

Frontline employee-driven change in hospitality firms: An analysis of receptionists' personality on implemented suggestions

Abstract

Purpose – Frontline employees' suggestions are relevant for employee-driven organisational change because their knowledge is partially constructed from direct contact with customers and indirectly with competitors. The employee's personality is a paramount individual characteristic that can exert a major potential influence on the proposal and implementation of those suggestions. This work discusses the impact of the personality dimensions in the Big Five model (i.e., *extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience*) on suggestions generated by frontline employees and implemented in their firms.

Design/methodology/approach – A questionnaire was prepared based on a review of the academic literature. The five presented hypotheses were tested with data from 167 frontline employees from hotels in Tenerife (Spain).

Findings – Results show the relevance of frontline employees' three characteristics of personality regarding employee-driven organisational change. Thus, their extraversion, neuroticism, and lack of direction tend to be relevant drivers of the suggestion and implementation of change.

Practical implications – Frontline employees act as change agents in hospitality establishments. Managers should develop recruitment processes that allow to select individuals prone to proposing innovative suggestions and creating a friendlier system for submitting them.

Originality/value – Employee-driven organisational change becomes crucial for the survival and growth of hospitality firms. Relatively few studies have been conducted on the role of frontline employees as change facilitators in the sector. This study contributes to shedding light on this research gap from a personality approach, and the work also provides practical implications to increase valid suggestions in the hospitality sector.

Keywords Employee-driven change; implemented suggestions; frontline employees; personality traits; employee voice behaviour; receptionists.

Paper type Original article

1. Introduction

Change is crucial for organisations operating in growing and highly competitive business environments, such as the hospitality industry. Organisational change in hotels can be a major challenge, as these organisations are forced to continuously improve and innovate to face competition and adapt to changes in customer demands or in the environment (Presbitero and Teng-Calleja, 2017). Hussain *et al.* (2018) established that organisational change explains an organisation's shift from the known or current state to the unknown or aspired future state. Several authors (e.g., Bamford and Forrester, 2003; Eisenstat *et al.*, 1990) agreed with the idea that organisational change should be driven by employees rather than by top management. According to Hussain *et al.* (2018), employee involvement in the change process is the most effective strategy for generating and implementing change, resulting in high quality organisational change. In the hospitality industry, frontline employees, given their constant interaction with customers, have accurate and up-to-date information about the latter's needs and expectations (Chang and Busser, 2020; Coelho *et al.*, 2011). Thus, they can come up with good ideas for suggesting improvements in customer service or even in strategic aspects (Bettencourt and Brown, 2003).

Lipponen *et al.* (2008) affirmed that suggestions for change proposed by employees enable and drive the development of competitive advantages. Suggestions arise from employee creativity (Lasrado *et al.*, 2016) or competitive intelligence activities (Kalra *et al.*, 2020). Thus, employees' creativity and imitation efforts have been established as key sources to propose valid suggestions for improving the firm's performance. According to Fairbank and Williams (2001), firms should provide employees with knowledge sharing and exchange channels through which they are motivated to share their creative ideas, such as suggestion systems. Employees' ideas or suggestions are not always considered sufficiently creative or suited for implementation in the organisation (Khazanchi and Masterson, 2011). Thus, suggestions proposed by employees are evaluated by organisations to decide on those that will be rejected or implemented. In this part of the process the employee also plays a relevant role, because after coming up with an idea, s/he also must defend it, promote it, and convince management of its validity to be implemented (Luria *et al.*, 2009; Nijhof *et al.*, 2002). LePine and Van Dyne (1998) considered that employee voice behaviour involves both proposing suggestions and advocating for their implementation in the firm. The study of employees' individual characteristics is hence crucial.

