

Issues faced by hotel human resource managers in Alexandria, Egypt

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This study investigates challenges faced by human resource (HR) managers and their practices to cope in hotels of Alexandria city, Egypt. The researcher undertook semi-structured interviews with HR managers in four- and five-star hotels in Alexandria. The study findings revealed several themes related to HR challenges faced by HR managers in the process of recruitment, selection, training, turnover and retention. Fortunately, customs and traditions have become limited in adversely affecting work in hospitality, except for married women. The coping practices adopted by HR managers are discussed. The study implications are put forward to HR managers to overcome the HR challenges in the hotel industry, such as conducting a cooperation protocol between hotels and academic institutions, developing educational hotels with faculties, institutions and hotel schools, or signing cooperation protocols with neighbouring hotels. By improving employment conditions and rewards, the negative trends can be reversed. Finally, the paper acknowledges research limitations and makes suggestions for future research, such as other hospitality sectors, hotel grades, geographical areas, and the whole of Egypt.

Keywords: Alexandria, hotels, human resource management, qualitative research

Introduction

Since the hospitality industry is an intensive labour industry, and service-oriented business, the hotels are anxious to attract and retain qualified employees, because they are vital major assets for hotel success, and hotel industry prosperity (Moncarz, Zhao, & Kay, 2009). The products of the hospitality industry are service experiences, which are intangible and depend on direct interaction between customers and employees (Law & Tam, 2007). Thus, HR plays a crucial role in products and service quality, customer satisfaction, loyalty, and organisation performance (Baum, 2015; Tracey, 2014). The human resource functions help hotels to utilise the available human resources more effectively as competitive advantages to increase hotel performance to cope with the fierce competition in the hospitality industry (Madera, Dawson, Guchait, & Belarmino, 2017). HR managers in hotels face many challenges in human resource recruitment, selection, training, and retention of qualified employees to achieve international performance standards in customer service (Leng, 2013). Kong and Cheung (2009) determine that the HR challenges are high staff turnover rates, shortage of qualified employees, and a reluctance of university graduates to enter the hotel industry. Hinkin and Tracey (2000) showed that cost of loss productivity is the most costly element of employee turnover, and represents 60%. This is due to the fact that the hotels replace the experienced employees with inexpert ones which leads to disrupting the existing employees' schedules in order to train the inexpert employees (Rowley & Purcell, 2001).

Egypt, as well as other developing countries, suffers from high rates of unemployment, low levels of education, and a skills shortage, especially in developing sectors. On the other hand, the hotel industry in Egypt has been suffering since

the January 2011 revolution due to political and economic instability which resulted in a decrease in the tourism demand and losing qualified employees to other industries, resulting in high turnover. That has created strong unprecedented challenges for HR managers. Although HR research has grown in recent decades, the literature review investigated neither the challenges, nor the practices in hotels of Alexandria, Egypt. The present study provides a qualitative investigation of HR challenges faced by HR managers, and their practices to overcome them.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges facing the HR managers and their best implemented practices to overcome these challenges in hotels of Alexandria through four objectives. First, to investigate the daily human resource problems and challenges. Second, to explore the best human resource practices to handle HR challenges. Third, to develop practical applications for practitioners and suggest future research for academics. Fourth, to improve the HR practices in the Egyptian hospitality industry.

Theoretical background

Challenge of recruitment and selection

Recruitment is the most significant of the human resource functions, due to its role in creating a positive impression about the business in the labour market to attract qualified employees who are interested in working for the organisation, and allows the company to effectively select the best applicants (Huda, Haque, & Khan, 2014). Ferreira and Alon (2008) stated that it is difficult to attract hospitality graduates to the hospitality industry. In addition, parents do not like their children to enter the hospitality industry because it has low wages compared to other industries (Doherty, Klenert, & Manfredi, 2007), leading to a shortage in skilled or educated

employees. This poses a new challenge in the labour-intensive industry (Kong & Cheung, 2009; Kong, Cheung, & Zhang, 2010; Shen & Huang, 2012). There are other factors that exacerbate the lack of qualified employees, for example, the desire of hotel employees to quit the hospitality industry and work for other industries, especially when the hospitality employees are preferred in other industries. Many people believe hotel careers are short and depend more on physical capabilities than mental skills (Lam & Qiu, 2004). As a result, HR managers will have to reduce the staffing requirements to be filled (Leng, 2013). Zhang and Wu (2004) discussed that only 10 per cent of hospitality graduates had aptitudes or skills to work in the hospitality industry. Such skills include language skills, and interpersonal skills, but unfortunately the graduates lack a service mentality. The hotel should be committed to sustainable strategies and look beyond costs to retain the employees (Davidson, & Wang, 2011). Also, Davidson, Timo, and Wang (2010) suggest that hotel must follow innovative recruitment and selection practices to alleviate the high turnover rate.

