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# **HOTEL PERFORMANCE: RIGOR AND RELEVANT RESEARCH TOPICS**

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## **Abstract**

Academic research (rigor) in alignment with practitioners' challenges (relevancy) has been advocated as a way of overcoming the ivory tower syndrome. Performance measurement is at the heart of strategic management processes, as it provides a mechanism of demonstrating outcomes. Given the importance of this topic for both theory and practice, this article explores the contribution of academic outputs in terms of academic research outputs (rigor) and current practitioners' needs (relevancy).

Using network analysis and cross-citation bibliometric approaches, a sample of 1,155 articles is examined and fourteen clusters are identified. The emergent topics and subtopics from the academic literature are compared to ten insights proposed by Ernst Young to the hotel sector. The findings suggest a good fit between the two approaches together with some gaps. Based from empirical results, nine propositions are articulated.

## **Keywords**

Rigor; relevancy; hotel performance; cross-citation; cluster analysis.

## 1. Introduction

Performance measurement is at the heart of strategic management and affects the firm's competitive position (Claver-Cortés, Molina-Azorín & Pereira-Moliner, 2006). Given the importance of this topic for both theory and practice, this article explores the alignment between academic research outputs (rigor) and, practitioners' needs (relevancy).

In fact, previous reviews focused on performance measurement systems (or simply on hotel performance) are relatively few and all regard the "rigor approach". Sainaghi (2010a) identifies the main research streams contributing to the development of performance measurement together with the different methodological approaches characterizing European, Asiatic and American papers (Sainaghi, 2010b). Sainaghi, Phillips and Corti (2013) use the balanced scorecard framework to analyze trends within the hotel performance literature, by focusing on leading tourism and hospitality journals. With an emphasis on the benefits of strategic planning in hospitality and tourism, Phillips and Moutinho (2014) detected a paucity of research. Pnevmatikoudi and Stavrinoudis (2016) performed a content analysis of 79 articles, distinguishing between studies based on financial and non-financial indicators. A comprehensive review introduces the distinction between three important dimensions of tourism and hospitality literature: unit of analysis (destination, cluster, and firm level), approaches (efficiency, tourism productivity, competitiveness, metrics in use, and performance measurement systems) and disciplines (accounting and financial management, economics and strategy) (Sainaghi, Phillips & Zavarrone, 2017).

More recently, Altin et al. (2018) provide a critical review based on three dimensions: progress on ontological and epistemological issues; purpose of performance measurement; emerging contexts. The authors suggest that the hospitality and tourism industry has not got any concrete structure. Sainaghi et al (2018a) adopt a bibliometric approach and identify the most cited papers, journals and authors. Furthermore, some trends were analyzed revealing spectacular growth of outputs especially in recent years. Finally, Sainaghi et al. (2018b), using a network analysis, examine salient streams and sub-topic in the hotel performance literature. These works collectively provide evidence of the existence of differing topics within the hotel performance literature, which can be "clustered", to identify different research streams.

On the other hand, some empirical studies mainly conducted by consulting firms suggest that the hospitality industry faces new challenges, such as the development of peer-to-peer platform (e.g. Airbnb phenomenon) that can create a "disruptive innovation" (Lane & Woodworth, 2016). Hotel brands need to cultivate customer loyalty, drive traffic to their websites and capture a greater share of the wallet. Unfortunately, hotels are structured in silos that make it hard to be flexible in this challenging ecosystem (Deloitte, 2016).

Academics are motivated in part by bibliometrics and rankings, but academic researchers flout their own rules to the effect that their research outputs should be impacting business and society in general as opposed to having academic outputs which include oceans of paper with scant practical relevance. The issue of rigor and relevance is of crucial important for a broader range of stakeholders (Phillips, Moutinho & Godinho, 2018). Given the paucity of academic endeavours assessing the comparisons between theoretical outputs with practitioner challenges, our particular interest, and focus of this research is to compare hotel performance in terms of rigor and relevance.

The rest of the article explores this gap by asking: How does research outputs align with practitioners' challenges? To address this original research question, we use a recent Ernst and Young (EY) report "Hospitality insights 2016" (EY, 2016) to illustrate a current view of practitioners' challenges. EY research focuses on three core issues which have been enduring and pertinent to the hotel sector for several decades, these being growth (Phillips, 1996), innovation (Phillips, 1999) and culture (Mwaura, Sutton & Roberts, 1998). We also performed

a short survey, among hotel managers, to check if they consider EY trustworthy in their business knowledge for hospitality, and how much do they agree with the importance of each of the ten insights of the EY report. The respondents positively confirmed both of these issues. Afterwards, we started the analysis of academic literature through a cluster analysis of outputs (as later presented and discussed), in order to gain fresh insights.

## **2. Hotel performance and practitioner challenges**

### **2.1. Hotel performance (rigor)**

This section outlines some basic results of the prior performance measurement literature. Two central themes emerge. Firstly, what are the topics analysed? Secondly, what are salient trends observed in these studies?

The basic premise, is that: Hotel performance literature is broad and stratified. As an illustration, the work developed by Sainaghi, Phillips and Zavarrone (2017) consider 978 articles published in the last 20 years, similarly Sainaghi et al. (2018a, 2018b) have used a gross sample of 1,155 papers and a net sample of 734 articles.

The performance measurement literature embraces many different topics. For example, some seminal studies in this field were linked with the four perspectives of the balanced scorecard – financial, customer, internal processes, and learning and growth perspectives (Sainaghi, 2010a; 2010b). Sainaghi, Phillips, & Corti (2013) revealed the multidimensional nature of performance measurement with increasing attention being placed on the customer perspective. Being market oriented in turbulent environments led to the initial growth in customer perspective research, with research on other perspectives in a growth mode. The work of Sainaghi, Phillips and Zavarrone (2017) has shown the stratified structure of performance studies, articulated in five approaches (efficiency, tourism productivity, competitiveness, metrics in use, and performance measurement systems). Competitiveness represents the most attractive approach, while efficiency being the most cited topic. Finally, metrics in use is the most marginal approach and it accounts for the lowest number of citations per paper. Another way to classify the content of performance measurement, is the division between financial and non-financial indicators (Pnevmatikoudi & Stavrinoudis, 2016). Altin et al. (2018) classified themes distinguishing between: ontological and epistemological issues; purpose; emerging context. The first dimension considers the shift from positivist towards interpretativist; the second from rational control to cultural control and learning; the third from a more static context to a more dynamic one. Finally, Sainaghi et al. (2018b) identified differing clusters within the hospitality and tourism performance measurement literature.

Concerning the second theme, many articles have depicted trends characterizing the nature of the performance measurement literature. A first observation is related to the number of published papers. There is a wide convergence that this research topic is attracting an increasing number of articles, showing a fast growth in the last five years (Sainaghi, Phillips & Zavarrone, 2017; Sainaghi et al., 2018b). Other trends are related to the specific segmentation proposed by each single review. For example, Pnevmatikoudi and Stavrinoudis (2016) reveal that the majority of analyzed studies measuring hotel performance adopt a narrow view, that is not multidimensional and they tend to focus on a relatively small number of indicators.

### **2.2. Practitioner challenges (relevancy)**

We have previously observed the central performance topics, from the academic literature (rigor). Now we will present the emerging gaps for practitioners.