A relevant individual aspect to orientate behaviour in different situations is personality (Agrawal *et al.*, 2014). In fact, academic literature supports that employee voice behaviour is associated with their personality traits (e.g., Zare and Flinchbaugh, 2019). One of the most popular and widely studied taxonomies of personality traits is the Big Five or Five-Factor Model (FFM). This model classifies many personality traits into five factors that are characterised as the main dimensions of personality, namely *extraversion*, *neuroticism*, *conscientiousness*, *agreeableness*, and *openness to experience* (Goldberg, 1990; McCrae and Costa, 1987). These personality traits can influence the employee's behaviour in several phases of the creation and approval process of suggestions.

Most of the research on organisational change in hospitality focuses on the role of managers. Relatively few studies have been conducted on the role of frontline employees as change facilitators (e.g., Chiang, 2010; Presbitero and Teng-Calleja, 2017). Academics and researchers concerned with innovation agree on the potential value of employee-driven change for long-term organisational adaptability (Bani-Melhem *et al.*, 2018; González-González and García-Almeida, 2021). Moreover, psychology is a pillar for hospitality research (Ali *et al.*, 2019). Several studies have considered the relationships between personality differences in employee voice (LePine and Van Dyne, 2001; Zare and Flinchbaugh, 2019) and in their innovative behaviour (Yesil and Sozbilir, 2013). Rathi and Lee (2016) stated that what needs to be studied further regarding frontline hospitality employees is the role of employee personality traits in predicting individual and organisational outcomes, such as customer satisfaction and service quality. Moreover, Carnevale *et al.* (2017) added that future research on innovative behaviour should focus more on the promotion and implementation of employees' ideas. Thus, this work contributes to the enrichment of the academic literature by studying the implemented suggestions of frontline employees in hospitality firms based on their personality differences and exploring the Big Five personality traits as a framework for understanding the employee's creation of suggestions and overcoming of obstacles for their implementation.

To address this research gap in the hotel sector, the Five-Factor Model of personality (McCrae, 2017; McCrae and Costa, 1987) proves to be an adequate theoretical approach to study frontline employees' personality traits in relation to the proposal and implementation of suggestions as a contribution to organisational change. Understanding how personality differences of employees in the hospitality industry play out in the proposal and implementation of suggestions is fundamental for change-oriented organisations that aim to remain competitive in the marketplace taking advantage of employee's know-how. The present study addresses

frontline employees as change agents in the hotel sector, and their involvement in the organisational system to channel and implement suggestions with the identification of feasible improvements. Moreover, the potential influence of frontline employees' personality traits on their implemented suggestions has been addressed, resulting in the proposal of five hypotheses, which are examined with information obtained from receptionists. The findings of this work may lead to insightful and relevant implications.

2. Frontline employee's suggestions and its implementation in hospitality firms

Hospitality firms are obligated to constantly change and innovate (Hassi, 2019). Human resources play a relevant role in the capabilities that favour change and adaptation to the business environment (García-Lillo *et al.*, 2018). Change agents can be internal, such as managers or non-managerial employees who drive and supervise the change process, or external, such as consultants from outside the company (Lunenburg, 2010). Eisenstat *et al.* (1990) affirmed that change must occur at the job-level and not because of top management judgements. Emergent change, in contrast to the typical planned and formal decisions, is a rapid, continuous, and informal process, that entails open-ended learning elements characterised by adaptation and experimentation, as it is closer to the frontline (Edwards *et al.*, 2020). But knowledge-sharing behaviours are discretionary (Lombardi *et al.*, 2019). In the hospitality industry, employee participation and engagement in this process creates an organisational environment that is conducive to successful change (Kruja *et al.*, 2016; Tang and Tang, 2012). In fact, modern management has realised the potential value of employee constructive ideas through employee suggestion schemes (Mehrajunnisa and Jabeen, 2020), given that employee involvement has an effect on organisational outcomes (Beraldin *et al.*, 2020).