Challenge of training

Malila (2007) indicated that hotels need effective training programmes to face the shortage of qualified employees, especially the four- and five-star hotels, which look for qualified employees to increase their performance efficiency. Employees prefer to work in companies with advanced training programmes for career development. Other researchers, Wang (2011) and Yang and Cherry (2008) state that the hospitality industry depends mainly on service quality as a competitive advantage to acquire the customers of a labour-intensive industry. This aligns with Zheng (2009), who contented that the service quality is related to training programmes.

Therefore, Boshoff and Allen (2000) stated that hotels invested in training programmes to improve employee performance. Similarly, the training programmes enhance employee motivation, increase employee outcomes (Joung, Goh, Huffman, Yuan, & Surlles, 2015; Rahimi & Gunlu, 2016), and reduce the turnover intention (Kampkötter & Marggraf, 2015). Contrarily, the lack of training leads to poor performance and insufficient employee awareness of their job functions, which negatively affects employees' abilities to deal with customers and that leads to customers dissatisfaction (Kokt & Ramarumo, 2015). Controversially, some companies consider the training process as a waste of money and time. Small hotels have a limited budget to fund training programmes (Yang & Cherry, 2008; Wang, 2011).

The lack of investment in human resources leads to high staff turnover (Bagri, Babu, & Kukreti, 2010). Since the hospitality industry attracts immigrant people from rural areas who do not have the necessary skills for the hospitality industry, the need for training programmes must increase to meet the needs of the hospitality industry (Liu & Wall, 2005).

Challenge of turnover and retention

The turnover issue faced by HR managers in the hospitality industry is that the employees may move to competitor hotels for higher wages, more benefits and promotion in fierce competition (Chan & Kuok, 2011; Ferreira & Alon, 2008). It was ascertained that hospitality employees move to another industry for higher wages, compensation, and rewards.

In 2014, 84 000 employees left the American hospitality industry (Zhao & Ghiselli, 2016). Leng (2013) posits that the younger generation are longing for money and position. In the hospitality industry, employees spend several years before getting promoted. Lewis (2010) has argued that the negative aspects of the hospitality industry include the sacrifice of private life, invasive and long working hours and lead to raising the turnover level (Gustafson, 2002), and losing talented employees (Leng, 2013). In the same vein, Deery and Jago (2015) stated that the major reasons for women to leave their jobs are work-life conflict, and poor opportunities to advance, respectively, whereas the major reasons for men to leave the job are the unclear duties and responsibilities given. Thus, they suggest that retention strategies should consider both work and life components. Moreover, the seasonal nature of the work and poor training increase the turnover rate (Bharwani, & Butt, 2012; Krakover, 2000; Poulston, 2008). The turnover rate increases among the employees in remote and isolated hotels (Davidson, Timo, & Wang, 2010). A study conducted by Khorakian, Nosrati, and Eslami (2017) showed that various factors lead to increasing the quit intention such as work overload, work-family conflict, work-leisure conflict, in addition to traditional and religious reasons. Also, Karatepe (2013b) stated that workload obstructs the talented employees from being retained.

The HR managers should utilise the hotel resources to satisfy employees and thereby increase the organisational commitment, and so reduce the turnover level (Chiang, Back, & Canter, 2005; Kim & Jogaratnam, 2010; Liao, Hu, & Chung, 2009; Sae-Hya, 2016). In a similar vein, the good reputation of a brand plays a critical role in retaining talented employees (Leng, 2013). The employee turnover increases the costs of recruitment, selection and hiring. And, it decreases productivity (Cho, Woods, Jang, & Erdem, 2006; Davidson, Timo, & Wang, 2010; Hinkin & Tracey, 2000).

