Hospitality managers in turbulent times: the COVID-19 crisis

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores the role General Managers (GMs) play in mitigating the effects of the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

Design/methodology/approach – Qualitative structured interviews conducted online with 50 hospitality GMs from 45 countries are used to explore the impact of the pandemic on the industry's operational norms, and the role of managers in both managing the crisis and planning contingencies for recovery.

Findings – Our findings enhance the conceptual capital in this emerging field and provide insights on how GMs behave during crises. Four related sub-themes emerged from the data analysis, namely contingency planning and crisis management, resilience and impact on GM roles, the impact on hotels' key functional areas, and some GMs' suggestions for the future of luxury hospitality.

Research implications – This study generates empirical data that inform contemporary debates about crisis management and resilience in hospitality organizations at a micro-level operational perspective.

Practical implications – Findings suggest that, in times of uncertainty and crisis, luxury hotel GMs are vital in coping with changes and leading their organizations to recovery. GMs' resilience, and renewed role and abilities enables them to adapt rapidly to external changes on their business environment.

Originality/value – This study is unique in terms of scale and depth since it provides useful insights regarding the GM's role during an unprecedented crisis such as COVID-19.

Key Words – General Managers; Luxury Hotels; Crisis Management; Resilience; COVID-19

Paper Type – Research paper

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry, untenable in the absence of core elements such as safety, security, stability and free movement, and reliant on the operational specificities of the hospitality sector, is vulnerable to incidents of economic, political and social instability, natural catastrophes and pandemics (Israeli et al., 2011). The unpredictability and volatility associated with such incidents pose severe challenges, both at a macro and micro level; stakeholders must be prepared to mitigate ill effects and ensure the viability of the industry when disaster strikes. Incidents like economic crises, terrorism, political unrest, natural disasters, war and pandemics have captured the attention of academics focusing on tourism and hospitality, who have written extensively on the challenges that arise as a consequence, mainly from a macro-level perspective at the tourism destination (Zopiatis et al., 2019). New theoretical knowledge has primarily focused on holistic crisis management approaches and actions, such as communication, image restoration, and macro-level recovery efforts (Haywood, 2020), rather than contextualizing the factors that influence managerial actions during crises or hotel managers' perspective and preparedness (Paraskevas and Quek, 2019).

This paradigm seemed to be the norm for the global tourism industry until December 2019, when the world first heard of an infectious disease called COVID-19: the most significant challenge for tourism since the end of the Second World War. Since the start of 2020, COVID-19 has spread at an unprecedented rate, threating the health and lives of millions of people worldwide. Lockdowns and mandatory quarantines have been enforced in most countries, crippling the global economy, and paralyzing the tourism industry which suffered an estimated 50% decline in revenues (Baum et al., 2020). Airlines have been forced to ground their fleets;

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airports, hotels, casinos and restaurants have shut down; events and conferences have either been canceled or postponed; and industry operators are facing the harsh reality of lay-offs and bankruptcies (Baum and Hai, 2020; Gossling et al., 2020). Echoing the above, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports extremely low hotel occupancy rates (30% or lower in May 2020) and even closures at the global level, whereas big chains have seen their stock prices plunge (OECD, 2020). Finally, with regards to the impact on employment, the World Travel Tourism Council (WTTC) forecast 100.8 million jobs at risk, whereas Sigala (2020) argues that 120 million tourism jobs could be lost. It is evident that the crisis has created a highly uncertain future, forcing the industry to reinvent itself in order to survive (Haywood, 2020).

As expected, this pandemic has caused a surge in studies, mostly exploratory in nature, that draw parallels with political and economic crises (Gursoy and Chi, 2020). Nevertheless, and despite the uniqueness of the situation, most of these studies espouse the pre-COVID macro-level research paradigm, with only a few exploring the ways in which hospitality establishments, and the managers therein, are dealing with the crisis, especially with regards to management plans, strategies and actions (Paraskevas and Quek, 2019). Notably, most studies on resilience focus on the macro perspective of market turbulence, with little consideration to employees' ability to respond to change or crises. This conceptual gap is supported by numerous scholars, with Henderson and Ng (2004) suggesting that accommodation managers have limited ability to deal with crises, and Okumus et al. (2005) criticizing the sector's crisis planning practices. Others propose that industry-specific research on crisis management should be more interdisciplinary (Haywood, 2020), with Pennington-Gray (2018) advocating for "*greater understanding of the link between crisis management, resilience and sustainability*" (p. 138), whereas Jones and Comfort (2020) suggest that contingency planning is not

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necessarily linked with sustainability and emphasize the importance of synergies and active

partnerships. Adding to this discourse, Sigala (2020) suggests that the current situation is an

opportune time to study crisis management and resilience, especially as these topics focus on

changing human attitudes and nurturing recovery capabilities.

Reflecting on the above, and responding to growing calls by numerous scholars (Baum et al.,

2020; Lai and Wong, 2020), this study, the first to investigate the pandemic at a micro-level,

contributes to the areas of crisis management, resilience, and managerial roles during the

pandemic. Recommendations for luxury hotel stakeholders are made, specifically on how to

remain competitive through such crises.

2. Literature review

2.1 Crisis management

In contemporary business literature, a crisis is a "*disruption that physically affects a system as
a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, its existential core*"
(Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992, p. 15). Any major event that can cause negative effects that
threaten the viability of organizations, companies or industries, and is characterized by
ambiguity of cause can therefore be defined as a crisis (Paraskevas and Quek, 2019). Early
studies provided broad classifications of crises over proposing actual models to manage such
eventualities; suggestions have tended to be "*reactive, intuitive and based on prior experience*"
(Paraskevas and Quek, 2019, p. 420).

Numerous scholars (e.g., Crandall et al., 2010; Ritchie, 2009) propose that, in order to
understand and manage a crisis, it is first important to analyze the different response stages
involved. Ritchie (2004) proposed three distinct stages: proactive pre-crisis planning, strategy

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implementation, and evaluation and feedback. Based on Ritchie's three stages, Wang and Ritchie (2012) refer to actions such as planning and development taken prior to the crisis, Chen et al. (2019) investigate how to implement a crisis management plan during and following the crisis, and Cakar (2018) identifies a response and recovery stage where actions taken by organizations to minimize negative effects are evaluated. From a different perspective, scholars have also suggested that a crisis can be seen as an opportunity for innovation (Wang and Ritchie, 2012); some have proposed reviewing the marketing mix or market segments, using social media, downsizing, simplifying processes, redefining labor needs and skills, and re-training employees (Lai and Wong, 2020; Pappas, 2018).