As Chiang (2010) underlined, managers should listen to employees' suggestions, allowing them to participate in the organisational change process. In the framework of hospitality, the privileged position of frontline employees in interacting with customers allows them to gather first-hand information about them (e.g., Martinaityte *et al.*, 2019) and it has been a traditional way of customer engagement, which is an increasingly relevant concept in the sector (Chen *et al.*, 2021). Organisations that appreciate and encourage employee voice are better able to achieve their goals and objectives (Daley and Vasu, 2005). According to Morrison (2011), voice refers to the discretionary communication of ideas, suggestions, or concerns about work-related issues to improve the functioning of a unit or the organisation. LePine and Van Dyne (1998) specified that employee voice includes proposing suggestions for organisational improvements even when others disagree with them. Suggestion systems are used to capture good ideas generated by organisational members and encourage their participation in the organisation's decision-making process (Lasrado *et al.*, 2016; Van Dijk and Van den Ende, 2002) and they reflect a relevant aspect of the organisational knowledge development and dissemination. These systems in hospitality firms comprise a wide array of methods, ranging from classical ones, like suggestion boxes or active comments in meetings or to bosses privately, to online software on the intranet or corporate apps. Presbitero and Teng-Calleja (2017) established that when hotel employees can actively participate in change initiatives and monitor the change process, they will be more committed to the task. By making suggestions for change, hospitality employees can help their organisations improve products, processes, and services, and thereby adapt to a changing environment.

Frontline hotel employees play a key role in organisational effectiveness (Chen, 2019). For frontline employees to provide creative and/or even imitation-based ideas, it is necessary that they interact with customers, to understand their needs and suggestions, but also that they know the business model of hospitality firms. Only then will it be possible to propose ideas in line with the organisation's vision, values, and objectives (Viseu *et al.*, 2020). Due to the potential low quality of some of those ideas (e.g., Khazanchi and Masterson, 2011), hospitality

firms conduct a process to evaluate suggestions in order to filter out and discard those ideas that are not considered useful for implementation. According to Axtell *et al.* (2000), the proposal of a suggestion could be more associated with the personal attributes of employees (i.e., personality, etc.), while their adoption and deployment could be rather connected to group and firm features. Thus, it can be argued that making suggestions does not guarantee their implementation, as external factors, such as the evaluation and approval of suggestions by the organisation, are involved (Axtell *et al.*, 2000). Cho and Erdem (2006) established that employees in the lodging industry feel more satisfied and valued when their suggestions are heeded and implemented at the workplace.

Since a first step for the employee is to propose a suggestion, a second step is to advocate for its acceptance and push for its implementation in the hospitality firm. According to Nijhof *et al.* (2002), when an employee has a novel idea, s/he must express the advantages and rationale underlying the suggestion with the right approach in order to convince decision-makers and evaluators of its potential. The employee must try to ensure that the suggestion is heeded; this involves developing the idea, proposing it to others, defending it against criticism, and dealing with the conflicts it may generate (Luria *et al.*, 2009). As stated by Janssen (2004), employees promote their ideas by persuading potential groups and departments within the organisation that can provide support and have the power to implement the idea. In the hospitality industry, once frontline employees have come up with a potentially interesting suggestion, they have an important role to play in convincing management about its validity and feasibility to proceed with its implementation. Thus, an individual useful idea is transformed over time into a team and organisational idea, enhancing the pool of knowledge held by the hospitality firm and fostering innovative behaviours among its employees (Kim and Koo, 2017). Despite the crucial role of the hospitality organisation in the evaluation and implementation of suggestions, there are consequently some individual characteristics of the employee suggesting the idea that can help to overcome the filter and gain the organisation's approval. Therefore, it is also interesting to analyse the implemented suggestions in hospitality companies from an individual perspective.