Thus, the firm should apply effective retention programmes to increase the productivity, and decrease the staffing costs. Scholars (Moncarz, Zhao & Kay, 2009) advocate for the application of effective employee-retention practices that include training, hiring, promotions, rewards, employee recognition, and compensation. In a similar line, other researchers argued that the salary level has a great effect on employee retention (Chan & Kuok, 2011; Hausknecht, Rodda, & Howard, 2009). Employees may move from one hotel to another looking for career progression, development opportunities, and better employment offers (Yang, Wan, & Fu, 2012). Moreover, training, development opportunities, and rewards alleviate the employee turnover rate (Babakus, Yavas, & Karatepe, 2017; Karatepe, 2013a). Other studies investigated the relationship between the incentive plan and turnover rate (Cho et al., 2006; Moncarz, Zhao, & Kay, 2009) and ascertained that the companies offering rewards systems reduce the turnover level. Another study conducted by Hausknecht, Rodda, and Howard (2009) states that the poor image of the hospitality industry affects employee retention. Thus, Bharwani and Butt (2012) suggest that the retention strategies should involve good salary and benefits, training programmes, tangible rewards, a better work environment, and high-quality leadership. Also, many studies stated that the career progression is a major element in employee retention (Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan, & Buyruk, 2010). Bouzari and

Karatepe (2017) stated that the hotel management should be committed to the servant leadership style, because the psychological capital is positively related to the retention of salespeople in hotels.

Research approach

The objective of this study is to explore the HR challenges faced by HR managers and practices adopted by HR managers in Alexandria, Egypt in order to overcome those challenges. The researcher used the qualitative approach to empirically reveal the unexplored knowledge. Qualitative research is suggested when the research area has limited knowledge. The research explored the experiential knowledge of HR managers that directly or indirectly aids the HR management practices in the hospitality industry. The researcher depends on the primary and secondary data analysis to develop the theoretical knowledge. Therefore, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with HR managers to get a rich and deep understanding for further analysis for a deeper investigation of the HR management challenges and HR management practices. Therefore, the study employs the sampling of purposive and snowballing strategies to select the participants (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). The major criteria for selecting the participants in the current study include that the participants are full-time HR managers who have worked in their current position at least for one year, who are at least 25 years old, and have worked in four- and five-star hotels, where effective HR management practices are clear. The established criteria aims to maximise the information richness.

The questions for an in-depth, semi-structured interview were developed in three phases. Firstly, the questions and topics were developed from the literature review. Secondly, the researcher conducted a pilot study with three HR managers who suggested new questions not mentioned in the hospitality literature. Thirdly, the researcher sent the interview questions to two academics. The pilot study helps us avoid misleading questions, asking two-in-one questions, helps refine the topic of data collection, eliminates redundant items, helps keep the questions short and specific, and follows the procedures relevant to the current study. After inserting the feedback of the pilot study, the final version of interview questions was launched and sent by email to potential participants. The present study has employed the in-depth, semi-structured interview for several reasons. Firstly, the open-ended questions permit participants to answer freely and thoroughly without restrictions. Secondly, writing down topics and group questions on each topic together prevents question variance from one participant to another, or missing any questions. The question topics were developed from the literature review and pilot study. Also, it allows for in-depth responses, greater detail, and encourages participants to elaborate on their answers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The interview schedule consists of three parts. First, the warm-up section that helped to create a comfortable, trustful, and informal environment by briefing on the study aim. To help the participants, the researcher briefed them on the study field and the interview structure, in addition to explaining the purpose of using interview data for scientific research, ensuring confidentiality, and anonymity. Also, the researcher explained to them that they had the right to withdraw at any

time without consequences. The participants were asked for permission to record the interview sessions, which were then transcribed verbatim. Also, the researcher asked demographic questions that supported the warm-up environment such as age, education background, years as HR manager, years in current company, etc. Second, the development section included the face-to-face interview where the researcher asked the in-depth interview questions about HR management's daily challenges such as shortage of qualified employees, training and development, and turnover rate. The researcher also explored the participants' practices to overcome these obstacles. Finally, it was the closing section that included appreciative words for voluntary participation in order to encourage participants to propose any other suggestions related to HR management challenges. It was powerful when the tape recorder was turned off, leading to more effective responses.

Several factors were taken into consideration during the interview, such as posture, movement of participants, as well as the quality of voice tone that could reflect the actual answers, and that might be quite different from what they said. Also, the researcher kept eye contact, and was positive, authentic, and confident. The researcher did not interrupt participants and did not write down the answers of the interviewees during the interview, otherwise it might have caused negative effects in the relationship between the interviewees, and also would have led to poor notes. Some participants answered questions that had not been asked yet. In addition, the researcher recorded their answers and did not ask the answered questions. The researcher controlled the interviews in study topics. Some respondents addressed other irrelevant topics to the current study. The researcher returned to study topics in a wise, professional and courteous manner.

