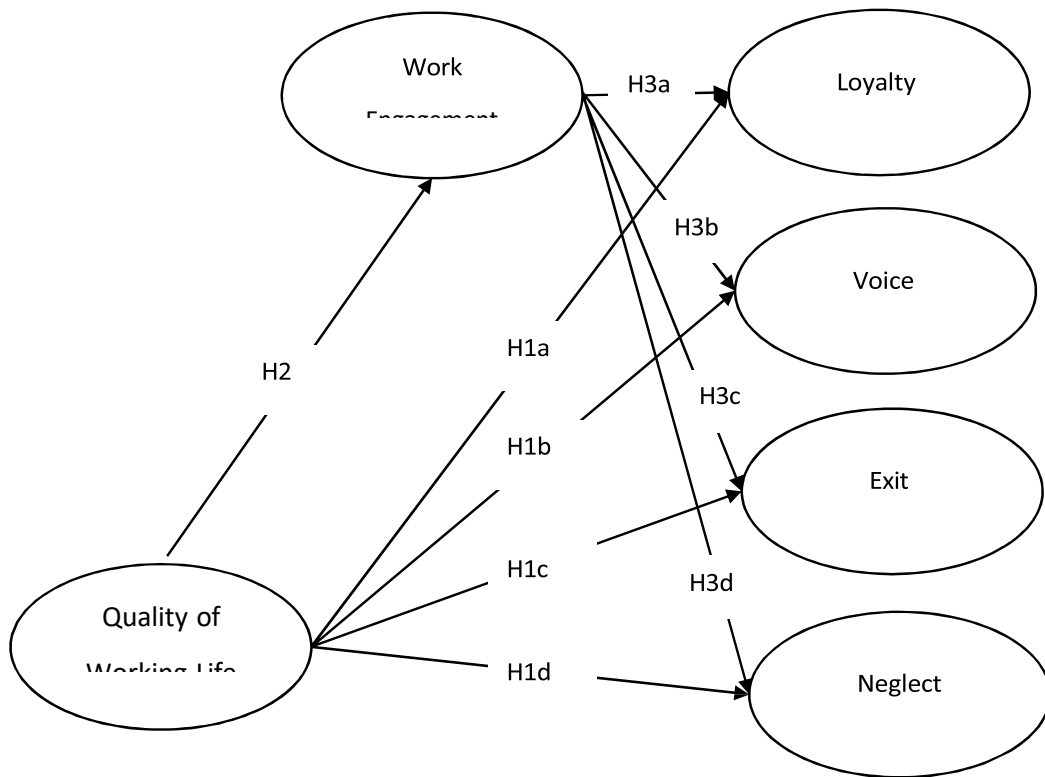


Figure 1. Model and hypothesis

Source: Authors

Table 1. Sample descriptive statistics

Variable	Category	Count	%
Gender	Female	57	59%
	Male	41	41%
Education	Until 9 years	4	4%
	From 9 to 12 years	26	27%
	Bachelor Degree	52	53%
	MSc or above	16	16%
Nationality	Portugal	64	65%
	Other European	17	17%
	Latin America	6	6%
Shifts	Other	11	11%
	Day shift	55	59%
	Night shift	8	9%
	Both	31	33%
Type of contract	Full-time	57	62%
	Part-time	23	25%
	Trainee	12	13%

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and assessment of constructs' internal consistency reliability and convergent validity

Var.	Item	M	SD	L	RI	CR	AVE	
QWL	I feel that my job allows me to realise my full potential.	3.82	1.39	0.95	0.90	0.94	0.89	
	I feel that I am realising my potential as an expert in my line of work.	3.80	1.32	0.94	0.89			
	There is a lot of creativity involved in my job.	4.21	1.30	0.93	0.87	0.92	0.86	
	My job helps me to develop my creativity outside of work.	4.06	1.37	0.92	0.85			
	I am satisfied with what I'm paid for my work.	3.72	1.50	0.89	0.79	0.83	0.70	
	My job helps me do well for my family.	3.70	1.51	0.79	0.62			
	I feel appreciated at work in this hostel.	4.53	1.40	0.90	0.80			
	People at this hostel and/or within my profession respect me as a professional and an expert in my field of work.	4.78	1.06	0.87	0.75	0.87	0.78	
	My job provides good health benefits.	3.62	1.78	1.00	1.00			
	I feel that I am always learning new things that help me	4.59	1.21	0.91	0.83			
							1.00	1.00
		do my job better.					0.90	0.67
		This job allows me to sharpen my professional skills. I have enough time away from work to enjoy other	4.46	1.17	0.90	0.81		
	things in life.	4.09	1.66	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	
WE	Time flies when I'm working.	4.25	1.23	0.70	0.49			
	When I'm working, I forget everything else around me.	3.76	1.36	0.63	0.39			
	I feel happy when I work intensely.	4.42	1.31	0.61	0.37			
	I get carried away when I'm working.	4.26	1.05	0.63	0.40			
	I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.	4.39	1.06	0.79	0.62			
	I am enthusiastic about my job.	4.69	1.12	0.80	0.63	0.90	0.57	
	My job inspires me.	3.97	1.19	0.80	0.64			
	I am proud of the work that I do.	4.90	1.09	0.58	0.34			
	My job is challenging for me.	4.00	1.35	0.64	0.41			
	At work, I'm bursting with energy.	4.43	1.06	0.77	0.60			
	At work, I feel strong and vigorous.	4.27	1.07	0.81	0.65			
	When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work.	3.99	1.44	0.68	0.46			
	often think about quitting.	2.44	1.58	0.86	0.74			
E	During the next year, I will probably look for a new job outside this hostel.	3.58	1.85	0.82	0.68	0.84	0.64	
	I have recently spent some time looking for another							