Table 1. EY insights

EY challenge	Short description
1. Commercial excellence	It focuses on the need to refine growth strategy. Three main questions are posed: i) What drives value for the stakeholders of your business? ii) How does your business react to changing market dynamics? iii) Does your current business plan position you for commercial success?
2. Capital flow from Asia	Cross-border capital flows from Asia into global lodging markets are predicted to continue their upward trajectory. The higher property yields and safe investment environments abroad attract investors, such as those in North America, Europe and Australia. This is in contrast to their domestic markets, which have declined due to challenging supply and demand issues.
3. Capital markets	The EY report compares these three different ways to finance the investing activity: equity, debt and emerging alternative financing. In 2016, prominent sources of <i>equity</i> capital and transaction activity will be generated by private equity and cross-border investor groups. Commercial mortgage-backed securities continued to be the largest source of <i>debt</i> for the US hotel sector. Finally, <i>emerging and alternative</i> sources of debt capital such as private equity, hedge funds and even peer-to-peer lending, or structures and higher loan-to-value ratio loans.
4. Creative development	It refers to the increasing percentage of world population based in urban areas. Unprecedented demand for both residential and commercial real estate developments have further raised the already high barriers to entry in urban environments. As a result, hotel developers are employing creative and sophisticated techniques to maximize return in both established and emerging development markets.
5. Merger integration	The focus here is on the relevance of cultural variables in managing this activity. In fact, the combination of two companies with different corporate strategies and infrastructures requires the integration not only of data and systems, but also a merger of cultures and purposes. The EY report suggests that 85% of failed acquisitions are attributable to the mismanagement of cultural issues.
6. Critical success factors	The relationships between hospitality firms and destinations play a pivotal role (Baggio & Sainaghi, 2011, 2016; Sainaghi & Baggio, 2017). “Critical success factors for tourism markets” centers on the increasing relevance of the destination area in order to define and emphasize a destination’s competitive attributes (d’Angella, De Carlo & Sainaghi, 2010; Sainaghi, 2006), to communicate the destination’s purpose to customers in key feeder markets and to ensure customer experiences align with the destination’s purpose across various tourism products.
7. Technology and innovation	It is operationalized in three promising areas: i) loyalty programs (moving from rigid to more personalized programs), ii) revenue management (re-thinking the forecasting approach, integrating new data dispersed around the firms, and delivering unexpected benefits to targeted customers) and iii) internet of things (exploring a network of everyday physical objects that contains electronics, sensors, and exchanges data).
8. Global gaming	“Gaming” refers mainly to casino hotels and the progressive changing customer demographics between older clients and Millennials, which show very different gaming and entertainment preferences. In fact, these young players are seeking an interactive, social gaming experience where they can use their skills to exert control over outcomes.
9. Sharing economy	This trend is indicative of the increasing importance played by lodging platforms (e.g. Expedia, TripAdvisor and Airbnb). In this new competitive area, three relevant questions emerge: i) How is peer-to-peer inventory affecting my hotel’s performance and value? ii) Is my hotel adequately protected against the growing supply of peer-to-peer inventory? iii) How do I consider peer-to-peer inventory to better understand its potential impact on the feasibility for new lodging developments?
10. Revenue recognition	The evolving environment requires continuing innovation in the criteria underlying the revenue recognition standard issued by both the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) and the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB).

Source: Adapted from EY (2016).

The first key question is related to the information source capable of identifying the practitioner challenges in the hospitality industry. Our attention was, first, on the many specialized consulting firms, variously involved in this sector, such as Smith Travel Research, PFK, CBRE.

However, none of them has published an in-depth report describing the emerging challenges. In fact, we have not considered as report, simple interviews that trace some future trends (i.e. STR, 2018). For this reason the research team used the EY document (later described) consisting of ten trends relevant for the hospitality industry.

Despite not specializing in hospitality, EY is an authoritative actor in the field of strategic consulting. Furthermore, academic researchers make use of EY documents. In fact, researching in Scopus “EY” in published papers and reviews since 1996 to present, the research team has identified more than 124 thousand works citing this consulting company. More than 7 thousand refer to “social science”, “business, management and accounting” or “economics and finance”. With ten challenges identified, these will be sufficient to provide a comprehensive platform to help deliver a rich source of fresh knowledge. Table 1 succinctly presents each EY challenge.

### **3. Methodology**

As previously stated, this study performs a cross-citation analysis within the broad stream of “hotel and performance”. To develop the study, some central themes are relevant: i) the sample selection, ii) the time horizon, iii) the cross-citation analysis and iv) the network and cluster analysis.

#### **3.1. Sample selection**

Articles were selected according to three criteria – as suggested in some previous reviews focused on hotel performance (e.g. Sainaghi, 2010a, 2010b; Sainaghi, Phillips & Corti, 2013) or more generally to other hospitality research streams (Chan & Hsu, 2016; Sourouklis & Tsagdis, 2013; Tsai, Pan & Lee, 2011; Tsang & Hsu, 2011) –: i) keywords, ii) journals, and iii) year of publication. Concerning the first point (keywords), given the focus on hotel performance, these two words were used as keywords, in accordance to previous studies.

Concerning the second point (journals), some previous reviews explicitly focus their attention only on tourism or hospitality sector (e.g. Jang & Park, 2011; Lucas & Deery, 2004; Li, 2008). However, some recent works, such as Sainaghi, Phillips and Zavarrone’s (2017) study, clearly demonstrate the relevance of non-tourism and non-hospitality journals. The empirical study was carried out at the beginning of August 2016 and two keywords (“hotels and performance”) were researched in abstract, title and keywords in the Scopus database. Only journals published in English were included in the sample. Concerning the time horizon, the analysis embraces 20 years, from 1996 to 2015. The timeframe was partly determined by the Scopus dataset, which was incomplete prior to 1996, as confirmed in previous studies (Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2013). These choices assure a wide coverage of the literature. Using these three criteria together, the sample includes 1,155 papers. The research team verified the match with hotel performance stream by analyzing all the papers. Only articles that explore determinants of results or, on the other hand, propose performance measurement systems are included in the final sample. 268 papers are excluded (23%), because, despite using the keywords, they did not really address hotel performance issues. It is interesting to note that 90% of these outliers (241) are “disconnected papers”, which means such papers have not received any cross-citations. Therefore, the proposed methodology (cross-citation) helps researchers to verify the relevance of used keywords.

Table 2 reports the sample size. Net sample counts 734 papers. Based on this basket of articles, a cluster analysis was realized, as depicted in the next paragraph (§3.2).

Table 2. Sample size

Papers	Gross sample		Outliers		Net sample	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<b>Gross sample</b>	<b>1,155</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>887</b>	<b>77%</b>
Disconnected papers	394	34%	241	90%	153	17%
Connected papers	761	66%	27	10%	<b>734</b>	<b>83%</b>

**3.2. The time horizon**

This section introduces and discuss a methodological, problem related to the different time horizons of practice and rigor. In fact, while the EY report identifies ten insights for the hotel industry in 2016, the rigor literature embraces twenty years (1996-2015). A question to consider is whether there is a time mismatch? Figure 1 shows that in reality, alignment consists of two elements – cross sectional and longitudinal. In fact, for answering the ten emerging questions (cross sectionally) in a given point of time it is important to consider (longitudinal) the previous research flow. Clearly, as the academic publication process will frequently exceed a one year time period, detailed gap analysis year by year is problematic. Furthermore, given the wide array of academic research, as the sample size confirms, some papers can anticipate future trends that will impact practitioners (practice). An example can help to illuminate this point. One trend of the EY report is related to the so-called peer-to-peer platforms (as Airbnb) and their impact on tourism and hospitality industry. This problem is formalized by EY researchers in 2016 but in the academic literature there are many papers published before the emergence of this insight. For example, there is a seminal research stream in the consumer behavior area of inquiry (i.e. Belk, 2007; Felson & Spaeth, 1978) with some articles in the tourism and hospitality field previously published (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015; Guttentag, 2015; Molz, 2013; Pizam, 2014). The goal of this paper is not to verify the overlapping between rigor and relevancy in the same period of time, but showing how academic research outputs can contribute to the challenge highlighted by EY.

Figure 1. The time horizon of the analysis between rigor and relevancy



**3.3. Cross-citation analysis**

We propose a cluster analysis based on network analysis, where nodes are papers and links are cross-citations (as described later in the methodology section). Citations are objective measures, which illustrate the exchange of ideas in a field of enquiry. Collectively, citations are influential as they represent quality at journal and at individual level. Citation relationships among authors can be categorized in three key ways: co-citation, coupling and cross-citation

(Wang, Qiu & Yu, 2012). Co-citation analysis uses pairs of documents, which often appear together in reference lists and have something in common (Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2013; Xiao & Smith, 2008). Two articles are bibliographically coupled if their reference list share one or more of the same cited documents (Yuan, Gretzel & Tseng, 2015). Two papers must cite the same source to be coupled, whereas co-citation relies on any papers listed in another's reference list. The coupling strengthens as the number of citations they share increase.

Cross-citation analysis assesses the relationships among journals, articles and/or authors to identify patterns (Howey et al., 1999). Given the focus of the present study on communities (clusters) cross-citation appears the most useful approach. It helps researchers to identify groups of papers that share relationships, and groups of articles that are disconnected. As illustrated in previous papers, this relational approach is mainly based on network analysis (Benckendorff & Zehrer, 2013; Figueroa-Domecq et al., 2015; Gomezelj, 2016; Hu & Racherla, 2008; Köseoglu, Sehitoglu, & Craft, 2015; Racherla & Hu, 2010; van der Zee & Vanneste, 2015; Ye, Li & Law, 2013; Yuan, Tseng & Chang, 2014).