The in-depth interview sessions lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. The researcher conducted only eighteen in-depth interviews for the current study. The researcher felt that data reached saturation after sixteen in-depth interviews when the interviewees did not add valuable insights. Thereafter, the transcripts were reread several times, and the common concept was identified. Quantitative results were analysed using theoretical and inductive approaches. The theoretical approach was based on the personal experience and previous studies to analyse experimental data. In the deductive approach of previous literature, the main challenges facing HR managers in the hotel industry were identified. The study used the inductive approach to keep an open mind in identifying concepts that were not identified in previous studies.

Findings

Based on the analysis of the in-depth interviews, the study findings on the challenges faced by HR managers in hotels are presented and discussed in the following order: first, the challenges facing hotel industry in Egypt; second, the lack of skilled employees; third, the recruitment challenges; and finally, employee turnover challenges. In addition, the coping practices were discussed. The study showed the challenges and coping practices respectively.

The challenges facing the hotel industry in Egypt

The majority of HR managers stated that the hospitality industry has suffered from instability since 2011, due to the decline in hotel revenues. Consequently, it has led to declining salary levels compared to other competing industries, which encouraged the leakage of skilled employees to competitor industries, such as the telecommunication industry, etc. This has led to a lack of preference for parents to enrol their children on hospitality programmes. This coincided with the proliferation of private academic institutions, where profitability has a significant priority regardless the quality of their graduates' attributes. All the previously mentioned issues have affected the quality of the hospitality graduates working in the hospitality industry, in addition to the lack of graduate passion to be employed in the hospitality industry. These results are in agreement with Leng's (2013) and Adler and Xiaoxu's (2009) findings which showed that fewer graduates are willing to enter the hospitality industry. The challenges are aggravating for a number of reasons, including the lack of quality graduates of hospitality programmes and the increasing necessity to equip employees with the necessary skills to cope with the constant growth of changes, desires and guests' needs.

Challenges of recruitment and selection

The majority of HR managers ascertained that the operational departments such as stewards, housekeeping, laundry, engineering and maintenance, food service, and kitchen suffer from unqualified employees. While, other HR managers pointed out that all hotel departments do not have qualified employees, particularly the front office and sales departments. The hotels struggle to find qualified and skilled employees. This aligned with many previous studies of all countries, both developed countries such as Australia and Canada, or developing countries such as Jamaica, China, Taiwan, and Trinidad and Tobago (Adler & Rigg, 2012; Björkman, Fey & Park, 2007; Butcher, 2012; Davidson, Guilding & Timo, 2006; Leng, 2013; Willie, Connor, Sole, Forgacs, Grieve, & Mueller, 2017; Yang, Wan, & Fu, 2012). HR managers acknowledged that the reason is due to the hotel employees who have been targeted by other industries, for example, the front office employees (guest relations, reception, telephone operators) are targeted by the telecommunications industry. While housekeeping employees and chefs are targeted by hospitals. Also, the waiters and chefs are targeted by café chains, the engineering and maintenance employees are targeted by petroleum companies and hotel equipment companies. The laundry employees prefer to work in private shops without the restrictions or the standard rules of hotels. The reason is due to other industries' success in attracting them with higher salaries. As an example, the telecommunications industry pays two or three times what the hospitality industry pays. The study findings align with Leng (2013), who stated that the hospitality industry is less attractive than other industries because it is categorised as a low-wage industry.

HR managers employ practices to cope with the previous challenges, such as selecting ambitious candidates, explaining the career path, and providing training programmes. Two HR managers of the Hilton depend on the Hilton Kitchen apprenticeship school to train the graduates and steward employees in all kitchen departments to fill the gap in kitchen jobs. There were some practices such as cooperation protocols with hotel schools, faculties and institutes of tourism and

hotel management to fill the shortage of qualified employees. Surprisingly, one of HR manager stated that *"I hire low skilled employees and low salary level, then develop them by training programmes"*. One HR manager stated that *"We faced the non-commitment of ironing employees through teaching ironing skills to many housekeeping and laundry employees in order to improve their commitment"*.

Lack of skilled employees

The majority of HR managers stated that there is a shortage of skilled employees in Egypt, particularly in the operational departments that depend on technical and/or physical skills, starting with the departments of stewards, housekeeping, kitchen and maintenance, while other managers ascertained that the front-line employees, such as front office and food service departments, have a problem with language skills when interacting face-to-face with customers. Also, almost two thirds of the HR managers explained that there is a lack of supervisory skills in middle-level managers. These findings are aligned with Leng's (2013), who stated that hospitality graduates have no language and/or operational skills. Also, he mentioned the mid-level managers are not ready to be promoted soon.