As previously noted, studies on crisis management focus on the macro-level perspective with only a handful exploring the role of hotel managers at a micro level (Israeli et al., 2011). In their compilation of crisis management good practices, Israeli and Reichel (2003) evaluated managers' actions during or after crises, whereas Okumus and Karamustafa (2005) proposed actions related to marketing, infrastructure maintenance, human resources and governmental assistance. Israeli et al. (2011) examined crisis management in the Indian luxury hotel sector focusing on managerial actions and concluded that "*gaps exist between the importance managers assign to practice and their implementation of these practices*" (p. 373). Based on the above, the human resources of an organization are an important element of crisis management.

2.2 Resilience

Resilience is defined as "*the system's capacity to absorb disturbance and re-organize so to retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedbacks*" (Paraskevas and Quek, 2019, p. 421). Brown et al. (2018) provide conceptual clarity by suggesting that resilience is

about adapting to change and developing flexible and innovative solutions. Models of organizational resilience consider the ability to manage weaknesses and threats through planning and adapting to emerging situations. According to Prayag (2018), resilience is linked to both extraordinary and incremental change, whereas crisis management is linked to change that occurs due to extraordinary circumstances. Key resilience indicators include "*elements of learning, risk identification, vulnerability assessment, proactive posture, planning strategies and recovery priorities*" (Paraskevas and Quek, 2019, p. 421). In the hospitality sector, resilience is defined as "*a dynamic condition describing the capacity of a hotel, together with its stakeholders (staff, guests, the local community), to assess, innovate, adapt, and overcome possible disruptions that are triggered by disaster*" (Brown et al., 2018, p. 69).

Resilience studies in tourism mostly focus on sustainability or ecological perspectives (Pennington-Gray, 2018) in relation to political and economic crises (Cellini and Cuccia, 2015) or terrorism (Liu and Pratt, 2017), with most reviewing response and recovery efforts (Paraskevas and Quek, 2019), whereas in hospitality, such studies mainly refer to corporate sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Ertuna et al., 2019). According to Prayag (2018), the connection between resilience and crisis management has to date been neglected by tourism scholars. The same author suggests that the nature and idiosyncrasies of tourism have created the need to investigate resilience with an emphasis on the effectiveness of managerial development and managers' readiness to respond to crises.

Resilience is based on "*the capacity of individuals to deal with sudden and unexpected change*" (Sheppard and Williams, 2016, p. 20). Individuals demonstrate resilience when they are supported by the capacity and readiness of their organization to change, as well as optimal, employee-centered human resource management (HRM) practices (Filimonau et al., 2020).

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Experience gained from tackling different crises can enhance hospitality managers' ability to adapt to changes and solve disruptions (Senbeto and Hon, 2020). According to Brown et al. (2018), resilience requires ongoing learning, flexibility, adaptation and evaluation, as well as adequate organizational resources, especially with regards to training (Filimonau et al., 2020); others highlight the necessity for proactive leadership that promotes hotel and employee safety, and ensures exceptional service (Wang and Ritchie, 2010; Zhang et al., 2020). Undeniably, human capital, defined as people's knowledge, learned and inherent skills, and physical and mental health plays a significant role in crisis management.

2.3 Managerial roles, crisis management and resilience

Mintzberg's (1973) seminal yet controversial work proposed ten management roles, which include interpersonal, informational and decisional elements. His conceptual reasoning, elaborated in subsequent work (see, Mintzberg, 1994), was that the individual's role is affected by their personal history, values, knowledge and experience, as well as their mental models of interpreting the world; thus, he proposed a framework with three specific components, namely, purpose, perspective and position. The model has been criticized (Fondas and Steward, 1994) for disregarding the impact of the individual's sociocultural context, which may be influenced by different events i.e., crises.

Literature indicates that, even though dealing with constant change is inherent to the managerial role, there is no clear and coherent framework (Cortada, 2009) in relation to managerial crisis management and resilience (Giousmpasoglou, 2019). Studies propose different roles and skills for hotel GMs, which are influenced by context and environment e.g., operational skills, managerial and leadership skills, human skills, as well as, abilities in information technology, financial management, and marketing. Other studies mention the need

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for GMs to be adept at strategy and HRM, work-life balance (Deery and Jago, 2015), customer handling, and networking; all suggesting that managerial roles in hospitality vary and managers must adapt their work roles to their own circumstances. We note that these roles reflect those suggested by Okumus and Karamustafa (2005) as vital in dealing with a crisis situation. Echoing this sentiment, Jones and Comfort (2020) recently suggested that managers should be able to design and implement strategies—beyond traditional business models—to ensure operational transition and sustainability. Furthermore, strategic HRM requires GMs to demonstrate sophisticated and integrated talent management, which should include a multi-cultural perspective, a focus on people-handling, technological proficiency, and leadership skills (Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou, 2019).

The manager's role and its relationship to managerial effectiveness and performance are the foci of considerable research interest in hospitality (Giousmpasoglou, 2019). Hospitality managers need to anticipate, be well equipped and able to prepare their teams for potential crises through mapping of potential threats, risks and vulnerabilities, as well as training to prevent and minimize damage (Chen et al., 2019). As noted by Pappas (2018), this is a complex process requiring decisions to be made on multiple fronts, e.g., operations, marketing, pricing policies, etc. Crisis management and resilience-building require the application of managerial expertise (Brown et al., 2018) across the board, but above all, they require the willingness and determination of managers to deal with the crisis itself. Such proactive attitudes in dealing with crises and managing staff are more likely to be seen, according to Filimonau et al. (2020), if the managers are first assured their own jobs are safe.

Research suggests that disaster planning is a core function of hotel managers (Wang and Ritchie, 2012). In a study of accommodation managers in Australia, Ritchie et al. (2011) found

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that 75% of participants had undertaken training on disaster planning. In this study, hotel managers and employees were confident in their disaster management knowledge and skills, following a proactive training approach, which clarified and alleviated potential role gaps during crises. Managers must perform different roles aimed at reducing the impact of crises, minimizing adverse effects and steering the organization through the pre- and post-crisis phases (Wang and Ritchie, 2012). With regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, Sigala (2020) highlights the importance of strongly collaborating with external systems; hotel managers should therefore adopt collaborative action and social bricolage.

Mintzberg (1994) believes it is possible for managers to anticipate the unexpected if they pay attention to signals from the environment. Managers who espouse a superficial "*it can't happen to us*" mentality, on the other hand, fail to acknowledge their organization's vulnerability to crises and resulting negative externalities. Rousaki and Alcott (2007) suggest that if managers believe they will not fail, they reduce their responsiveness and preparedness to crises.