### **3.4. Network and cluster analysis**

Citation network analysis has been used several times and proven to be an effective tool to analyze the structure of scientific research. This method enables the illustration of different domains that can uncover emerging research strands in many disciplines, with tourism included (Cardillo et al., 2006).

For the analysis we built a network with papers selected as nodes and the cross-citations that a paper makes to other papers as links. A traditional clustering technique would require the collection of a number of characteristics of the papers examined. Then the application of some methods to organize the papers into clusters based on the statistical similarity of the different variables (Baggio & Klobas, 2017; Baggio & Sainaghi, 2011; 2016; Sainaghi & Baggio, 2017). A network approach, instead, works on the possibility of recognizing the internal structure of the network by identifying groups of nodes (papers) that are more densely connected between themselves than to other nodes in the network (modules, clusters or communities). Several algorithms exist that differentiate themselves in terms of the network characteristics they consider (directionality, weights etc.) and resolution power (Fortunato, 2010).

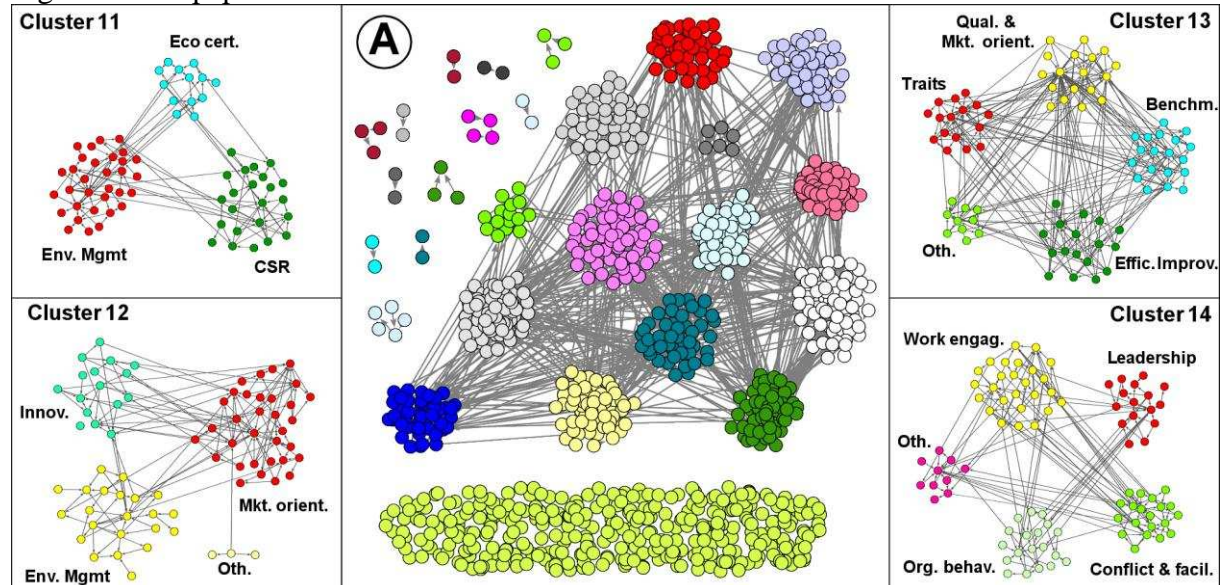
Here we use the so-called Louvain method proposed by Blondel et al. (2008) which is a heuristic algorithm that optimizes a modularity metric  $Q$ , designed to measure the strength of the division of a network into different modules.  $Q$  is the fraction of the edges that fall within the given groups minus the expected fraction if edges were distributed at random. The higher the value of  $Q$ , the more defined and separated the modules are. By tuning a resolution parameter, the Louvain method enables the observation of communities at different scales. Here we use a value of 1 that gives a moderate resolution power thus allowing detecting reasonably sized and separated clusters.

Based on our net sample (734 papers), our calculations identified found 14 clusters with a modularity index  $Q = 0.65$ , that implies a well-clustered network. Successively, each community was further analyzed with the same algorithm, thus highlighting groups of similar papers within the different clusters. A closer (qualitative) inspection of these groups allowed new topics to emerge.

Figure 2 reports the whole network (left-side) and, as an example, the four broadest clusters (11, 12, 13 and 14) are represented, putting in evidence some sub-clusters (as later presented).



Figure 2. The papers' network and the main clusters.



**Legend:** The central panel A contains the whole network, with all the clusters uncovered. As an example a closer view of the four largest clusters (11, 12, 13 and 14) is shown with their different components (see text for details).

## 4. Rigor and relevance

This paragraph compares the trends emerging from the literature (rigor) with those proposed in the EY study (relevance). The analysis is structured at the following levels: first, a short qualitative description of each cluster is reported (§4.1); second, a holistic approach is developed, connecting the ten insights with the 14 clusters (§4.2); third, the two more relevant connections (weighted in term of papers) are analytically investigated, in order to understand what kind of suggestions emerge from rigor in order to deal with the EY insights. These two relevant connections are represented by commercial excellence (§4.3) and merger integration (§4.4).

### 4.1. A short qualitative presentation of the 14 clusters

This paragraph presents a brief summary of the fourteen identified clusters. A full description is reported in a separate paper (Sainaghi, et al 2018b). The first cluster includes six papers focused on Human Resource Management (HRM), not published in top journals and mainly based on qualitative methodology, such as case study. The topics explored are mainly related to job motivation and satisfaction. The topic of Cluster 2 is termed external determinants of hotel performance and the independent variables are mainly represented by macroeconomic antecedents. In terms of discipline, this cluster is related to finance. Three main topics are identified: i) monetary policy or other macro-economic variables, such as consumer confidence, ii) business cycle and corporate governance, and iii) crisis and external shocks. Cluster 3 consists of 40 papers. The basic topic of this cluster is internal operational and soft determinants of hotel performance. The dependent variable is mainly represented by business performance, which is a broad concept usually including both operational and financial measures. Independent variables belong to five different groups: i) performance measurement systems, ii) information technology, iii) relational capabilities, iv) intellectual capital and v) competitive strategy.

Cluster 4 includes 41 papers. The cluster deals with market and product diversification, on one side, together with some processes linked to diversification: i) performance measurement systems, using some typical hospitality indices (sales measures) and financial indices (risk and

stock return), ii) diversification strategy, iii) HRM, iv) organizational competencies, and v) technology. Despite the fact Cluster 5 includes 44 papers, it appears homogeneous both in terms of dependent and independent variables. Dependent variables are mainly represented by business performance, operational performance and process performance, using indicators relating to HRM, such as job performance. The independent variables are principally related to: i) HRM practices (the largest group, that accounts for more than 50%), ii) agglomeration and geographical competition, plus some and iii) other marginal themes, such as service quality and corporate governance.

The Cluster 6 accounts for 45 papers. The predominant topic is strongly related to competitive strategy with four sub-groups: i) competitive strategy (the largest group), ii) sales performance determinants, iii) outsourcing strategy, and iv) strategic practices and benchmarking. The underlying discipline is management and in particular strategic management. The Cluster 7 consists of 55 papers; the general topic being performance indicators or performance measurement systems. Three main sub-groups were identified: i) non-accounting measures, ii) BSC approach, and iii) accounting indices. The main discipline of this cluster is accounting.

Cluster 8 includes 56 papers; the topic of this cluster is social media and comprises four sub-groups: i) social media and online reviews, ii) websites, iii) market orientation, and iv) environmental management. The dependent variable is usually represented by operational performance. The discipline of this cluster is marketing.

With 59 papers, the central theme of Cluster 9 is brand management and three sub-groups were identified: i) brand management, ii) pricing, and iii) marketing strategies and crisis management. Given the focus on selling processes, unsurprisingly the dependent variables are mainly related to “operational performance”, usually represented by ADR, occupancy and RevPAR, or customer satisfaction. The prominent discipline is marketing.

Cluster 10 includes 62 papers and develops two interrelated topics: i) customer satisfaction and ii) service quality. These two sub-groups are interrelated, since the ability of service quality of improving customer satisfaction. Marketing is the main discipline. This basket of papers usually use customer satisfaction as a dependent variable; financial and competitive measures are more rarely used.