The HR managers implemented effective practices to overcome the shortage of skilled employees. The majority of the HR managers ascertained the value of moral and monetary motivation in addition to improving the work environment, particularly for the jobs which depend on physical effort. Only one HR manager conducted a cooperation protocol with a hotel school from a rural area (Kafr el Dawar City) and implemented a two-day study at the school and four days of internship at the hotel. He had great experience in providing qualified candidates to the operational departments. Another HR manager hired foreign language teachers to upgrade the language skills of the hotel employees to overcome the lack of language skills. Also, they suggested some training programmes such as leadership and supervision skills for the middle management level.

Shortage of employees

The majority of HR managers ascertained that the operational departments such as stewards, housekeeping, and laundry are suffering the most due to employee shortages. This is due to the nature of the job which depends on physical effort, in addition to the low income, and the length of career hierarchy to reach the top management.

To overcome these challenges, all HR managers increased the salary level of these jobs, and explained the opportunities to shift to other departments such as steward employees who may shift to kitchen, while housekeeping employees who have the opportunity to shift to front office departments. 80% of the HR managers referred to the necessity of communication and awareness in a transparent and clear manner about career path, and opportunities for growth, promotion, and positive turnover. A minority of HR managers hired these people from rural areas and Upper Egypt, then got them qualified through training programmes. The majority of HR managers use electronic boards and social media to fill these jobs, such as Facebook groups, Whatsapp groups, and LinkedIn. Also, they use the traditional methods such as employment agencies, job fairs, referral, in-house announcement, and walk-in candidates.

Recruitment challenges

Almost all HR managers assert that the methods of employment vary according to the management level. For example, the general manager is recruited by head office. The heads of departments are recruited by the general manager and the HR manager. The supervisor level is recruited by the head of the department and the HR manager, then general manager. Employees are recruited by the HR manager and heads of departments.

The candidates' qualifications

The majority of HR managers posit that the candidates are not satisfied with the offered salaries although their skills and qualifications do not meet the vacant job requirements. The younger generation are impatient, and want money, positions and prestige, and they do not have the passion to be employed in the hospitality industry. These results are consistent with those of Leng's (2013), who stated that the younger generations are eager for money and position.

The recruitment cost

Over half of those interviewed reported that the high cost of employment documents constitutes a new challenge for low-level employees such as steward and housekeeping employees. The majority of HR managers employ the salary survey to determine the salary level for each job. Over half of HR managers reported that they refuse employees who do not have the passion to work in the hospitality industry where it is impossible to gain passion by training.

The governmental roles

The majority of HR managers confirm that the government authorities do not have a role in attracting and supplying skilled employees. The academic institutes play a role in supplying the hospitality industry with employees, but they lack technical and language skills.

The customs and traditions barriers

The majority of HR managers confirm that the impact of customs and traditions on preventing people from working in the hotel industry has become less than in the past for men. Unfortunately, women still suffer from the bad reputation of girls who work in the hotel industry, as they leave work after marriage because of the husband's refusal to work in the hotel industry.

The challenges of training

Nearly all HR managers stated that the training programmes, whether technical, management or in languages, vary according to job and position. Also, they elaborated that the annual employee appraisals are the cornerstone for designing an employee training plan determining the weaknesses that need to be strengthened by training programmes. Accordingly, a training plan is developed for each employee. Also, they claimed that the training programmes, could be in-house training (soft skills), or external training programmes (languages, computer skills) in academic institutes or centres.

A common view among HR managers was that the training programmes are continuously provided to meet guest desires and needs. In all cases, the HR managers reported that the training and motivation can support the development of

the employees' skills and competencies. While a minority mentioned that they were designing career plans for new employees, they also explained that there are opportunities for growth, promotion, and transfer to other departments. One interviewee argued that there were quick programmes for promotion, such as the "Elevator" in the Hilton chain.

A large number of HR managers suggested that training programmes such as leadership and management ones can develop the next generation of leaders. The HR managers of the Hilton agreed that the quick training programmes of management can help to develop the next generation of leaders such as "Shine", "Elevator" in the Hilton chain. The majority of those who responded to this question believed that effective selection and recruiting procedures of ambitious employees help to prepare future leaders. While two HR managers asserted that training on delegation of decision-making, especially the operational decisions, is a vital factor that helps to develop the next generation of leaders.