Echoing the above, in a study of the accommodation sector in Australia, Rousaki and Alcott (2007) identified three factors that define an individual's crisis planning behavior: attitude, subjective norms and past crisis experience. Along the same lines, Bharwani and Talib (2017) added emotional and cultural intelligence, as well as interpersonal skills, whereas Racherla and Hu (2009) stress collaborative knowledge-enabled crisis preparedness. Moreover, Haver et al. (2014), and Rousaki and Alcott (2007) propose that hospitality managers should demonstrate emotional regulation—the ability to make good decisions in stressful situations—to control their own behavior, as well as efficiently manage their teams' emotions. The same authors note that "*positive emotions are useful in achieving resilience by having faith to ride out the storm, handle anxiety and tolerate frustrations*" (Haver et al., 2014, p. 154). It is therefore prudent to

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examine the psychological factors of the individual in crisis planning, such as "*experience, values and beliefs, messages, personal attributes, social and cultural norms, attitudes and perception*" (Wang and Ritchie, 2012, p. 1059).

GMs should demonstrate both psychological and decision-making capabilities to be prepared to deal with stress and crises. According to Rousaki and Alcott (2007, p. 30) "*the more unfamiliar the organization with the event, the greater will be the requirement for adaptation and change to cope with the event.*" Studies propose that the organization's size and type may influence crisis management and managerial roles (i.e., Gursoy and Chi, 2020; Rousaki and Alcott, 2007). Large firms usually have a multidivisional structure and exhibit synergy in strategic coordination, which also implies greater readiness and/or crisis management systems and skills. For example, Filimonau et al. (2020) propose that larger hotels (e.g., international chain-affiliated establishments) demonstrate higher levels of organizational resilience and have higher potential to survive crises as they tend to hold more capital and be better structured. On the other hand, smaller companies (SMEs), may have more basic corporate coordination (Eggers, 2020) with crisis management as part of the GM's role. Here, we are likely to see GMs adopt a more humane HRM approach, which contributes to employee empowerment and increases organizational commitment in times of crisis (Filimonau et al., 2020). In this study, we investigated both independent and chain-affiliated luxury properties, which may demonstrate differences between decisions made at a corporate level versus those taken at the hotel level. Nevertheless, we note that it was beyond the scope of this study to explore differences at corporate, chain and/or local ownership level.

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3. Research methodology

3.1 Data collection

This study focuses on the luxury hotel GM's role in crisis management and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors chose a qualitative inductive approach to capture participants' experiences and provoke in-depth reflections on their role during times of crisis. The research design focused on data collection via interview questions in order to understand the phenomenon at hand (Morse and Richards, 2002). Fifty structured interviews were conducted with participants from all over the world. Due to the enforced shutdown of the accommodation sector, qualitative interviews were deemed the most appropriate and practical way of pursuing this line of investigation. The research questions were formulated through an extensive literature review (Patton, 2015), and from informal discussions with experienced luxury hotel GMs; the asynchronous online interview design emerged as the most appropriate format.

The primary challenge of this approach was to extricate valuable data from participants with differing levels of willingness and comfort regarding sharing of information. The interview protocol ensured that the interview questions aligned with research questions, prior to conducting an inquiry-based conversation with the participants (Patton, 2015). Feedback was provided by a third research team member on the protocol to ensure reliability, and finally the instrument was piloted with two GMs to ensure that the order of the questions worked for the study (Merriam, 2009).

The researchers' intention was to approach GMs or executives working only in luxury hospitality establishments: upscale brands, major luxury chains, and exclusive small- or medium-sized properties. This sector was considered appropriate for our study since, as

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suggested by Sharma (2016), small organizations may not have crisis management policies due to their limited resources. A convenience sample, produced from the lead author's extensive LinkedIn network of 185 GMs from 50 countries, was utilized. Given the qualitative nature of the study, a sample size of fifty (n=50) was considered adequate (Ritchie et al., 2011) to provide rich data. Bryman (2008) proposed that just 20 interviews may be adequate, however data collection continued until the authors observed saturation in the responses (Fontaine et al., 2013).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to ensure richness of data. The interview design first focused on collecting demographic and work data, including interviewees' gender, age, years of experience as GM, hotel location (country), and type of business in which they were currently employed. Next, six open-ended questions, based on literature and discussions with GMs, encouraged interviewees to share their views and provide information regarding their role during the pandemic, with particular emphasis on key operational areas (i.e., people management, sales, customer service). Study participants were also asked to reflect on the crisis and provide their thoughts regarding the post-COVID era of the luxury hospitality sector.

Potential participants were approached, as mentioned, on LinkedIn via a personalized message, which included a brief outline of the study, information on their consent to participate and a link to the interview questions. Online Surveys (formerly BOS) was the platform used; access was provided through the lead author's university. A reminder was sent to all potential participants in the week following the original message. Data collection took place between May 25th and June 10th, 2020.

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3.2 Data analysis

An exploratory approach via content analysis was adopted in order to expand our conceptual understanding of crisis management, resilience and the role of GMs in the luxury hotel sector. The interviews were analyzed with clear intention and structure, as the main purpose was to illuminate the study in an exhaustive way (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009), and gain a better understanding of the phenomenon in a context that had not been studied before.

Four stages (Braun and Clarke, 2006) were utilized to identify the themes or key issues that aid in understanding GMs' roles in relation to crisis management. The interviews were transcribed, and, through repeated reading, initial ideas were noted. Coding then took place, putting these initial ideas into sub-themes, informed by GM discussions, literature, and the objectives of this study. Each sub-theme was reviewed in terms of its relevance to crisis management and resilience. Four sub-themes emerged, namely: contingency planning and crisis management, GMs' resilience and impact on GMs roles, the impact on hotels' key functional areas, and GMs' predictions for luxury hospitality.

Exploratory qualitative data analysis followed a systematic way to analyze data in order to be generalized. This method has some level of subjectivity, which can affect validity and reliability, nevertheless, we used a systematic process of data analysis and coding to confirm the trustworthiness of the findings. The researchers' skills and judgement were considered adequate to ensure reliability (Hall and Valentin, 2005). To ensure validity and reliability, an audit trail and audit process were utilized as proposed by Bengtsson (2016). Two of the authors performed the analysis separately and after discussing the results, consensus was obtained. The process started with decontextualization, as both authors became familiar with the data before splitting it into smaller units. Each unit was labelled with a code (open coding) and listed to

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minimize cognitive change during the process. Next, recontextualization took place, with researchers re-checking the content and highlighting key themes. Any unhighlighted areas were checked following an in-depth literature review, that had taken place after data collection, to prevent intended bias and perceived notions (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). In the third step, themes and categories were identified and researchers purged duplicates. Finally, a compilation analysis was written up.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Participant profiles

In order to simplify the coding process for the data analysis, each participant was given a number, P1 to P50, that corresponded to a unique response number (URN). Most respondents were male (94%), aged between 45 and 55 (58%). The under-representation of female GMs was expected due to the comparatively low proportion of women holding senior management positions in the hospitality industry (Marinakou, 2014). The majority of respondents (60%) reported more than ten years' experience as GMs in luxury hotels. In terms of business type (ownership status), most hotels (60%) belong to a multinational chain, the rest being national or local hotel chains (18%), or independently owned (22%). Table 1, below, provides an overview of the GM profiles:

Table 1: Participant GM profiles

Insert table 1 here

4.2. Key findings and discussion

The key findings correspond to the research objectives and are set within the context of COVID-19's reverberations in the luxury hotel sector across the globe.