Cluster 11 includes 68 papers with focus on i) environmental management (EM), ii) corporate social responsibility and iii) eco-certification. Unsurprisingly, the Journal of Sustainable Tourism is the second most popular journal in terms of the number of published papers. The underlying topic is represented by “sustainability”, which can be broken down into environmental or eco-sustainability, on one side, and social or stakeholder sustainability, on the other.

Cluster 12 accounts for 74 papers primarily related to: i) market orientation, ii) environmental management, and iii) innovation, plus some other marginal themes. The underlying discipline is marketing.

Cluster 13 is the second largest group with 80 papers and reveals a strong focus on efficiency, measured mainly using DEA models. Four sub-groups were identified: i) efficiency improvement, ii) benchmarking, iii) quality and market orientation, and iv) hotel traits. The underlying feature is efficiency, sometimes integrated with marketing and management.

Cluster 14 is the largest group with 91 papers. The topic of this cluster is job satisfaction, usually operationalized as a dependent variable, while antecedents are related to four sub-groups: i) work engagement, ii) organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB), iii) conflict and facilitation, and iv) leadership, empowerment and knowledge sharing. The discipline of this cluster is HRM.

## **4.2. Holistic approach**

Based on cluster analysis, as reported in the methodology section, 14 clusters and some sub-topics were identified. Table 3 reports the overlapping between insights and clusters.

Table 3. Rigor and relevance.

		EY insights											# of papers
		1. Commercial excellence	2. Capital flow from Asia	3. Capital markets	4. Creative development	5. Merger integration	6. Critical success factors	7. Technology and innovation	8. Global gaming	9. Sharing economy	10. Revenue recognition		
C I U S T E R S	1. HRM (qualitative)					HRM (6)							6
	2. External determinants			Crisis & external shocks; monetary policy; business cycle (12)									12
	3. Soft internal determinants	Competitive strategy (6)				Intellectual capital; relational capabilities (16)		IT (9)			PMS (10)		40
	4. Diversification					HRM; organisational competences (11)		Technology (4)	Diversification strategies (10)		PMS (16)		41
	5. HRM (antecedents)					HRM practices (33)				Agglomeration (11)			44
	6. Competitive strategy	Competitive strategy (26)								Outsourcing; sales determinants (19)			45
	7. Social media						Social media & online reviews; website; market orientation; environmental management (55)						55
	8. Performance measurement systems (PMS)										Accounting indices; BSC approach; non-accounting measures (56)		56
	9. Marketing & brand management	Brand management; marketing strategies (40)								Pricing (19)			59
	10. Service quality & customer satisfaction	Customer satisfaction; service quality (62)											62
	11. Environmental management, CSR, eco-certification					Environmental management; CSR; eco-certification (68)							68
	12. Market orientation & innovation	Market orientation (33)				Environmental management (22)			Innovation (19)				74
	13. Efficiency	Quality & market orientation (25)				Hotel traits (19)					Efficiency improvement; benchmarking (37)		81
	14. HRM (Job satisfaction)					HRM (work engagement; leadership, empowerment & knowledge sharing; conflict & facilitation; organisational citizenship behaviour) (91)							91
<b># of papers</b>		191	0	12	109	157	55	32	10	86	82	734	
<b>%</b>		26%	0%	2%	15%	21%	7%	4%	1%	12%	11%	100%	
<b># of connections</b>		6	0	1	3	5	1	3	1	4	3	27	

1 Before considering the results, some premises are given. There is some common overlap  
2 between rigor and practice: the 14 clusters cover 9 (of ten) insights. The only one relevant  
3 insight omitted is “capital flow from Asia”. A second consideration suggests the presence of  
4 some clusters that have a clear link with one and only one EY insight, while others show  
5 relationships with more a single insights. The broad scope of some issues has made it difficult  
6 to find a precise location. An example will help to clarify this point. The third cluster (soft  
7 internal determinants) shows four sub-topics: competitive strategy; intellectual capital and  
8 relational capabilities; information technology (IT); performance measurement systems. For  
9 some sub-topics there are potentially more connections with EY insights: for instance, the  
10 competitive strategy can create commercial excellence, but also creative development, or can  
11 be a source of critical success factors or innovation. The relationships depicted in Table 3  
12 propose only one link, focusing on the most relevant connection between a specific sub-topic  
13 and a precise EY insight, as it emerges after reading the articles.  
14 Finally, the penultimate line shows three different intensities between rigor and practice. Two  
15 insights (commercial excellence, 26%; merger integration, 21%) account 47% of the sample;  
16 three insights show values higher than 10%, representing 37% (creative development, 14%;  
17 sharing economy 11%; revenue recognition, 11%), while the four remaining EY topics (capital  
18 markets, 2%; critical success factors, 7%; technology and innovation, 4%; global gaming, 2%)  
19 attract only 15%. For this reason, in the next sub-paragraphs only the first two very “strong”  
20 relationships (squared in Table 3) are analyzed and discussed.

21  
22

### 23 **4.3. Commercial excellence**

24 At the heart of strategic management is the concept of competitive advantage, which translates  
25 to higher levels of firm performance (Phillips & Mouthinho, 2014; Sainaghi, Phillips &  
26 d’Angella, 2018). For hospitality firms, the competitive advantage is variously related to the  
27 destination context (d’Angella, De Carlo, Sainaghi, 2010; Sainaghi, 2006) and it is influence  
28 by special events (Sainaghi & Mauri, 2018; Sainaghi et al. 2018c; Sainaghi, Mauri & d’Angella,  
29 2018). So, the first column of Table 3 being commercial excellence aligns rigor with  
30 practitioner relevance, and in particular point to a clear path to accelerate growth. This insight  
31 is structured around three aspects: understanding what drives value; taking an agile approach  
32 to the market; developing a strategic business model, as suggested by the EY report. Six  
33 connections are identified and this column accounts for the highest percentage (26%, Table 3).  
34 Just the two strongest relationships are analyzed: marketing and brand management (cluster 9);  
35 service quality and customer satisfaction (cluster 10). The emerging topics from rigor are  
36 particular insightful to identify what drives value (brand equity and internal business), how to  
37 take an agile approach to the market (managing customer satisfaction) and how developing a  
38 strategic business model (centered on both brand and service quality management).

39

#### 40 **Marketing and brand management**

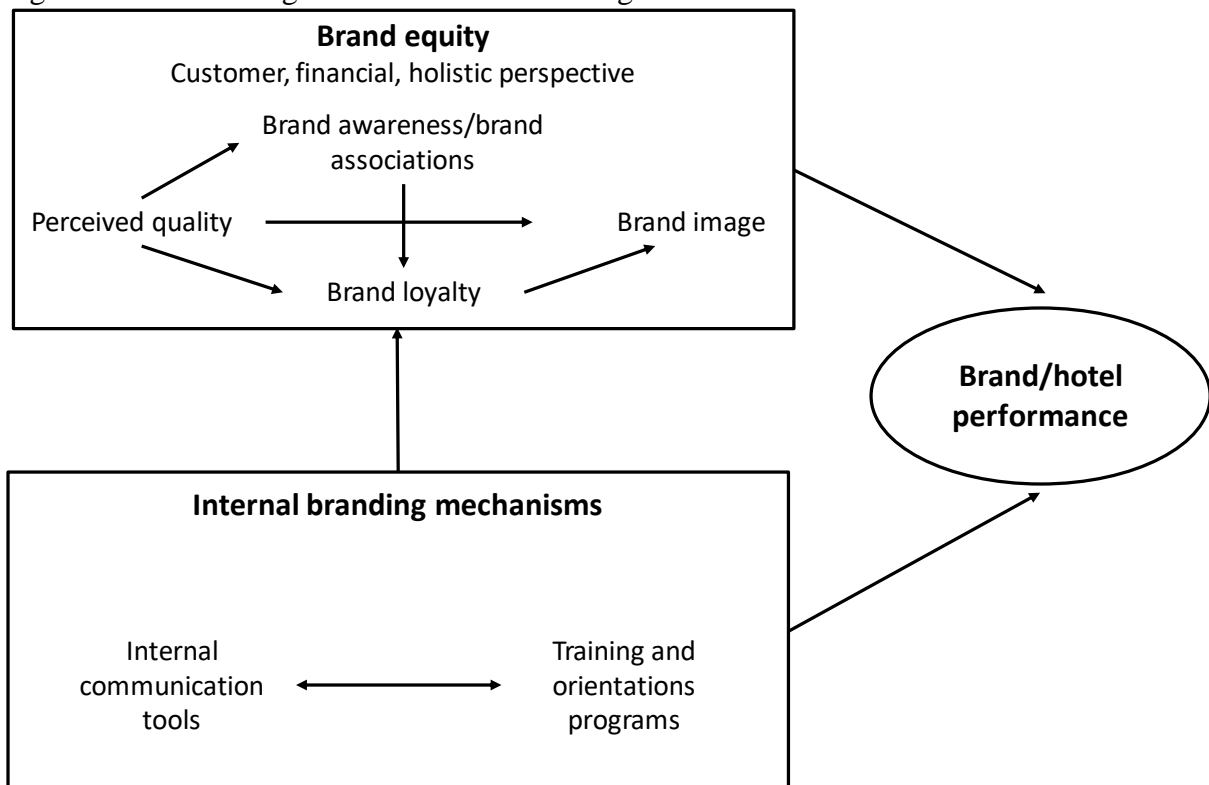
41 Focusing on the first topic, Figure 3 summarizes the main evidence emerging from rigor. Brand  
42 management appears as a central topic and is operationalized by considering brand equity and  
43 internal branding. This first issue is particular important to identify both what drives value and  
44 how to develop a strategic business model.