The challenges of turnover rate

The results showed that the hotel's location has a positive relationship with the turnover rate. The downtown hotels have a lower turnover rate than remote or isolated hotels. Also, the results showed that the hotel age has a negative relationship with the turnover rate, as it decreases the employee turnover rate. One HR manager stated that "*I faced high turnover rate at the hotel opening, and then the rate reached a healthy rate after two or three years, then the situation became much better when I received lots of candidates' CVs who wanted to be employed in the hotel*". These findings support previous research in developing countries such as Taiwan and China (Leng, 2013; Yang, 2008) that stated that the shortage of skilled employees and high turnover rate are the major issues that faced the HR managers at the beginning. All the HR managers of downtown hotels argued that the development and training programmes decrease the turnover rate, while the HR managers of remote or isolated hotels provided transportation for employees. In all cases, the HR managers employed the salary, communication, and promotion to face the turnover rate (Moncarz, Zhao, & Kay, 2009).

The majority of HR managers revealed that the main factors that lead to employee turnover are salary level, management style, and manager incivility. One HR manager said that "*the people resign because the people, not resign because the company*". Over half of HR managers reported that the lack of development and promotion opportunities also lead to the intention to quit. Moreover, the employees' expectations do not meet the actual tasks. Also, remote distances lead to increasing employee turnover. For females, the work-family conflict is the main reason to leave work. Also, the results showed that the hotel age has a negative effect on the turnover rate.

The coping practices: The majority of HR managers employed salary, communication, and promotion to deal with the turnover rate. They also conducted an exit interview to identify the reasons for leaving work and analysed the causes to take the proper actions. All HR managers urged the department managers to provide an excellent work atmosphere. A small number of HR managers stated that transparency, credibility, and firmness help to mitigate the turnover level. All the HR managers of downtown hotels argued that the development

and training programmes decrease the turnover rate, while the HR managers of remote or isolated hotels provided transportation for employees.

Most HR managers stated that the department employees who depend on physical effort experience the highest turnover rate, such as stewards, and housekeeping employees, due to the nature of the exhausting physical work. While chefs and food servers leave their jobs due to the high salaries or positions elsewhere in café chains.

The majority of HR managers provide generous salaries, benefit packages, opportunities for growth, development, career plans, and the possibility of internal transfer to other departments by valuable training programmes to retain the employees. Over half of those surveyed depend on Upper Egypt and rural areas to provide steward and housekeeping employees.

The challenges of retention

HR managers believed that the salary package is the main factor to retain the best employees during the current inflation that the Egyptian economy suffers from. Also, there are opportunities for employees to develop and get promoted. In other words, the training programmes such as different cross-exposure training programmes (internal, chain, and international cross-exposure training) and (I develop programmes) in the Hilton chain. While, other HR managers claim that open communication with employees and the reputation of brand image can support retaining the best employees.

The majority of HR managers attract talented employees with higher salaries, benefits, and quick promotions. Also, they employ the up-to-date technologies to meet the younger generations' expectations. The current results confirm the findings of Tracey et al. (2015), who stated that the younger generations were very comfortable with up-to-date technologies.

Many respondents stressed the need for transparency, credibility and honesty in communication to retain talented employees. All the HR managers employed the moral and monetary motivation systems to retain talented employees, especially a bonus in the revenue generation departments, such as sales and reservation. The HR managers create a good work atmosphere through the relationship between supervisors and their subordinates. Supervisors should have been trained to focus on not only tasks, but they should show respect and interest in employees' personal lives to increase the loyalty to the hotel. The hotel holds parties for ideal employees, employees' birthdays, family day, and Ramadan breakfasts to increase the fun activities in the work atmosphere, to motivate the employees to raise their performance and increase their loyalty to the hotel. This aligns with findings of Han, Kim and Jeong's (2016) findings.

Conclusion

The findings of the current exploratory study present significant contributions to the existing literature on challenges of HR management and successful practices to overcome the challenges in the hotel industry in Alexandria, Egypt. It helps academics update and revisit hospitality curricula to equip future hospitality leaders with the necessary knowledge to

lead successful operations in the light of current and future challenges.