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4.2.1. Contingency planning and crisis management

While industry practices tend to require some form of contingency planning and crisis management, a small number of respondents noted otherwise in their own experience. Seven GMs (P15, P22, P26, P32, P40, P45, P48) reported that they had no crisis management or contingency planning systems in place. Notably, two GMs (P14 and P19) reported that they had relevant systems and detailed plans in place due to prior experience with other pandemics (i.e., SARS):

> *Since I have personal experience in handling SARS in 2003, we started our pro-active crisis plan very early before owners, HQ and even government started to get involved on our level. Relevant guidelines were later provided but in a less organized and structured manner.* (P14)

The majority of GMs who worked for international hotel chains reported having a systematic approach to crisis management, such as "*guidelines set by the corporate office*" (P28). It seems that international hotel chains, due to their organization, internal functioning and operation, are generally equipped to deal with such eventualities, which is important as past experience with crises has a positive correlation with crisis readiness (Filimonau et al., 2020; Rousaki and Alcott, 2007). Existing plans were not necessarily designed to cope with "*the magnitude of COVID-19*" (P34), but this did not hinder GMs' willingness, regardless of the type and size of organization, to respond to the crisis. They acknowledged the need to take further action due to the lack of COVID-19-specific procedures: "*We learn, adapt, implement and review new ways daily*" (P4). Responding to this urgency during the crisis period, companies developed new protocols and standard operating procedures (SOPs) (P17), and new hygiene standards (P38) in order to create a safe environment for hotel employees and guests (P25). Most respondents felt that their organizations responded quickly to the pandemic, and that they had access to resources and an adequate crisis management plan already in place. New purpose-made training programs for staff, including GMs, has been key for the implementation of crisis

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management plans. Support and guidance from corporate offices in terms of training and resources was considered vital in implementing contingency planning. Processes and procedures were also updated regularly by the head office as part of their crisis management strategy.

Interestingly, GMs' preparedness was evident from their contribution to new terms negotiated with insurance companies. GMs were particularly wary of insurance companies using the vulnerable position the pandemic had placed hotels in as a business opportunity:

Insurance policies adopted worldwide did not have provisions for a pandemic like COVID-19! They claimed pandemics do not come under the definition of 'force majeure' (unforeseeable circumstances) when hotels like mine started claiming insurance under business interruption clauses... Insurance companies are now coming back with offers to include pandemics under force majeure clauses for business interruption. But the deductible is huge! (P1)

Pushing back against insurers is just one way that GMs' responses reflected an overall confidence and preparedness regarding the existing crisis, a topic further discussed in the following section under resilience:

The tourism industry has always been and must continue to be very responsive to crises and uncertainties, no matter how they come about: sudden occupancy loss, natural disasters (earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, etc.), or terrorist attacks. (P31)

4.2.2. GM resilience

GMs' resilience was evident throughout the responses. Despite the high levels of uncertainty and the volatile business environment, more than half the GMs appeared confident and ready to deal with the consequences of the pandemic, demonstrating high levels of resilience. Resilient managers should be able to retain and manage human resources in order to return to business processes and improve and maintain organizational resilience (Brown et al., 2018). GMs in this study operated as *change agents* demonstrating crisis readiness due to past experience, knowledge, skills and competencies. They had knowledge of the available

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resources and information of their organization, therefore exhibited clear thinking and smoothly channeled resources. For example, new operational plans were viewed as an opportunity to improve the hospitality experience for customers and, thus remain competitive in a very demanding and volatile market:

> *I spend most of my time with the sales team to find creative ways to increase revenues and drive up the volume… The top target is to return to a break-even situation for the hotel.* (P14)

In theory, given their willingness and ability to go through the emotional and cognitive process of personal change, resilient managers should be able to bounce back and perform better than before (Haver et al., 2014). Empirically, resilience is linked to organizational performance, commitment and job satisfaction (Brown et al., 2018; Filimonau et al., 2020). Apart from pre-planning, capacity-building is a key measure to bolster resilience: it helps organizations adapt and change, and also predicts their ability to survive disasters. In line with these principles, in this study, GMs integrated elements of resilience into their daily routine in order to encourage situational awareness, improve their adaptive capacity, and identify possible vulnerabilities. The following statements reflect the GMs' approach to resilience: "*We must keep the morale of the team high*" (P6); and "*...we will evolve and refine [processes] and our business will continue to prosper*" (P46).

4.2.3. Impact on GM roles and daily routine

COVID-19 has impacted GMs' roles and daily routines in three key areas: 1) leadership skills and resilience, 2) work-life balance, and 3) new procedures, operational standards and re-opening plans. These are discussed in the following section in terms of their impact on functional areas.

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Leadership skills and resilience are two competencies luxury hotel GMs are meant to develop throughout their career. These competencies are critical during crisis periods, like the COVID-19 pandemic, when key business functions are disrupted (Brown et al., 2018). GMs in this case had to devote more time to thinking rather than doing. The role of the GM during a crisis shifted in response to it:

> *You need to be a leader more than a manager. You lead by example because everyone is looking at you. It's all the more difficult due to the fact that you need to be ready and trained more and better than anybody else.* (P17)

Frequent personal communication and good interpersonal skills (Mintzberg, 1994) play an important role in the GM's ability to motivate and inspire teams in difficult times, as well as ensure customer loyalty:

> *I communicate with every single employee and try to motivate them with everyday news about our business. As 95% are at home, it is important to support them at least with motivation and to keep them updated with the ongoing situation.* (P41)

> *[You must] lead as a positive example of care and compassion; at the same time, you must encourage the team to maximize the opportunity to selectively save costs and drive revenue opportunities. Most importantly, be present, encouraging and positive to inspire hope for the future.* (P14)

Confirming findings by Bharwani and Jauhari (2017), the GMs' emotional ties with their teams emerged as typical of the luxury hotel sector. Team members were seen as part of the '*family*', with GMs looking after their interests: "*[I need to] stay even closer to my team and support them. We can only overcome this together*" (P28). It is widely acknowledged that this kind of relationship increases staff loyalty and achieves higher retention rates (Marinakou and Giousmpasoglou, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). As already mentioned above, the key leadership role performed by GMs during transition and crisis periods is that of change agent: "*This is where true leadership comes into play; by managing crises and adapting to change while keeping the team engaged and focused*" (P50). GMs demonstrated readiness and preparedness to face the crisis by performing changes at all levels: technical, HR, marketing, operations etc.

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The GM's decision-making role in entrepreneurship and resource allocation activities, as noted by Mintzberg (1994), was also found to be vital on the road to recovery, as it demonstrates evidence of preparedness in the pre-crisis period (Wang and Ritchie, 2012). Top managers' personal psychology was evidently good: GMs in this study were aware of the changes in the environment and were able to notice danger signs in order to make their organization crisis-prepared.