3. The frontline employee's personality and implemented suggestions in hospitality firms

Individual characteristics of frontline employees, such as their personality traits, are relevant in shaping their attitudes, behaviours, and performance at work (Buil *et al.*, 2019). Personality is one of the factors that influence knowledge sharing in firms (Hussain *et al.*, 2016). Agrawal *et al.* (2014) described personality as the set of personal characteristics that determine how individuals perceive and react to a given situation or context. Likewise, McCrae *et al.* (2000) stated that personality traits remain constant over time and influence individual's response to various circumstances. In service organisations, frontline employees' personality can influence customer perceptions of service quality, corporate image, and consumer loyalty, which can result, for example, in customer satisfaction and longer overnight stays. Therefore, frontline employees' personality is crucial for building a favourable image and the so-called brand personality (Ekinici and Dawes, 2009). A firm grasp of the role of employee personality is essential for hospitality organisations to manage employees more effectively and, thus, provide a better level of service (Huang, 2006; Leung and Law, 2010).

One of the most studied personality frameworks is the Big Five or Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality, which categorises several traits into five groups comprising *extraversion*, *neuroticism*, *conscientiousness*, *agreeableness*, and *openness to experience* (Goldberg, 1990; McCrae, 2017; McCrae and Costa, 1987). The five-factor theory of personality argues that this model captures the major dimensions of personality that are common to most personality scales despite diverse origins, and at the same time each of the five factors has deep conceptual roots in psychological literature (McCrae and Costa, 1996). The study of personality allows to

identify the main attitudinal, behavioural, and emotional characteristics of individuals, as well as their thought patterns (Funder, 2001; Lynn, 2021; Shahreki *et al.*, 2020). The development of personality psychology was marked by the rise of several theoretical models, e.g., psychoanalytical, behavioural, humanistic, and linked to traits (Funder, 2001). Regarding the traits approach, there was a model of personality, the Big Five, which achieved a greater consensus, both theoretically and empirically (Funder, 2001). This model allowed the organisation of this field of studies, which was characterised as chaotic and complex, where several constructs were proposed to measure the same aspects but using different labels (Funder, 2001). Nevertheless, the evolution of personality psychology suffered a few setbacks, some of them last until today, namely regarding the true nature of the five factors (Goldberg, 1993). For example, although there is a consensus on the number of factors, different authors have proposed different labels for them (Goldberg, 1993).

Nowadays, two different frameworks (i.e., McCrae and Costa, 1997b; Peabody and Goldberg, 1989) have reached an agreement on the number of personality factors, namely five. Costa and McCrae's (1997) five-factor model has gathered a solid empirical support across different activity domains, including the hospitality one (e.g., Kosker *et al.*, 2019; Lynn, 2021). According to Funder (2001), these five dimensions are broad enough to measure personality, ensuring also adequate psychometric evidence. Since the 1990's, the Big Five model began to gain relevance at the workplace, with its personality dimensions being correlated with several job- and work-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and job performance (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Judge *et al.*, 2002; Kim *et al.*, 2019). Personality assessment has also been the target of special attention. Thus, it has been observed that standardised measures (e.g., Revised NEO Personality Inventory [NEO-PI-R]; Costa and McCrae, 1995) have received greater acceptance, as they provide psychometric evidence that proves their suitability. Nevertheless, some other options have emerged recently and can evaluate the five-factor model of personality with a smaller pool of items.

Several studies have found that most employee personality traits have an important effect on their voice (e.g., LePine and Van Dyne, 2001). Thus, when employees speak out with the intention of changing current work processes or practices, they do not only propose ideas for improvement, but also focus their efforts on convincing leaders to implement change (Carnevale *et al.*, 2017). Thus, personality can be associated with proposing and defending suggestions, and the personality traits of frontline employees of hospitality firms can exert a decisive influence in obtaining suggestions that will be implemented. Subsequently, the potential effects of the five-personality dimensions in the Big Five model regarding frontline employees and the generation of suggestions that obtain organisational approval are discussed.

3.1. Extraversion

The academic literature agrees that a person with a high level of extraversion tends to be sociable, dynamic, talkative, bold, optimistic, oriented to action, as well as assertive (e.g., Barrick and Mount, 1991). In organisations, extraverted employees are characterised by being less likely to settle for stable situations and are more prone to initiate change-oriented communication with their supervisors (e.g., Crant *et al.*, 2011; Nikolaou *et al.*, 2008). Compared to the other Big Five personality traits, extraversion is the most relevant feature regarding employee voice (i.e., expression of opinions and concerns by workers) (Tedone and Bruk-Lee, 2021).