According to the current findings, it is difficult to find qualified employees, especially in operational departments. Hospitality revenue has declined since 2011, consequently the hospitality industry has been categorised as offering a low-level wage, which has led it to be less attractive to candidates because the salary is not competitive compared to other industries. Moreover, parents do not want to enrol their children in hospitality programmes. Hospitality professionals are targeted by other industries such as telecommunications, hotel hospitals, and hotel equipment companies. The findings stated that competitor industries such as telecommunications and hospitals play a crucial role in exacerbating the challenge of qualified employee shortages. The operational departments suffer skilled employee shortages. Also, the current findings showed that the mid-level managers have limited supervision skills.

In relation to turnover rates, the current findings are aligned with Babakus et al. (2017), who proved that employee turnover is the most formidable challenge facing HR managers. A majority of HR managers indicated that salary and development are the major reasons for staff turning over. The employees may leave the hotel for small increases in salary or promotion, which is consistent with Leng's (2013) and Shen and Huang's (2012) findings. Also, work-family conflict is a crucial reason for women to leave the job. The incivility of managers towards subordinates increases the turnover rate. Thus, HR managers are concerned to apply retaining and retention practices to alleviate the turnover rate, such as increasing salary, training programmes, development, promotions and improving the work atmosphere. In Table 1, the study conclusions about the challenges and coping practices are presented.

Research implications

The current study provides valuable managerial implications for the hospitality industry. The implications will equip hospitality professionals with effective tools to provide skilled, qualified and talented employees and retain them, leading to employee satisfaction and thus improved performance, which results in increasing the profits of hospitality properties. These implications include three major factors: recruitment (employee shortages), retention, and repositioning the industry. Also, the author of the current study identified nine opportunities for the hospitality industry, academic institutions, and governmental bodies to overcome HR challenges.

Increase student contact with the hospitality industry

Hotels should establish a relationship with hospitality properties and schools so as to provide the required candidates. Hotels can offer internship opportunities to students during their education. On the other hand, the students could study for two days at their school and for four days of internship at a hotel. It helps to establish a good brand image among hospitality students. Also, the Hilton chain has an "apprenticeship kitchen school". It offers two-year kitchen internship opportunities for employees or graduates. They train in all kitchen departments to fill the gap in kitchen positions.

Table 1: Practices to cope with challenges

Challenges	Practices
Lack of qualified employees	Selecting the ambitious and those who have passion to work in the hospitality industry Applying positive transfer (internal transfer) Conducting cooperation protocol with academic institutions
Lack of skilled employees	Applying monetary and moral motivation Improving the work environment, especially for the jobs that depend on physical effort Applying internship cooperation programmes (internship days in hotel and studying days in hotel schools) Hiring English teachers to improve languages skills Providing leadership training programmes for mid-level managers
Shortage of employees	Increasing the salary level Explaining the career path, growth, promotion opportunities in a transparent and clear manner Using social media and the internet to fill vacant jobs Depending on the regions of rural and Upper Egypt to provide the low-level jobs
Recruitment challenges	Conducting a salary survey Recruiting the candidates who have passion to work in the hospitality industry
Turnover challenges	Applying the retention practices such as: Increasing salary and benefit levels Increasing the training programmes and the opportunities for development and promotion Urging the managers to provide an excellent work atmosphere Providing transportation for employees Conducting an exit interview to track the reasons for leaving Holding a monthly meeting with employees Using the brand image reputation Applying up-to-date technology in daily tasks Employing the monetary and moral motivation system

Accompany educational hotels with academic institutions, or sign cooperation protocols with nearby hotels

The academic institutions should establish an educational hotel to train their students while studying. The hotels' manpower should depend on students to operate the hotel, so the students should be trained in the departments that are related to the courses studied in the current semester to maximise the benefit of the practical part to understand the theoretical courses. Moreover, the industry experts should participate in teaching the courses. Therefore, the graduates will be qualified enough to enter the hospitality industry to provide excellent services. Also, they will discover their strengths to support, weaknesses to eliminate, and the advantages and disadvantages of hospitality career. On the other hand, matching employees' expectations to actual tasks precisely leads to decreasing the employee turnover. The graduates will be able to accurately choose the department they like to work for according to their skills. This leads to having highly qualified and skilled graduates that will increase hotels' performance.

Improve training procedures

The academic institutions should improve the training programmes, both internship and externship, and mentorship processes according to the training course specifications. The internship course specifications are prepared by formulating consulting committees of the industry experts with academics. The constructive development of students' skills should be taken into consideration when developing the training course specifications.