> We've had no revenue-generating activities since the beginning of lockdown in our country on March 19th. The focus was on preparing models of financial predictions for owners and readjusting the cost lines with the new norm. (P34)

GMs identified significant changes in their role and daily routine in the area of *work-life balance*. Under normal circumstances, GMs spend most of their time at their hotel, interacting with the key stakeholders (customers, staff, suppliers, the local community, and the public sector) (Giousmpasoglou, 2019). During the COVID-19 pandemic, most face-to-face interactions were replaced by virtual meetings and webinars, which, on the practical level, saw GMs perform many job-related tasks in front of a computer screen. The changing work pattern has had certain benefits, including engagement in professional development activities and spending quality time with family:

> This period gave me the opportunity for e-learning, webinars, etc. and will allow me to be more efficient when hotel operations start up again. (P2)

> Hoteliers tend to spend very long hours at work. COVID-19 has done something great for us. We got closer to our families and our children. We also had the opportunity to show our social responsibility towards colleagues and other members of society. (P29)

On the other hand, change was not always positive: uncertainty, large salary cuts and job losses (P3, P26, P45) resulted in increased stress and anxiety levels. P45 felt "*uncertainty, stress, and difficulty in planning ahead due to the unknown situation,*" while P26 found "*remote working and gauge on mental health*" to be highly stressful. P10 added*: "I trust the people I talk to less, I'm taking action in isolation, there's a cold working atmosphere.*" Rousaki and Alcott (2007)

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propose that past learning inhibits new learning. In view to this, GMs took on an overall forward-looking stance, relying on their knowledge to identify the best possible solutions for the business and their employees. Some examples, also noted in the work of Jiang and Wen (2020), included implementing stress management programs and recruiting occupational psychologists to support employees struggling with the effects of the pandemic. In the meantime, some GMs dedicated time to pursue new planning avenues:

> *[I'm focusing on] staying productive and positive, whilst working with the executive team on devising innovative new concepts that'll serve as differentiators and give us the competitive edge when we reopen.* (P16)

4.2.4. Impact on key functional areas

GMs closely monitor four functional areas that are key to the survival of the business: hotel operations and customer service, hotel sales, revenue management, and people management; all areas impacted by the crisis. In terms of *hotel operations and customer service*, respondents all agreed that the industry is moving towards a new business model in response to the pandemic. Changes were mainly related to health and safety (Jiang and Wen, 2020), as well as the use of IT, all of which were expected to increase costs; in the F&B department, for example, the increase was estimated at 15% (P1). While self-service technology and artificial intelligence are already used in the industry (Bitner and Wang, 2014), these elements have now become a necessity in delivering luxury services and enhancing guest experiences.

> *… [we need] a new model of operations with revised staffing and quality standards of operation. The operation must become more flexible to deal with reduced demand for the foreseeable future…The challenge in continuing in this new norm is to provide meaningful service and human interaction to guests despite the limitations we are experiencing.* (P34)

> *Heartfelt service is at the epicenter of every respected hotel management company in the world... covering the smiles with masks, the facial expressions… Trying to connect with guests and visitors at a distance or through plexiglass as if you're at a bank … it's not the same!* (P1)

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GMs unanimously agreed that *customer expectations* will focus on "*getting the guarantee that high safety measures have been taken*" (P31, P34) by the hotel. P1 added that customer expectations "*will be at least on par with the pre-COVID-19 era if not higher, due to the anticipation created in the prolonged shutdown,*" while P34 added, "*customer service will have to remain memorable and offer an experience.*" The customer-centric approach in luxury hospitality is now likely to "*focus on private experiences, exclusivity and digital transformation*" (P24). New technologies came up repeatedly in GM responses as a means to reduce direct contact with staff wherever feasible. Moreover, guests should expect "*less cross-communication with staff members, enjoying instead the services of a personal concierge throughout their stay*" (P31). Those who had already implemented and tested the new hygiene protocols and standards reported that most loyal guests "*have been supportive and understood the situation*" (P41). It is key to note that standards and expectations have been revised in the other direction as well. Customers are expected to adjust their behavior as hotel guests, with consequences for non-compliance with new regulations.

In terms of *sales and revenue management*, GMs focused their attention on room sales. There was broad agreement amongst the respondents that sales efforts should target the local and regional markets using online promotions (P24, P32). Larger organizations have dedicated departments that deal with promotion, otherwise it is the GMs themselves who tend to undertake this role. When it came to collaborating with online travel agents (OTAs)—that are gradually replacing traditional travel agents and tour operators (Yin et al., 2019)—respondents gave conflicting responses. P39 for example, suggested that hotels should "*stay close to OTAs*" in order to cope with the occupancy drop, while P3 hoped to "*get more direct business and less from OTAs.*" Less dependence on OTAs could result in increased revenue due to the avoidance of high commissions. Regardless of the distribution channel used to sell rooms, some argue

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that a "*price war*" (P28, P32) amongst hotels is imminent on the local, regional and global scale. More flexibility was also seen as important with regards to change and cancellation policies, which would allow customers to amend or cancel their bookings without extra charges.

Challenges associated with *people management* and staffing levels, and actions aimed at controlling labor costs were mentioned frequently. At the time the data was being collected, two-thirds of the businesses in this study were closed. Hotel employees were either on a government support scheme or receiving a reduced salary, while compulsory redundancies and termination of contracts were also reported. The majority of participants expressed their intention to keep as much of the existing staff as possible, in some cases they even "*took a bank loan to pay salaries*" (P3). Changes to management were also foreseen due to organizational restructuring and downsizing: "*The focus is on fewer staff to take on more tasks. We will also restructure reporting lines by eliminating some layers of management*" (P50). As already mentioned, staff training was highly valued in keeping the hotels profitable (P14). Some GMs proposed that the current crisis will dramatically increase unemployment among people working in the luxury hospitality sector globally, thus creating a larger pool of available talent; a notion also suggested by Filimonau et al. (2020). At the same time, GMs highlight the need for candidates to possess the skills, willingness and ability to perform in demanding working conditions (P2).

4.2.5. Predictions for the luxury hospitality sector

Hotel managers should value preparedness and devote time to planning for possible scenarios to face risk (Rousaki and Alcott, 2007). This is no small task, as there are myriad events without any prior signals, making it difficult for managers to consistently identify them (Mintzberg,

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1994). Nevertheless, managers in this study demonstrated high levels of knowledge and expertise to deal with crises by constantly scanning the environment in which they operate for possible threats.