Extraversion is generally associated with change behaviour (Karlsen and Langvik, 2021). According to Tedone and Bruk-Lee (2021), employees with a high degree of extraversion feel more confident making change-oriented suggestions to their supervisors. Maynes and Podsakoff (2014) stated that extraverted employees tend to express and defend their ideas and opinions about opportunities for improvement or about the organisation's current

procedures, especially if it helps achieving goals. In the hospitality industry, frontline employees are in constant interaction with customers; because of this, organisations expect extraverted employees to be more customer-oriented, sociable, and friendlier, and to come up with good improvement ideas that result from successful interactions with customers (Ekinci and Dawes, 2009). Furthermore, several studies have validated that extraversion is positively related to employee voice behaviour (e.g., Crant *et al.*, 2011; Nikolaou *et al.*, 2008). This discussion leads to the proposal of the first hypothesis in this research.

H1: Frontline employees' extraversion is positively linked to the number of their implemented suggestions in hospitality firms.

3.2. Neuroticism

Neuroticism is the inability to adjust emotionally to the environment (Costa and McCrae, 1992). Kammeyer-Mueller *et al.* (2016) indicated that an individual with a high level of neuroticism tend to evaluate the environment as threatening and could often experience negative emotions like shame, insecurity, distress, irritability, fear, and low self-esteem, (e.g., Costa and McCrae, 1987). Raja *et al.* (2004) stated that neurotics do not tend to engage in relationships that require high social skills, trusting others, taking initiative, and long-term commitments.

As claimed by Sung and Choi (2009), neurotic individuals do not adapt well to changes in the workplace, they try to avoid new, uncertain, and risky situations, and are less likely to develop creative behaviours. Neurotic individuals often delay decision-making, believing that their voice will not impact or influence others (Ohana, 2016). Costa and McCrae (1992) stated that neurotics tend to have irrational ideas, excessive impulses, and maladaptive responses. Applying Costa and McCrae's (1992) understanding to the hospitality industry, frontline employees who exhibit a high degree of neuroticism often feel insecure about their thoughts and ideas, so they are reluctant to propose suggestions for improvement or significant changes in their organisation. In this regard, LePine and Dyne (2001) showed that neuroticism tends to be negatively related to employee voice behaviour. Hence, the second research hypothesis proposed is:

H2: Frontline employees' neuroticism is negatively linked to the number of their implemented suggestions in hospitality firms.

3.3. Conscientiousness

According to academic literature, conscientious individuals are characterised as organised, planned, dependent, responsible, punctual, practical, self-disciplined, self-controlled, and achievement-oriented (e.g., Barrick and Mount, 1991; Costa and McCrae, 1992). Conscientious individuals are hard-working, purposeful, task-complete, and demanding at work (Agrawal *et al.*, 2014). In addition, a high degree of conscientiousness is characterised by focussing on goals and commitment to achieve them, as well as concern for the success of the organisation (Nikolaou *et al.*, 2008).

In the hospitality industry, conscientiousness reflects task-orientation or a need for frontline employees to satisfy customer preferences. Conscientious frontline employees are hence more likely to work hard to find solutions to customer problems and meet their needs/demands (Ashill *et al.*, 2020). In academic literature, several authors concur with the idea that conscientious individuals are more likely to engage in voice behaviours (e.g., Avery, 2003; LePine and Dyne, 2001; Zare and Flinchbaugh, 2019). However, other authors disagree (e.g., Tedone and Bruk-Lee, 2021), arguing that conscientious individuals could avoid speaking out on work-related aspects, as they are likely to evaluate the risks involved. This could be related to knowledge hiding (Rao *et al.*, 2021), caused by a lack of impulsiveness (Wang *et al.*, 2020).