45 External brands are often described as a name, term, design, logo, symbol, identity, or  
46 trademark that are developed and designed to identify the goods or services offered by one  
47 entity and further differentiate the entity from its competitors (Kim & Kim, 2005). Many studies  
48 note the tremendous investment necessary to position a new brand, the long time required and  
49 the low probability of success (Jackson & Qu, 2008). By contrast, brand equity generates value  
50 to both clients, shareholders and other stakeholders. From the consumer point of view, key

51 benefits include the reduction of perceived risks and search costs, while owners can charge a  
 52 price premium, increase market share, or reduce marketing costs (Kayaman & Arasli, 2007).  
 53 Having clarified the concept of brand, branding is usually described as organizational processes  
 54 geared towards creating perceived value beyond the tangible goods or services offered by the  
 55 enterprise (Xu & Chan, 2010).

56 Brand equity is mainly operationalized along four variables: brand awareness (or brand  
 57 associations); brand image; perceived quality; brand loyalty. These determinants are employed  
 58 in many studies usually with positive relationships with hotel performance. Prior studies  
 59 propose some hierarchal relationships among these components. For example, Xu and Chan  
 60 (2010) suggest that brand awareness, brand associations, and quality of experience are  
 61 determinants of brand loyalty. Kayaman and Arasli (2007) found that perceived quality  
 62 influence brand loyalty and brand image on one side, and brand loyalty influences brand image,  
 63 on the other. While Kim and Kim (2005) revealed a stronger effect generated by brand  
 64 awareness and perceived quality on firm performance, compared to brand image and loyalty.  
 65 These relationships are reported inside the block of brand equity in Figure 3 and demonstrate  
 66 that research has not reached a state of maturity. Fresh enquiries are necessary to fully  
 67 understand and appreciate the precise relationships depicted in Figure 3.  
 68

69 Figure 3. Brand management: evidences from rigor



Legend: rectangles = independent variables; circle = dependent variable; arrows = relationships

70 Control variables and moderators play a crucial role in measuring the effects of brand equity  
 71 on performance. For example, O'Neill, Mattila and Xiao (2006) point out that brands affect the  
 72 market value of mid-price and upscale hotels beyond the usual contribution attributed to net  
 73 operating income and revenue per available room (RevPAR). Alternatively, Hanson et al.  
 74 (2009) found performance improvements for hotels that rebranded within a higher market  
 75 segment. O'Neill and Carlbäck (2011) found that branded hotels have higher levels of  
 76 occupancy than unaffiliated. However, unbranded hotels outperform in term of rates and  
 77  
 78

79 RevPAR. Hotels that merely changed brands without also changing their scale reported no  
80 significant variation in financial results (Hanson et al., 2009). These observations illustrate the  
81 fickle nature of the hotel management business in terms of performance metric. Also, the type  
82 of hotel matters too. In terms of the bottomline drivers, high levels of occupancy may be  
83 beneficial, but RevPar is ultimately more important. So, some of the findings of prior studies  
84 suggests a need for further investigation.

85 The second driver of Figure 3 is represented by internal branding, which considers promoting  
86 the brand within an organization with its employees as the key audience (Punjaisri, Wilson &  
87 Evanschitzky, 2009). Internal branding is therefore defined as a nurturing process whereby  
88 employees are provided with brand knowledge. Such a process enables employees to  
89 understand the meaning of a corporate brand and pass on a consistent brand experience to  
90 customers (Tsai, Cheung & Lo, 2010). This is vital when the experience provided by employees  
91 is a key differentiator. In the hospitality industry, employees are both internal resources and  
92 part of the product. Hence, employee quality is an important factor, and employees should be  
93 the primary marketing targets of managers (King, 2010).

94 In Figure 3, two main drivers of internal branding are identified: on one-side internal  
95 communication tools (group meeting, briefing, notice boards, newsletters, and logbooks) and,  
96 on the other, training and orientation tools (orientation, development course, and training).  
97 Internal branding can have a direct and indirect effect on performance. Phillips and Moutinho  
98 (2014) observation are pertinent, as they note the critical nature of strategic planning praxis  
99 which considers and asks what are the key activities of formulating and implementing strategic  
100 plans. These can include workshops, use of analytic and creative tools.

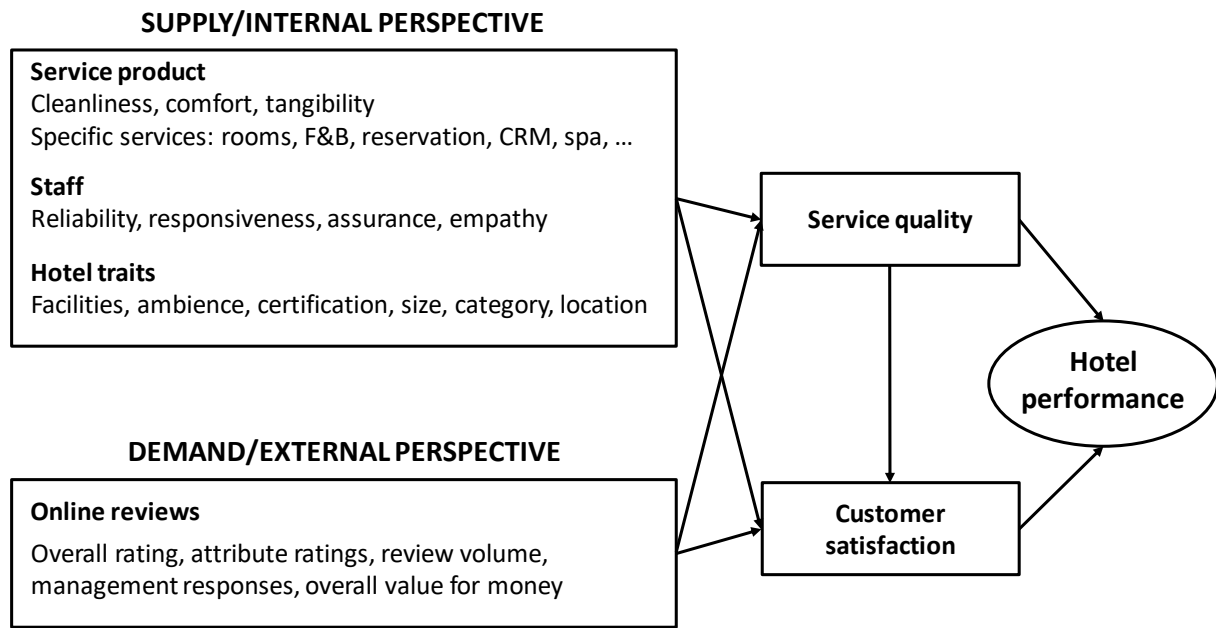
101  
102 Service quality and customer satisfaction

103 This second theme is particularly relevant to answer EY questions about taking an agile  
104 approach to the market and developing a strategic business model. Concerning the first point,  
105 customer satisfaction is a focal issue, while service quality is a key ingredient for developing a  
106 strategic business model.

107 As depicted in Figure 4, the relationship with hotel performance is articulated in two steps:  
108 some analytical determinants (left side) are able to impact on service quality or customer  
109 satisfaction and these latter are related to hotel performance (variously operationalized).  
110 Furthermore, service quality influences customer satisfaction (down arrow). The determinants  
111 are mainly related to internal (or supply) items, with some interests in external antecedents.  
112 This latter area includes overall value for money and online reviews (Mauri & Minazzi, 2013;  
113 Phillips et al., 2015). But matters are now more complicated as a customer even if satisfied,  
114 may not engage in repeat business.