The participant GMs had conflicting views regarding the road to recovery and the timeline for this process. Perhaps this was due to their diverse contexts, countries and types of organization. The hospitality sector's full recovery was predicted between 2021 and 2022, with P44 suggesting that "*once it's calm, all should be back to normal by end of the first quarter of 2021,*" whereas P50 argued that the sector "*will be in survival mode for couple of years at least.*" The road to recovery depends of several exogenous factors such as the availability of quick tests (P19), the development of a COVID-19 vaccine (P12), and government intervention (P14) and support (P28):

> *...we expect international travel to gradually return, starting with destinations within each region. This will depend on a country's ability and performance in managing the pandemic within its borders.* (P32)

The findings suggest that luxury hospitality was expected to be the first to recover, much sooner than other sectors of the hospitality industry (P31). The sector also depends on the airline industry's recovery: local and regional travel—within the same country and with neighboring countries—was expected to resume quicker compared to travel based on long-haul flights:

> *I expect the global luxury hotel sector to be at 70% of what it was by next summer (2021) and that's only if... airlines resume their operations to meet travel demand as it progressively recovers.* (P12)

Based on their experience, participant GMs foresaw that the "*strong brands will survive*" (P24), while others may disappear, depending on the magnitude of the current economic crisis, as well as the local/regional market characteristics:

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…some independent hotels as well as chains will survive and some not; it will be according to location, but especially their agility and adaptability in facing the huge economic challenge still coming our way. (P25)

Europe might be fine, but this is devastating for South Africa. I'm not sure we will ever recover as we place so much emphasis on international travel… if as a country and continent we are not able to get control of the virus, no one will visit us. (P40)

As a direct consequence, GMs proposed that a new business model will emerge in the luxury hospitality sector: *"More restructuring of operations… unprofitable hotels will be weeded out… more consolidation… more owners will want to franchise their hotels"* (P39). Moreover, a diversification in terms of products and services in luxury hospitality, in order to meet the consumers' changing demands was discussed:

…we will see a rise (in demand) for villas/private spaces in hotels. We can also expect longer vacations, where families will combine working and vacationing, averaging 15 days. (P1)

Part of these changes are temporary and depend on the duration and eventual eradication of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some perceived these changes as an opportunity to innovate (P16), improve industry standards, and enhance the overall customer experience:

…in the short term, businesses will offer bigger spaces and distancing measures, and nice packed meals but eventually, everything will get back to its normal state and once it happens, we will all have a great experience when it comes to hygiene, health, safety and quality control. (P41)

The pandemic will direct businesses to take a new look at guest engagement expectations and use of technology to improve [levels of] service. Guests will continue to expect elevated [levels of] service; however, operators must be innovative to achieve the same levels of customer satisfaction. The result will be a change in the definition of what is luxury in the new normal. (P5)

Table 2 exhibits a summary of this study's key findings.

Table 2: Summary of key findings

Insert Table 2 here

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5. Conclusions and implications

5.1 Conclusions and theoretical contribution

Early findings from COVID-19-related tourism research challenge industry operational norms and enhance our horizons on new and innovative ways of not only overcoming the current crisis but also reshaping the future of the industry (Sigala, 2020). This paper responds to Israeli et al.'s (2011) suggestion that studies should investigate crisis management in a diversity of locations and contexts. Gossling et al. (2020) also propose that research should look at the structural and transformational changes necessary to guide the industry out of the 'storm' and into a new normality. This study, which focuses on the GM's role as change agent in managing a crisis, suggests that future endeavors should espouse a more human-centered paradigm, especially with regards to resilience-building. More specifically, it contributes to the theory of resilience and crisis management by exploring the context of luxury hospitality. Findings highlight the significant role of GMs in effective disaster and crisis management in luxury hotels, thus contributing to HRM theory and talent management.

Although the nature and magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic has not yet been captured, this study found that GMs are prepared to engage in crisis planning and management by relying on experience, expertise and business contingency plans. The findings of this study expand our theoretical horizons by proposing that, in order for hospitality organizations to effectively deal with crises, GM roles must become more flexible; only then can GMs take the necessary actions and act as change agents to build business resilience and lead business recovery (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Theoretical framework

Insert Figure 1 here

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Our findings, aligned with Wang and Ritchie (2012), suggest that, to build resilience and perform crisis management, luxury hotels GMs must take action at three different levels. Prior to a crisis, GMs must develop a detailed crisis management plan and a human-centered HRM strategy in order to provide employees with the necessary training to effectively deal with such eventualities. During the crisis, they must be proactive, and able to communicate and collaborate with external systems and internal staff. Finally, following the crisis, systems must be put in place to measure, evaluate, and learn from actions taken.

This study confirms academic and practitioner consensus that the economic recovery for the industry is likely to be gradual (Baum and Hai, 2020; Sigala, 2020). GMs believe it will take time for people to feel comfortable and safe to once again leave their homes and travel for either leisure or business. In order to minimize the damage and losses, the industry must act quickly and decisively. Hospitality GMs have the capacity to lead this effort in close collaboration with their operational teams and based on new business models that are shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic. As the hospitality and tourism industry is faced with constant changes, GMs are ready to deal with such events (Sigala, 2020).

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, the pandemic can highlight many positives of the GM role. The key GM qualities that emerged in this context were leadership, work-life balance and managing stress, crisis management, team building, and resilience-building. It is clear that traditional leadership, recruitment and motivation are not appropriate for such crisis situations; instead, GMs must employ innovative methods to inspire, engage and motivate employees, especially in lockdown and remote working conditions. Managers must also comprehend the impact of the crisis on employees and understand their own influence on resilience and organizational readiness for change in turbulent environments. Beyond their role as change

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agents, GMs can also use lockdowns for personal and professional development, and at the same time offer training to staff to build resilience. GMs can act as role models by being flexible, demonstrating adaptable work attitudes (i.e., by physically or virtually supporting staff), enhancing their communication and interpersonal skills, coaching teams, and exhibiting emotional intelligence in handling anxiety and stress. GMs must therefore be prepared to face crises and foster business survival and prosperity, as well as demonstrate entrepreneurial skills to identify new and effective streams of revenue. In this, their experience, skills and pragmatic view of the world are critical factors for the continuation of hotel operations even in extremely difficult times and during unprecedented events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In contrast to most studies, we propose that GMs consider the current crisis as an opportunity. While the increased use of technology is often seen as a challenge (Eide et al., 2017), GMs in this study see it as a tool to better communicate with stakeholders and increase revenue in a difficult time, e.g., by identifying new markets and segments. Furthermore, despite the detrimental impact of the pandemic on employment and the loss of jobs, GMs in this study can benefit from the current labor market conditions by recruiting from the expanded talent pool. They can also develop more resilient teams, who are attentive to work processes and can demonstrate crisis preparedness and adaptability to stress and challenges (Brown et al., 2018).