Build a realistic image of the hospitality industry

The academic institutions should draw a realistic image of the hospitality industry after students' graduation, before enrolling in hospitality programmes. The students must be

equipped with trendy knowledge and experiences. Also, it should explain the nature of the physical effort to hospitality students, to avoid students running from the industry reality after graduation. Also, it should explain the return benefits to them through acquiring interpersonal skills and competencies that cannot be acquired in other industries. Moreover, it should clarify that work in the hospitality industry needs more perseverance to achieve success and access to managerial level. It is necessary to provide direct messages from the industry experts. Thus, the students are made ready after graduation and do not escape to other sectors. It should cultivate passion in the hospitality programme students, which is the focus of success in the industry, especially for operational departments such as restaurants, kitchens, housekeeping and others. A passion begins at the study start by students' respecting the knowledge, experiences and guidance of educators, especially in food and beverage curriculums.

Repositioning the image of the hospitality industry

Offering proper salary and benefits packages

The findings proved that the salary and benefits play a major role in employee turnover. Thus, HR managers conducted salary survey among hotels chain. But it is not enough, because the challenges include the diversion of talented professionals from the hospitality industry to other industries, and therefore HR managers must survey salaries in other industries, and offer a generous salary level to retain talented employees.

Offering efficient training and development opportunities

The salary is not enough to retain employees; training and development is the second factor to retain employees and alleviate the turnover rate. The learning atmosphere increases employee satisfaction, thus it is a good opportunity to retain the employees. Hotel chains vary in providing effective training

programmes, such as on-the-job training for newcomers. Also, they provide cross-training in other departments in the hotel or at other properties across the chain. Hotels should offer outdoor training in the professional organisation or provide study opportunities in overseas universities. HR managers should set a career plan for newcomers to motivate them.

Creating a positive work environment

According to the findings, many HR managers acknowledged the relationship between supervisors and subordinates playing a crucial role in employee engagement to hotel brands, where the employee loyalty is derived from loyalty to their supervisors. Thus, hotels should offer proper training courses in leadership and communication skills to the managerial level employees, to focus not only on employees' tasks, but also on their personal life to create a family atmosphere. Hotels should organise social events such as Ramadan breakfasts, entertainment tours, and employees' birthday parties.

Conducting open communication with employees

HR managers should periodically interview departmental employees to discuss any problems in the department or provide any solutions to develop work performance leading to developing employees' skills of self-learning and problem-solving, creating a new generation of leaders capable of solving problems and making decisions that in turn will increase their sense of importance and confidence. Finally, it will increase employees' loyalty to the hotel and reduce the turnover rate. Hotels offer various ways to receive proposals and suggestions provided by their employees, whether by email, post box or during a meeting to diversify their different abilities and skills.

According to the literature and findings, there is reluctance among the younger generation to enter the hospitality industry. Thus, hospitality professionals should improve and rebuild the industry's image among the younger generations through presentations in high schools. They also should let students know about the reality of the hospitality industry. The advantages, benefits, and perks of the hospitality industry such as career paths, opportunities, availability of learning and development, and rapid promotion must be explained and compared with other competing industries. It also offers great opportunities for talented people to reach the managerial level much quicker than other competitive industries. Finally, the hospitality industry should draw a prestigious image of the industry among the younger generation. Moreover, the advantages of other competitive industries are limited in high salaries, but there are limited opportunities for learning and development, promotion, and career paths, in addition to the fact that employees are dispensed within a maximum of five to ten years. The cooperation, coordination and communication between academic institutions and the hospitality industry must be continued to face the HR challenges and retain the qualified and skilled employees.

Implications for governmental bodies

Enhance the governmental bodies' role in supporting qualified and trained employees

Government authorities should support the development and training of employees in the hospitality industry through the provision of scholarship programmes for whoever are interested to work in the hospitality industry professions, in partnership

with all community stakeholders in the hospitality industry and charitable institutions. In addition, it should reopen accredited training centres such as the Culinary Training Centre in 6th of October City as an Excellence Centre, and generalise it in many major cities and for all hospitality industry professions, to create new supply channels of qualified and trained employees who have a passion to work in the hospitality industry.

Limitations and future research

The current limitations of this study should be avoided in future studies. Firstly, the sample focuses on luxury four- and five-star hotels in Alexandria. Secondly, the study sample focused on only one sector: hotels. Further research could study the HR challenges in various hospitality sectors (e.g. restaurants and cruise ships). To achieve the generalisability, future research should expand to cover the whole of Egypt. Further studies may conduct a comparison between these findings and other findings in other geographical areas, such as Sinai. Future studies must focus on mid-scale hotels, the results may be quite different.

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