115  
116

117 Figure 4. Service quality and customer satisfaction



**Legend:** rectangles = independent variables; circle = dependent variable; arrows = relationships

118  
119

120 Focusing on supply determinants, three main blocks are used by researchers: service product,  
121 staff and hotel traits (Albayrak, 2015). The supply perspective is the most developed in the  
122 literature and within them, the service product is analyzed in many contributes. Some studies  
123 measure the quality of single services, as cleanliness, comfort or tangibility, while others focus  
124 on specific services, such as rooms (Chaves, Gomes & Pedron, 2012), F&B (Giritlioglu, Jones  
125 & Avcikurt, 2014), reservation systems (Ali, 2015), CRM (Garrido-Moreno, Lockett & García-  
126 Morales, 2014). The items reported in Figure 4 represent some examples, in fact some papers  
127 propose many other antecedents or categories (as ancillary and core services).

128 Staff is used in some studies as a determinant of both service quality and customer satisfaction.  
129 This variable is primarily operationalized by considering reliability (the ability to deliver a  
130 service coherently with the hotel standards), responsiveness (the ability to provide prompt and  
131 quick service or to provide the extra level of service to handle customer special requests),  
132 assurance (experience in the field, courtesy and respect for clients), and empathy (personal  
133 initiative, ability to understand specific customer needs, and individual attention to clients).  
134 These four determinants are related to the work of Parasuraman and the SERVQUAL system  
135 to measure service quality. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) identified ten dimensions  
136 in assessing service quality reduced to five in some papers (Mauri, Minazzi & Muccio, 2013).  
137 The fifth variable is represented by tangibility, positioned in service product block in Figure 4.  
138 In fact, this dimension considers the physical part of the hospitality product (parking areas,  
139 building exteriors, dining area, food) (Tsai & Lin, 2014). The SERVQUAL approach (reduced  
140 to five dimensions) is used in some papers (as Serrat, 2011).

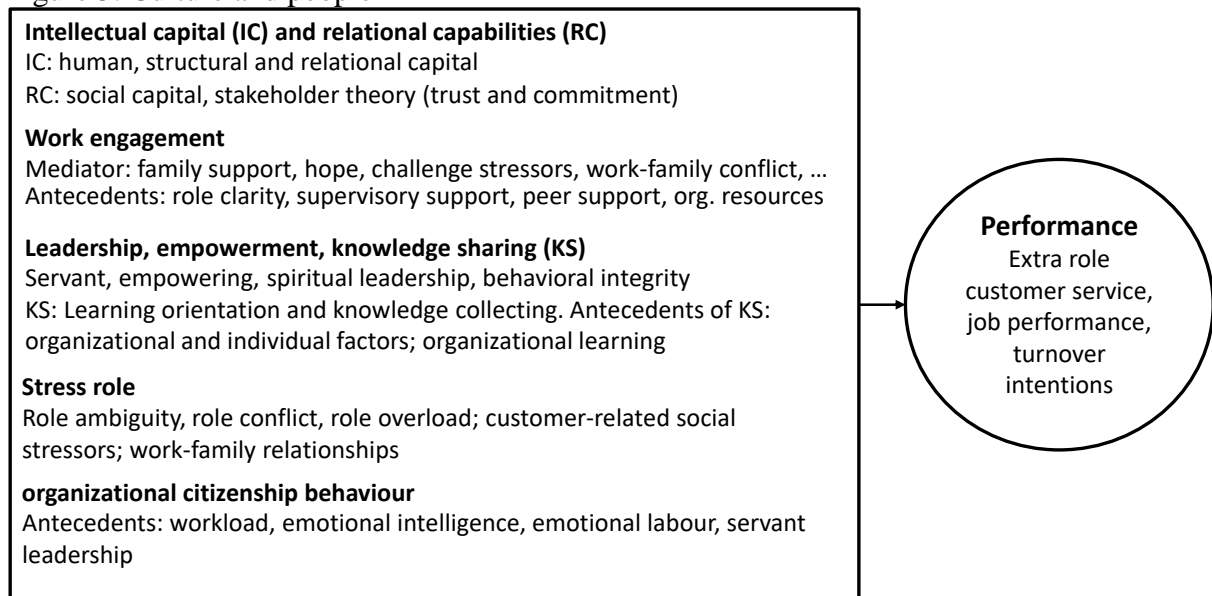
141 The last block is represented by hotel traits and includes an array of variables mainly related to  
142 the building, as the category, location, size (number of rooms), and number of facilities. Some  
143 papers explore the presence of certification and in particular eco-certification. Findings suggest  
144 that certified hotels usually account for lower levels of performance, giving the extra cost  
145 generated by the additional controls (Heras-Saizarbitoria, Arana & Boiral, 2015).

146

147 **4.4. Merger integration**

148 In the case of merger of two companies what is most critical is not embodied by data and  
 149 systems integration, but culture and people. As reported in the EY study, 85% of failed  
 150 acquisitions are attributable to the mismanagement of cultural issues. For this reason, we  
 151 suggest an important link between this insight and HRM, with a particular focus on cultural  
 152 aspects, as later clarified. Table 3 depicts five connections between clusters (1, 3, 4, 5, 14) and  
 153 merger integration. It is clear that the focus is not solely represented by merger integration, but  
 154 more generally the relevance of HRM and cultural variables in hospitality organizations. The  
 155 issues emerging from rigor are reported in Figure 5 and are centered on the following topics:  
 156 intellectual capital and relational capabilities; work engagement; leadership, empowerment and  
 157 knowledge sharing; role stress; organizational citizenship behavior. Each of these points will  
 158 be discussed, by explaining the link with “culture and people”, according to EY insight. Given  
 159 the high number of clusters (and therefore papers) involved in this insight, we place emphasis  
 160 only on some relevant themes and focus more on recent contributes.

161  
 162 Figure 5. Culture and people



163 **Legend:** rectangle = independent variables; circle = dependent variable; arrows = relationships

164  
 165 Intellectual capital and relational capabilities are rooted in the resource-based view and  
 166 knowledge-based view of the firm (Barney, 1986). Basically, this theoretical stream assumes  
 167 that firms own different types of resources which enable them to develop different strategies  
 168 (Wernerfelt, 1984). Resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable are able  
 169 to create sustainable competitive advantage (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993). In this perspective,  
 170 intellectual capital is a set of contemporary value drivers that productively transform resources  
 171 into material assets with added value (Bontis, Janošević & Dženopoljac, 2015). Zeglat and  
 172 Zigan (2013) explore three components of intellectual capital, represented – in analogy to social  
 173 capital (Sainaghi & Baggio, 2014) – by human, structural and relational capital (also defined in  
 174 some papers as customer capital). Human capital is the knowledge that employees take with  
 175 them when they go home after work. Examples of human capital are innovation capacity, know-  
 176 how, experience, team effort, and employee flexibility. Structural capital is the knowledge that  
 177 remains in the company after employees go home after work. It consists of organizational  
 178 routines, procedures, systems, corporate culture, databases and so forth. Relational capital  
 179 entails relationships with external stakeholders (clients, suppliers and partners). Empirical



180 papers find a positive relationship between intellectual capital and business performance,  
181 operationalized both considering financial (ROA, gross operating profit) and operating  
182 (RevPAR) performance (Sainaghi, 2011).

183 Relational capabilities (Sainaghi & De Carlo, 2016) present some analogies with relational  
184 capital (Campopiano, Minola, & Sainaghi, 2016) and they are rooted in two different research  
185 streams: social capital and stakeholder theory. Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) define social  
186 capital as the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through,  
187 and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit.  
188 Similarly, stakeholder theory states that the long-term survival and success of a firm is  
189 determined by its ability to establish and maintain relationships with its critical stakeholders.  
190 In these perspectives, relational capabilities are able to create trust and commitment with  
191 stakeholders (Lo, 2013) and, more generally, to develop a customer relationship management  
192 (CRM) approach (Mohammed, Rashid & Tahir, 2014).

193 With reference to EY insights, the firm's ability to develop intellectual capital and relational  
194 capabilities help hotels enhance their success in managing their culture. In the case of mergers,  
195 these abilities help in developing integrating processes. But the challenge of the 1980s and  
196 1990s are different from today. The digitization of businesses necessitates the identification of  
197 new ways to develop and manage intellectual and relational capabilities. The main driver is the  
198 reality that hotels need to elucidate how the relationships between intellectual capital and  
199 innovation can be successfully deployed within a dynamic environment.

