

CASE STUDY

HOTEL HOUSEKEEPING OCCUPATIONAL STRESSORS IN NORWAY

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Abstract

Stress is evident in the Norwegian hotel industry and requires urgent attention as portrayed in Annbjørg's housekeeping managerial occupation. Annbjørg's occupational stressors derived from weak control of and support for demanding jobs in the housekeeping department and possibly under-reward in comparison to her tireless efforts. Hence, this case study provides a platform for educators, trainers, managers, students and learners to critically examine, discuss and argue managerial occupational stress and interventions set within the Norwegian hotel housekeeping context.

Keywords Occupational stress, Occupational stress intervention, Housekeeping department, Norway, Work-family enrichment, Management

BACKGROUND

The labour intensive Norwegian hospitality industry (accommodation, restaurants and food service, and events catering) employs approximately 90,000 workers and generates in excess of NOK 42 billion in revenue (Statistics Norway, 2009). The backgrounds of the workers are diverse due to the expansion of the European Community (Tamas, Münz and Hönekopp, 2006) and globalisation of the hospitality industry. In order to provide excellent service to hospitality customers 24 hours a day, seven days a week (Lövhöiden, Yap and Ineson, 2011), hospitality workers in Norway experience occupational stress (Onsøyen, Mykletun and Steiro, 2009). As a result, the labour turnover rate in the hotel industry is higher than other industries in Norway (Furunes and Mykletun, 2007).

Occupational stress is explained as a circumstance when a worker is unable to cope with her/his work demands (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2006). As such, there are positive and negative outcomes. On one hand, occupational stress can trigger a worker's adaptive instinct to address work-related issues. On the other hand, it can impact negatively on workers' physical and psychological health outcomes (Tsutsumi and Kawakami, 2004). Occupational stress can be viewed from two perspectives: the job demand-control-support model (Johnson and Hall, 1988), and the effort-reward imbalance at work model (Siegrist, 2001). The job demand-control-support model hypothesises that workers with weak control over high psychological and/or physical work demands, and who receive insufficient social/managerial support can experience high occupational stress. The effort-reward imbalance at work model postulates that workers who are unfairly rewarded according to their hard work or over-commitment can experience occupational stress. The negative contexts of occupational stress present in hospitality

organisations and workplaces can be addressed. Occupational stress interventions can focus on the individual (worker) and at the organisational level (Nytrø et al., 2000). Counselling and fair treatment of workers are two of the many methods employed of occupational stress intervention for individuals; while cost-benefit analysis and involvement of labour unions can be employed at organisational level.

CONTEXT

Annbjørg is a housekeeping manager who has worked in a four star hotel in Oslo for approximately three years. She is happily married to her husband Tormod, who also happens to work in a five star hotel in Oslo as a restaurant manager. Annbjørg and Tormod have been married for more than two years and they have a one year old baby boy, Erlend. Both Annbjørg and Tormod would, in the future, like to start their own hospitality consulting business when they have saved enough money. Dual-earner families are common in Norway due to advanced family welfare and orientation policies and systems (Brækhus, 2004). Annbjørg and Tormod lived in the outskirts of Oslo and they need to drive for around 15 minutes to get to their workplaces. Both of them have different work shifts due to the different nature of their occupations. They take turns to take care of Erlend on their off-days. When both of them are working day shifts, they bring Erlend to the day child care centre and collect him in the evening.

Annbjørg manages 15 room attendants and cleaners with three work shifts (7a.m. to 3p.m.; 3p.m. to 11p.m.; 11p.m. to 7a.m.). She reports to the Executive Housekeeper as her immediate superior. As a manager, Annbjørg frequently works from 7a.m. till 6p.m. but she also stays until 11p.m. when there are special events and functions in the hotel. Due to the nature of the housekeeping department, Annbjørg works very closely with the room attendants and the cleaners. Most of the time, she can rely on their quality work. However, Annbjørg needs to conduct cleanliness inspections once in a while to ensure her employees are consistent with their jobs. Needless to say, Annbjørg's employees are unhappy about the inspections. In general, the work morale in the housekeeping department is positive. However, the room attendants and cleaners are fragmented and tend to 'group' according to their diverse ethnic backgrounds. At times, rumours spreading around the hotel originate from the housekeeping department. There have been several incidents of quarrelling and disputes amongst the housekeeping staff. Due to the strenuous nature of housekeeping cleaning jobs, Annbjørg's department experiences one of the highest levels of absences due to medical reasons; finding skilled substitutes at a short notice to replace absent employees is extremely challenging. Moreover, the idea of taking part-timers to accomplish housekeeping tasks is not practiced because of their insufficient training.

The housekeeping department is commonly pressured by other departments to provide fast and quality services to hotel guests. In return, some hotel guests are sympathetic and reward the housekeeping staff with gratuities; while some are unreasonable in their behaviour. Annbjørg has also been involved with the local police a couple of times because guests have accused her staff of stealing. To make things worse, the overbooking of hotel rooms, issuing wrong room keys and constant room changes by the front desk have made Annbjørg's work-life uneasy. In reality, Annbjørg has to

manage the day-to-day operations of the housekeeping department with the work pressure from her boss. Hence, she often has to bring administrative work back home to complete; her manager has provided her a company laptop to work at home from time to time. In addition, the Executive Housekeeper has provided Annbjørg with a company mobile phone so that she can be contacted easily, including on Annbjørg's off-days and out of work time.

Annbjørg has a busy and eventful work life as illustrated above. As a result, she was off sick twice due to work-related situations. Although she feels exhausted and fatigued after working, she is satisfied, contented and happy after resolving employees' issues, accomplishing her assignments and satisfying the guests. Whenever she feels down, sad and stress, Annbjørg uses her happy memories at work or at home to compensate for her negative emotions.

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NOTES FOR EDUCATORS/TRAINERS

1. Indicative learning outcome

Upon successful completion of this case study, educators, trainers, students and managers will be able to:

1. Comprehend and analyse critical issues of occupational stress of housekeeping department and housekeeping managers;

2. Appraise occupational stress interventions suitable for housekeeping department and housekeeping managers; and
3. Understand the job responsibilities of housekeeping managers.

2. Recommended delivery style

This case study is best delivered using multiple approaches of lecture, tutorial, workshop and desk research.

3. Teaching and learning activities

Discussion Questions

- a. What are the occupational stressors experienced by Annbjørg?
- b. What are the causes and consequences of the occupational stressors experienced by Annbjørg?
- c. Discuss the various types of family welfare and orientation policies and systems in Norway.
- d. What occupational stress interventions can you suggest to Norwegian hotel managers?

Activities

- a. Compare and contrast the Norwegian hospitality industry with other hospitality industries in other parts of the world, in the context of employment, labour turnover and revenue generation.
- b. Examine the job description of a housekeeping manager of different types of hotels.
- c. Discuss the positive and negative outcomes of occupational stress.
- d. Examine work-family enrichment to buffer occupational stress.

FURTHER READING

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