The GMs' predictions regarding luxury hospitality in the post-COVID-19 era provide useful insights on the shape of the sector in the near future. GMs were very optimistic and suggested that the sector will recover between 2021 and 2022. That said, regional variations were identified, with some places (i.e., the Middle East and Africa) expected to recover slower than others (Europe). Overall, the sector must demonstrate its resilience to unforeseeable events of global magnitude and quickly adapt to changing market conditions and consumer preferences.

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5.2 Practical implications

The results of this study have implications for luxury hotels (and also for other hospitality organizations) that are dealing with the current crisis. The authors propose that those interested in crisis management should collaborate with those who actually put it in practice. Luxury hospitality services are evolving in response to the new market requirements and needs that have emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. This evolution will, in the short-term, cost many jobs that will be partially replaced by new technologies. More exclusivity and less direct contact with customers is expected to become the new norm. Heightened market competition, in conjunction with the imminent global economic fallout, will result in the survival of those companies best prepared for this crisis, which in this case will be those with adequate and effective GMs and human resources. Hence, we will likely see new players emerging on the global scene, while others will disappear. Investment in human capital, which is the only way to ensure organizational commitment and loyalty, will be key in preparing organizations for future crises. Moreover, sustainable CSR programs will support hotels in relying on their own financial resources rather than on governmental support. The true winners will be the customers who will receive more attention, better quality of service and greater value for money.

On the practical level, recovery action plans and protocols, developed centrally from the head or regional offices of multinational and national hotel chains, should be front and center. These plans should be well communicated to managers providing them with all relevant information as they are responsible to put crisis management in action. For this reason, GMs should be ready and prepared in terms of decision-making capabilities and, in psychological terms, by demonstrating a high degree of stress management to cope with the crisis. We propose that relevant training could be offered to GMs to enhance their crisis preparedness. Luxury hospitality GMs in this study exhibit past experience with crises, which is associated with crisis

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readiness competence through clear thinking, smooth channeling of information and anticipating the future. Hotels that do not have knowledge on crisis management, or due to their size do not have dedicated staff or departments, may learn from studying their competitors' organizational systems and procedures.

Variations in terms of crisis management strategies were identified depending on the type of the organization. Nevertheless, in all cases GMs were ready and prepared to face such crises. When business operations in the luxury hospitality sector resume, they are expected to promote more diversified products and services as a response to new market requirements. At the same time, hotel GMs should be assembling taskforces able to implement these plans. For independent hotels, GMs themselves will be responsible to develop these plans. Hotel openings or relaunches require several changes, mostly affecting the departments where staff most frequently interact with customers. Thus, it is expected that GMs will review or even re-write SOPs regarding Rooms Divisions (Front Office and Housekeeping Departments), F&B (bars and restaurants), Spa and Wellness, and Events and Conferences.

Sophisticated technology will also see a rapid growth, ushering in a new era where the luxury guest experience will be increasingly contactless. Big brand names such as Marriott, Hilton, Wyndham and Accor have already invested in the development of hi-tech solutions, such as mobile check-in/-out, digital keys using a mobile phone application, and robots and artificial intelligence, in order to enhance the customer experience. The contactless guest experience is expected to be adopted in broader areas where human-to-human interaction was once required. The danger here is the replacement of human employees by machine-workers: that would mean the end of luxury hospitality as we know it.

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GMs in luxury hotels must truly support their staff and recognize their value and key role in the creation of positive guest experiences. COVID-19 has exacerbated the already demanding working conditions in hospitality, making it imperative for hotels to reduce pressure and work stress. Baum and Hai (2020) mention that the hospitality workforce is often impacted by the inadequacy or absence of social safety nets that are meant to take care of them in times of crisis. Crisis management and resilience plans should include staff training on innovative and adaptive capabilities, new business models and revenue strategies, and plans to attract the support of local embeddedness and community support. Mentoring programs and business-tailored workshops could be organized to enhance employee resilience and contribute to the organization's efforts to offer services in an innovative way. Psychological support should be provided to increase motivation and show that GMs care about employees, who must be rewarded when they demonstrate safety-related behaviors. GMs should be carefully considering all of the above and more, all the while scanning their business environment for further challenges and opportunities.

5.3 Research limitations and future research

This study provides a snapshot of the luxury hospitality sector on the global scale, taken at a time (May-June 2020) when most countries were still in lockdown and slowly lifting travel restrictions locally and regionally. The sample was chosen based on participants' willingness to respond; hence it would be difficult to generalize. A longitudinal study would be useful following the resumption of operations in order to further explore the views of luxury hotel GMs, and so would the addition of more studies two years from now, by which time the pandemic will hopefully have abated. In the meantime, a mixed-method approach with a bigger sample could provide better insights on the status of this sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A qualitative comparative analysis can also be done to consider how crisis management and resilience are developed based on the organization's type, response strategy and other factors that influence organizational outcomes such as the gender of GMs. For example, the lack of women in the sample could be considered a limitation, as studies have revealed differences between female and male leadership styles and organizational effectiveness (Marinakou, 2014). Furthermore, future research endeavors should focus on crisis management and resilience in the hospitality field since our findings suggest that GMs exhibit specific skills relevant to crisis readiness, with past experience being expressed as a key success factor.

Existing theories and studies do not focus on how companies are prepared to address the crisis, nor on how to assess their operations and actions to ensure sustainability. It is, therefore, recommended that a new pandemic-specific sustainability model be developed that proposes practices, procedures and CSR programs enabling companies to allocate their resources efficiently for a sustainable transition to the post-COVID-19 era. Moreover, the interrelation between human activity and business operations, and more specifically information flow, is challenged by the complexity of the pandemic and influenced by the type of company ownership; performance strategy requires agility, adaptability and flexibility (Obrenovic et al., 2020). Reflecting on the above, it is suggested that future studies focus their attention on both the company type, and the differentiation between larger corporations and SMEs.

Given the circumstances and the fact that humanity has not experienced an event like this since the Second World War, it is difficult to make any solid predictions. The nature of service work has changed since the outbreak of the pandemic with radical changes in terms of HR. Other important issues could be explored such as staff mobility, staff anxiety and stress, or even the link between employees' health and the industry's economic sustainability. Studies could also

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be conducted, in collaboration with health experts, on staff and GMs' well-being in order to develop workshops on how to deal with such crises and on ways to be prepared for new lockdowns. Baum and Mooney (2019) propose that such eventualities have amplified the disadvantages experienced by vulnerable groups; women (Marinakou, 2014) and younger employees, for example, experience heightened precarity and discrimination. Further studies could be conducted to investigate the response and attitudes of such groups towards the pandemic. Flexibility in organizational culture may help hospitality businesses respond better to challenges and understand the critical issues faced by employees in times of crisis.