200  
201 Work engagement is usually defined by citing Schaufeli et al. (2002): "positive, fulfilling, work-  
202 related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (p. 72).  
203 Employees who feel energetic, are enthusiastic and are immersed in their work. They have  
204 desirable job outcomes such as reduced turnover intentions, quality performance in the  
205 workplace, and higher levels of job and career satisfaction (Karatepe, 2014). It has been shown  
206 that employees who are actively disengaged in their work seem to result in \$450 to \$550 billions  
207 of lost productivity per year in the United States (Karatepe, 2015).

208 Studies focusing on work engagement are mainly centered on the work of Karatepe. Generally  
209 speaking, many contributes use work engagement as a mediator role in measuring job  
210 performance, in combination with other HRM variables, such as organizational resources,  
211 family support, "hope" (defined as positively oriented human resource strengths and  
212 psychological capacities), challenge stressors (composed by work overload and job  
213 responsibility), and work-family conflict (Karatepe et al., 2014). The dependent variable is  
214 usually operationalized in term of job performance, customer service, and turnover intentions.  
215 The link between work engagement and the firm culture is evident. In fact, without work  
216 engagement it is difficult to create a clear firm identity. Furthermore, work engagement has  
217 some positive spin-offs on service quality and customer satisfaction (as analyzed in the previous  
218 paragraph).

219  
220 Leadership, empowerment and knowledge sharing is a relevant sub-topic. Leadership and  
221 empowerment are able to improve customer service quality and employee's membership as  
222 well as to implement knowledge sharing approaches. The relevance of empowerment is related  
223 to the increasing number of employees with a high degree of autonomy. In this context, hotel  
224 supervisors with empowering behavior may encourage employees to improve their service  
225 attitude and passion for customers. Wu and Chen (2015) find that empowering leadership is an  
226 antecedent of the psychological contract, where the latter is defined as individual beliefs, shaped  
227 by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their  
228 organization (Rousseau, 2004). Empowering leadership affects team creativity (Hon & Chan,  
229 2012), while organizational empowerment influences job satisfaction, affective commitment

230 and psychological empowerment (Kazlauskaitė, Buciuniene & Turauskas, 2011). Similarly,  
231 Salehzadeh et al. (2015) introduce the concept of “spiritual leadership”; Asree, Zain and Razalli  
232 (2010) propose the “leadership competency”, while Kwak and Kim (2015) suggest the ability  
233 of servant leadership to influence organizational citizenship behavior. In their study, servant  
234 leaders refer to a leadership style by the use of which the leader facilitates the development of  
235 followers to achieve their potential by building self-confidence, performing as a role model,  
236 developing trust, and providing valuable support and resources. Guchait, Simons and  
237 Pasamehmetoglu (2016) proposed the ability of behavioral integrity to influence service  
238 recovery performance, which refers to frontline employees’ abilities and actions to resolve a  
239 service failure. Concerning the EY insight, the message emerging from these contributes is  
240 clear, in the field of hospitality organizations a new leadership paradigm needs to replace  
241 traditional forms of leadership.

242 Knowledge-sharing behavior is important in the hospitality industry due to the immense costs  
243 of knowledge loss caused by high rates of employee turnover (Kim & Lee, 2013). However,  
244 employees often refuse to share knowledge because they worry that doing so may reduce their  
245 opportunities for promotion or because doing so requires uncompensated time and energy  
246 (Bock et al., 2005). Kim and Lee (2012) explore antecedents of knowledge sharing and find  
247 positive relationships with organizational factors (facilitating conditions and social factors) and  
248 some individual variables (enjoyment in helping others, knowledge self-efficacy, extrinsic  
249 motivators, anticipated usefulness, and reciprocal relationships). Aizpurúa, Saldaña, and  
250 Saldaña (2011) identify another determinant of knowledge sharing: organizational learning.  
251 This last concept is defined as the process of improving actions through better knowledge and  
252 understanding. With reference to the EY insight, the ability to design a learning organization is  
253 a central point to improve knowledge sharing mechanisms.

254  
255 Job stress can be defined as stress that employees experience in the workplace environment  
256 (Karatepe & Karatepe, 2009). Job stress influences employees’ performance at work, which  
257 also affects the customers’ perceptions of service quality and customer satisfaction (Karatepe  
258 & Tizabi, 2011). Job stress is influenced by several factors, called role stress that is both a  
259 source and an important premise of job stress. The work of Akgunduz (2015) examines three  
260 role stressors: role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload. The first two variables are  
261 negatively related to job satisfaction, while role overload shows a positive link. Akgunduz  
262 focuses on internal processes, and Karatepe and Nkendon (2014) explore the mediating role  
263 of emotional exhaustion in the relationships between customer-related social stressors and job  
264 performance. Another relevant role stressor is represented by work-family relationships. Given  
265 the hotel industry’s long and irregular working hours, high levels of job insecurity, and high  
266 work stress, some studies posit that hotel frontline employees are prime candidates for role  
267 conflict between work and family (Zhao, Mattila & Ngan, 2014). This work-family conflict  
268 refers to the incompatible and competing time and emotional demands from work and family  
269 (Karatepe & Kilic, 2007). This sub-topic provides a clear insight concerning “culture and  
270 people”: hotels should control role stress in order to avoid an excessive level of stress that  
271 generates turnover intentions, on one side, and culture disruption, on the other.

272  
273 Finally, organizational citizenship behavior is usually self-initiated by employees. Although  
274 this kind of behavior can enhance the overall effectiveness of organizational functions, the  
275 formal organizational reward system does not recognize behavior. Similarly, Kwak and Kim  
276 (2015) define organizational citizenship behavior as extra role behaviors that are not formally  
277 required and rewarded by the organization’s systems, but enhance organizational functioning  
278 and effectiveness. Organizational citizenship behavior is a relevant topic for hospitality firms,  
279 given the relevance of employee-customer relationship. Papers have identified some

280 antecedents of organizational citizenship behavior, including workload (Wei, Qu & Ma, 2012),  
281 emotional intelligence and emotional labor (Ramachandran et al., 2011), servant leadership, in  
282 which priority is placed on fulfilling the followers' needs (Kwak & Kim, 2015), perceived  
283 organizational support and psychological empowerment (Chiang & Hsieh, 2012). Hospitality  
284 firms able to generate, manage and increase organizational citizenship behavior can easily  
285 improve "culture and people", creating some important positive feedback in term of service  
286 quality and customer satisfaction.

287  
288

## 289 **5. Discussion and conclusions**

290 Conclusions are articulated at two levels (as findings): firstly, some propositions are drawn  
291 based on the connections between the ten EY insights and the 14 clusters (§5.1); secondly, some  
292 remarks are made based on the analytical inspection of commercial excellence and merger  
293 integration (§5.2). Finally, some limitations and future research agenda are reported (§5.3).

294  
295

### 296 **5.1. Holistic approach**

297 From an academic perspective, there is a need to take stock of outputs and ascertain its  
298 relevance with practice. We are not asserting that we have performed a gap analysis by  
299 matching outputs with current industry themes. This would have been rather difficult for several  
300 reasons. First, the time it takes to get from a kernel of an idea to the idea appearing in a top-  
301 ranked academic journal paper can two years. Six months to perform the research and write the  
302 paper and another twelve to eighteen months for the review process and revise and resubmit  
303 resubmissions. Then it can take several years for the ideas of the research to permeate to  
304 practice. The business world places a premium on knowledge, as a source of competitive  
305 advantage (Starkey & Madan, 2001). If we as academics ignore this issue, our research may  
306 lead to irrelevant theory and flawed practice. Our findings identify several areas associated with  
307 practice associated with impact and the preparedness of researchers in helping to achieve  
308 national development objectives around future growth strategies, such as the UK government's  
309 Industrial Strategy (Great Britain. Department for Business, 2017).

310

311 At the first level, the analysis reported in the Table 3 allows us to identify some topics developed  
312 in literature (rigor) and able to operationalize the ten EY insights (relevancy), which can help  
313 growth, innovation and dealing with culture. A first important remark concerns the multi-  
314 disciplinary approach that emerges from Table 3. Researchers have analyzed the EY insights  
315 using different theoretical approach: strategy, accounting, finance, efficiency, marketing,  
316 stakeholder theory, HRM, environmental management, technology, and agglomeration theory.  
317 This breadth of approaches indicates the complexity characterizing the lodging industry and the  
318 need of a unitary and holistic approach.