	job.	2.43	1.69	0.71	0.50		
└	The people in charge of this hostel generally know what they are doing.	4.55	1.36	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
≧	Now and then, there are workdays where I don't put much effort into my work.	2.64	1.45	0.79	0.63		
	Now and then, I arrive at work late because I really am not in the mood for work that day.	1.64	1.11	0.86	0.75	0.81	0.69
>	When I think of an idea that will benefit my hostel, I make a determined effort to implement it.	4.69	1.05	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

Notes: Var. = Variable; M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; L = Loading; RI = Reliability Indicator; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Explained; QWL = Quality of Working Life; WE

= Work Engagement; L = Loyalty; E = Exit; N = Neglect; V = Voice; the overall QWL composite reliability is 0.904, and the AVE is 0.521.

Table 3. Fornell-Larcker criterion analysis

	QWL	WE	L	V	E	N
QWL	0.667					
WE	0.637	0.708				
L	0.455	0.341	Single Item Construct			
V	0.212	0.407	0.222	Single Item Construct		
E	-0.511	-0.507	-0.475	-0.310	0.799	
N	-0.285	-0.401	-0.266	-0.123	0.508	0.828

Notes: QWL = Quality of Working Life; WE = Work Engagement; L = Loyalty; E = Exit; N = Neglect; V = Voice

Table 4. Significance testing of structural model's path coefficients and total effects

Path	Path Coefficient	Empirical T-value		Confidence Interval
QWL-> Loyalty	0.446	2.459	**	[0.098; 0.782]
QWL -> Voice	-0.191	1.474		[-0.484; 0.046]
QWL -> Exit	-0.300	1.986	**	[-0.587; 0.095]
QWL -> Neglect	-0.418	2.736	***	[-0.334; 0.37]
QWL -> WE	0.737	13.031	***	[0.613; 0.836]
WE -> Loyalty	0.012	0.068		[-0.312; 0.354]
WE -> Voice	0.548	4.755	***	[0.344; 0.789]
WE -> Exit	-0.285	2.033	**	[-0.624; -0.019]
WE -> Neglect	-0.418	2.736	***	[-0.669; -0.343]
Total Effects				
QWL -> Loyalty	0.455	4.799	***	[0.278; 0.626]
QWL -> Voice	0.212	1.747	*	[-0.022; 0.452]
QWL -> Exit	-0.511	6.141	***	[-0.669; -0.343]
QWL -> Neglect	-0.285	2.493	**	[-0.492; -0.056]

Notes: QWL = Quality of Working Life; WE = Work Engagement; ***, **, * statistically significant at 0.1%, 1% and 5% levels, respectively.

Table 5. Results of R² and Q² values for endogenous constructs

	R ²	R ² Confidence Interval	Q ²
Exit	0.298	[0.22; 0.529]	0.165
Loyalty	0.207	[0.105; 0.451]	0.059
Neglect	0.161	[0.137; 0.403]	0.056
Voice	0.182	[0.087; 0.426]	0.004
Work Engagement	0.543	[0.395; 0.705]	0.261

Table 6. Hostel staff's EVLN behaviours

QWL -> WE	0.737	13.031
WE -> Loyalty	0.012	0.068
WE -> Voice	0.548	4.755
WE -> Exit	-0.285	2.033
WE -> Neglect	-0.418	2.736
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Total Effects		
QWL -> Loyalty	0.455	4.799
QWL -> Voice	0.212	1.747
QWL -> Exit	-0.511	6.141
QWL -> Neglect	-0.285	2.493
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