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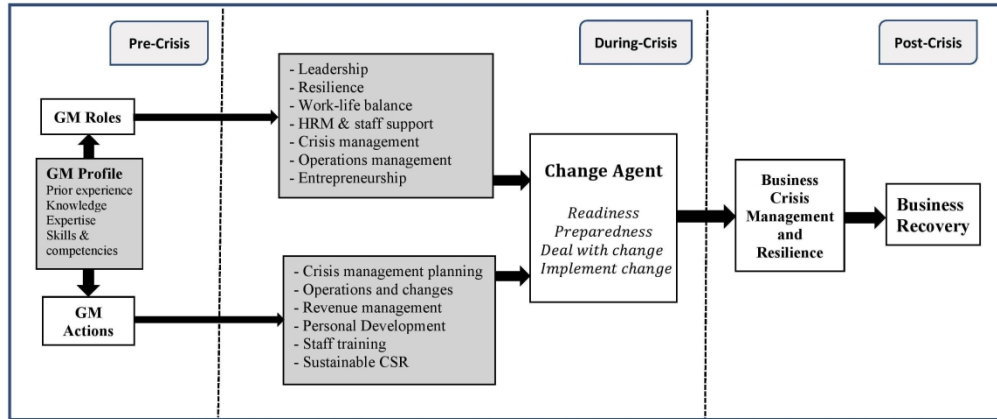
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Figure 1

269x113mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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Coding	Hotel location	Gender	Age	Years of service as GM	Business Type
P1	Anguilla	Male	35 - 45	10 - 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P2	Algeria	Male	44 - 55	9 - 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P3	Argentina	Male	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	National Hotel Chain
P4	Australia	Male	35 - 45	5 - 10 years	National Hotel Chain
P5	Bahamas	Male	Over 55	10 - 20 years	Independent
P6	Bahrain	Male	45 - 55	5 - 10 years	International Hotel Chain
P7	Bahrain	Male	45 - 55	More than 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P8	Belgium	Male	Over 55	More than 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P9	Belgium	Male	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	Independent
P10	Brazil	Male	45 - 55	More than 20 years	Independent
P11	Bulgaria	Male	35 - 45	5 - 10 years	International Hotel Chain
P12	Canada	Male	Over 55	More than 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P13	Cape Verde	Male	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P14	China	Male	Over 55	10 - 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P15	Croatia	Male	35 - 45	5 - 10 years	Independent
P16	Croatia	Male	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P17	Cyprus	Male	45 - 55	5 - 10 years	International Hotel Chain
P18	Egypt	Male	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P19	Georgia	Male	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P20	Germany	Male	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P21	Greece	Female	45 - 55	5 - 10 years	National Hotel Chain
P22	India	Male	25 - 35	Less than 5 years	Local Hotel Chain
P23	Indonesia	Male	45 - 55	5 - 10 years	International Hotel Chain
P24	Italy	Male	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P25	Japan	Male	45 - 55	5 - 10 years	International Hotel Chain
P26	Jordan	Male	Over 55	Less than 5 years	Local Hotel Chain
P27	Latvia	Male	45 - 55	5 - 10 years	International Hotel Chain
P28	Maldives	Male	35 - 45	Less than 5 years	International Hotel Chain
P29	Malta	Male	45 - 55	5 - 10 years	Independent
P30	Mauritius	Male	35 - 45	Less than 5 years	International Hotel Chain
P31	Mexico	Male	25 - 35	Less than 5 years	International Hotel Chain
P32	Namibia	Female	35 - 45	5 - 10 years	Independent
P33	Nigeria	Male	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	Independent
P34	Oman	Male	45 - 55	More than 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P35	Oman	Male	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	Independent
P36	Philippines	Male	45 - 55	Less than 5 years	International Hotel Chain
P37	Portugal	Male	45 - 55	5 - 10 years	Local Hotel Chain
P38	Qatar	Male	Over 55	More than 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P39	Saudi Arabia	Male	Over 55	10 - 20 years	National Hotel Chain
P40	South Africa	Male	35 - 45	10 - 20 years	Independent
P41	Spain	Male	35 - 45	5 - 10 years	International Hotel Chain
P42	Switzerland	Male	45 - 55	More than 20 years	Independent
P43	Switzerland	Male	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	Independent
P44	Turkey	Male	45 - 55	5 - 10 years	International Hotel Chain
P45	U.A.E.	Female	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	National Hotel Chain
P46	U.K.	Male	45 - 55	More than 20 years	National Hotel Chain
P47	U.K.	Male	35 - 45	10 - 20 years	Independent
P48	United States	Male	45 - 55	10 - 20 years	International Hotel Chain
P49	Vietnam	Male	Over 55	5 - 10 years	International Hotel Chain
P50	West Africa	Male	Over 55	More than 20 years	International Hotel Chain

Table 1

173x284mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Crisis management & Contingency planning	*Hotel readiness:* 7 out of 50 business (14%) had no crisis management or contingency plans in place at all; the majority of hotels had generic plans, (no COVID-19 specific); only 2 hotels had fit-to-purpose plans due to experience with other pandemics. *Hotel Response*: immediate response to guidelines, rules and legislation – creation of new procedures and hygiene protocols *Insurance companies' role*: denial to recognise the pandemic as 'force majeure'; updated policies for extra coverage with high premiums and revised / new contracts.
Impact on GMs' roles and daily routine	*Resilience & Leadership*: strong GMs' leadership during this crisis; stayed close to staff and made best possible effort to support and motivate them; GMs acted as change agents. *New procedures, operational standards and re-opening plans*: GMs in charge of creation and implementation of the action plan(s), in response to the crisis *GMs' Work-Life Balance*: positive effects from temporary business closure include learn new skills and spend quality time with family; negative effects include stress, anxiety and loneliness.
Impact on the hotel's key functional areas	*Hotel operations*: increased emphasis on strict hygiene protocols; higher impact on front-line staff; Food & Beverage and Housekeeping departments most affected by the new rules; emphasis in technology in order to increase social distancing. *People management*: staff retention with salary cuts and flexible working; retrain staff during the lockdown to acquire new skills and achieve cross-departmental functionality; changes in work environment due to new hygiene standards; easier for employers to recruit talent due to high unemployment. *Sales and revenue management*: price war and the 'survival of the fittest' in sales; GMs' held responsible for the business survival; increased use of OTAs and direct internet sales; Sales efforts linked to information campaigns aiming to restore customers' trust. *Customer Service*: persuade customers that hotels are safe places to enjoy their stay without affecting their customer experience.
Future predictions for the luxury hospitality industry	*Duration of crisis and sector recovery*: sector recovery between 2021 and 2022; regional variations, with some places (i.e. Middle East and Africa) expected to recover slower than others (Europe). *Product / service diversification*: reinventing business model; increase the use of technology in hotels; sell products/services like villas or serviced apartments that require minimum or no contact with staff. *Business survival & Resilience*: moderate optimism despite the detrimental impact of COVID-19 to luxury hospitality; overall, GMs believe the sector is resilient to crises and capable to recover soon.

Table 2: Summary of findings

166x215mm (300 x 300 DPI)