319 **Proposition 1.** To address EY insights, hotel management should work collaboratively with  
320 academics, so that bespoke holistic and interdisciplinary approaches can evolve. Academics  
321 should strive to create a synthesis between different research streams and share knowledge.

322

323 Table 3 proposes answers for each insight, ranging from 1 to 6 (see last line). In total, 27 sub-  
324 topics are proposed to operationalize nine connected insights, with an average of 3 sub-issues.  
325 Based on these findings, the following proposition is stated.

326 **Proposition 2.** To operationalize each connected insight, many sub-topics are relevant,  
327 showing the multi-dimensionality of each challenge.

328

329 Focusing the attention on a single insight, HRM is the discipline that accounts for the highest  
330 number of sub-topics, showing the importance of people and the complexity of organizational  
331 variables. This basket of items (insight 5, merger integration) includes HRM practices; personal  
332 skills (intellectual capital, relational capabilities); organizational variables (organizational  
333 commitment, organizational competences, organizational citizenship behavior, leadership,  
334 empowerment and knowledge sharing); as well as the ability to manage conflicts.

335 **Proposition 3.** HRM is the discipline that accounts for the highest number of sub-topics.  
336

337 Taken together the nine connected insights, marketing (inclusive of social media and online  
338 reviews) is the discipline linked with the highest number of EY challenges. In fact, marketing  
339 is related to commercial excellence (brand management, marketing strategies, customer  
340 satisfaction, service quality, market orientation, and quality & market orientation), critical  
341 success factors (social media & online reviews, website, and market orientation), and sharing  
342 economies (sales determinants, and pricing). Based on this evidence, the following proposition  
343 is formulated.

344 **Proposition 4.** Marketing sub-topics play a pivotal role in the EY insights.  
345

346 Finally, six trends are related to more than two clusters – commercial excellence is linked to  
347 six clusters, merger integration with five, sharing economy with four, creative development;  
348 technology and innovation; revenue recognition with three – while the three remaining insights  
349 focused only on one cluster (capital markets; critical success factors; global gaming). This  
350 evidence supports the following proposition.

351 **Proposition 5.** EY insights are mainly complex trends, connected with more than two clusters,  
352 which demonstrates the need for more impactful research together with an interdisciplinary  
353 approach.  
354

## 355

### 356 **5.2. Analytical inspection**

357 The second level of conclusions focuses on the two analytical inspections developed in §4.2  
358 (business excellence) and §4.3 (merger integration).

359 Concerning business excellence, four different sub-topics were analyzed: brand equity, internal  
360 branding, and service quality and customer satisfaction. As previously discussed, brand equity  
361 refers primarily to customer-based perspective and branding is centered on four determinants:  
362 brand awareness (or brand associations); brand image; perceived quality; brand loyalty. Despite  
363 the fact that branding is widely considered a key issue for hospitality firms, there is still a  
364 discussion regarding the juxtaposition between hotels affiliated with branded hotel chains, on  
365 one side, and independent hotels, on the other. Furthermore, the subject becomes more complex  
366 too because it involves strategies of either hotel properties, franchisors and management  
367 companies (Xiao, O'Neill, & Mattila, 2012). Some studies, as the work of Carvell, Canina and  
368 Sturman (2016), have found no advantages in all segments for either the affiliated hotels or the  
369 comparable unaffiliated properties. By contrast, the paper of O'Neill and Carlbäck (2011)  
370 affirms that branded hotels achieve higher occupancy but lower rates. Based on these opposing  
371 evidences, the following proposition is stated:

372 **Proposition 6.** Concerning business excellence, there is a contradicting relationship between  
373 affiliated and unaffiliated hotels and their operating performance (occupancy, ADR and  
374 RevPAR).  
375

376 Employees in the hospitality industry are both an internal resource and part of the product. For  
377 this reason, internal branding plays a crucial role. In particular, this nurturing process whereby  
378 employees are dialoged and trained with brand knowledge, influences brand equity.

379 **Proposition 7.** Internal branding plays a crucial role in creating and communicating the hotel  
380 brand. Internal branding positively affects brand equity.

381  
382 Finally, considering the binomial service quality and customer satisfaction, the first variable  
383 influences the second one and both are positively related to hotel performance (as depicted  
384 previously in Figure 4). Service quality can be analyzed and operationalized in many views.  
385 The current literature shows a prevalent supply approach mainly focused on service product.

386 **Proposition 8.** Service quality influences customer satisfaction; both are positively related to  
387 hotel performance.

388  
389 Focusing on merger integration, prior work has identified five determinants: intellectual capital  
390 and relational capabilities; work engagement; leadership, empowerment, knowledge sharing;  
391 stress role; organizational citizenship behavior. This broad list suggests the complexity in order  
392 to work on “culture and people” in the hospitality industry.

393 **Proposition 9.** In order to create and maintain a positive integrative culture, the rigor analysis  
394 suggests the relevance of many internal organizational processes.

395  
396 We now summarize the propositions formulated in Section 5.1 and 5.2 in Table 4.

397  
398 Table 4. The formulated propositions

### 1. Holistic approach

**Proposition 1.** To address EY insights, hotel management should work collaboratively with academics, so that bespoke holistic and interdisciplinary approaches can evolve. Academics should strive to create a synthesis between different research streams and share knowledge.

**Proposition 2.** To operationalize each connected insight, many sub-topics are relevant, showing the multi-dimensionality of each challenge.

**Proposition 3.** Focusing on one single insight, HRM is the discipline that accounts for the highest number of sub-topics.

### 2. Analytical inspection

**Proposition 4.** Marketing sub-topics play a pivotal role in the EY insights.

**Proposition 5.** EY insights are mainly complex trends, connected with more than two clusters, which demonstrates the need for more impactful research together with an interdisciplinary approach.

**Proposition 6.** Concerning business excellence, there is a contradicting relationship between affiliated and unaffiliated hotels and their operating performance (occupancy, ADR and RevPAR).

**Proposition 7.** Internal branding plays a crucial role in creating and communicating the hotel brand. Internal branding positively affects brand equity.

**Proposition 8.** Service quality influences customer satisfaction; both are positively related to hotel performance.

**Proposition 9.** In order to create and maintain a positive integrative culture, the rigor analysis suggests the relevance of many internal organizational processes.

399

400

401

402

### 5.3. Limitations and further research

403 This paper uses the SCOPUS database, which despite being authoritative will result in some  
404 research outputs not being accessible because of their unavailability at the time of the research.  
405 The SCOPUS database is not exhaustive of all the possible publications relating to tourism  
406 performance measurement, and we do not include books in our sample.

407 Groups of papers (cluster and main sub-groups) were identified using cluster analysis, while  
408 the corresponding topics (and sub-topics) were defined by reading each article. This method,  
409 assures reliability (cluster analysis) but, on the other hand, reduces generalizability, given the  
410 subjectively of content analysis. Some recent reviews (Sainaghi, Phillips & Zavarrone, 2017)

411 propose an objective method, based on keywords and computer-aided text analysis (CATA).  
412 Future researchers can deploy this technique to compare results achieved using the two  
413 approaches.

414 The clusters were identified using a software approach. This method, on one side, assures  
415 reliability but, on the other, some papers can fit within more than one cluster. This limitation is  
416 well known in the literature, however cluster analysis is considered a good tool to reduce the  
417 complexity of large sample. This is illustrated in the case of the present study, which is based  
418 on 734 papers. Furthermore, network analysis has proved to provide outcomes that often are  
419 not simply (or at all) visible using other methods.

420 Some limitations are applicable to the method used to operationalize practitioner challenges  
421 (relevancy). The use of EY report on its own, cannot fully represent the needs of the entire hotel  
422 sector. In fact, it is difficult to rely on a single consulting firm, which is not focused on the  
423 lodging sector. Future studies can pursue new ways to operationalize relevancy, by including  
424 interviews with key players or by considering more consulting reports. The EY insights may  
425 reflect relevant topic for practitioners but not for researchers. Said differently, academic  
426 research does not have to concern itself with all of industry challenges. But the UK government  
427 expects academics to make impacts beyond their traditional networks.

428 In this study the research team has compared the EY insights of 2016 with academic papers  
429 published in the previous 20 years. We could have created a match between the EY report of  
430 2016 and academic research published for the previous two decades.

431

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