In addition, conscientious employees have a certain orientation to be practical and proactive, so they may try to solve a given problem or situation themselves before sharing it with their supervisors, thus avoiding employee voice behaviour. Furthermore, regarding the development of creative suggestions, a negative relationship has been found between employee conscientiousness and their creative ability (Feist, 1998). Conscientious employees could reduce their creativity based on preferences for planning and control (Coelho *et al.*, 2018). These individuals may be then too dependent, inflexible, and rigid in their thinking, or too risk-averse, which is detrimental to creative performance (Coelho *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, even if frontline employees propose their ideas to the organisation, they may not be novel and creative enough to be implemented. Based on this discussion, the third research hypothesis argues that:

H3: Frontline employees' conscientiousness is negatively linked to the number of their implemented suggestions in hospitality firms.

3.4. Agreeableness

Agreeableness is the tendency to be philanthropic (Costa and McCrae, 1992). Agreeable individuals are described as kind, trusting, generous, altruistic, cooperative, and tolerant (Barrick and Mount, 1991). Ekinci and Dawes (2009) established that agreeableness is associated with actions aimed at gaining acceptance from others. Highly agreeable individuals tend to maintain positive social relationships in the workplace (Park *et al.*, 2021). In addition, agreeableness has been found to be a strong predictor of customer-oriented behaviours (Brown *et al.*, 2002).

Agreeable frontline employees in the hospitality industry are expected to feel satisfied when they meet customer expectations and desires, which motivates them to produce novel and potentially useful ideas (Donavan *et al.*, 2004; Oldham and Cummings, 1996). However, since agreeable employees place a high value on social harmony in the workplace (LePine and Van Dyne, 2001), they are unlikely to challenge current situations by making recommendations for change, as this may create social dissent and clashes with those who oppose the proposed suggestions. Agreeable individuals try to avoid conflict, so they tend to agree with the supervisor's decisions and support suggestions proposed by their colleagues (Avery, 2003; LePine and Van Dyne, 2001; Tedone and Bruk-Lee, 2021). Hence, agreeable employees are less prone to voice behaviours (e.g., Maynes and Podsakoff, 2014; Zare and Flinchbaugh, 2019). Though research about the impact of agreeableness on creativity presents mixed and inconclusive results (e.g., Coelho *et al.*, 2018; Feist, 1998) the lack of determination to voice and defend ideas that entail change in work environments with colleagues and managers limits the likelihood of achieving implemented suggestions. Thus, the fourth research hypothesis states that:

H4: Frontline employees' agreeableness is negatively linked to the number of their implemented suggestions in hospitality firms.

3.5. Openness to experience

Openness to experience is characterised by intellectual curiosity, active imagination, and open-mindedness (Barrick and Mount, 1991). McCrae and Costa (1987) stated that openness to experience relates to those individuals who are proactive, have broad interests, and seek new and authentic experiences. Thus, frontline employees who are open to experience are imaginative, curious, original, intelligent, and have flexibility of thought (e.g., Ekinci and Dawes, 2009). Barrick and Mount (1991) find that employees with a high level of this trait are willing to consider information from multiple sources and are characterised by attitudes towards learning experiences. According to McCrae and Costa (1997a), people who are open to

experience develop a variety of new ideas that they are willing and able to put forward, thus challenging the *status quo*.

In service organisations, frontline employees who are open to experience are likely to meet customer needs better than those employees who are less imaginative and novel in addressing customer problems (Ashill *et al.*, 2020). McCrae (1987) stated that individuals who are open to experience can ‘think outside the box’, this results in the generation of novel and useful ideas. In fact, openness to experience tends to be viewed the most relevant personality factor in the Big Five model in predicting employee creativity (Zhang *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, individuals with a high level of openness to experience value the opportunity to express their creative ideas and strive for change (Avery, 2003). Hence, a positive relationship between openness to experience and employee voice behaviour is expected (LePine and Van Dyne, 2001). Consistent with these arguments, the fifth research hypothesis defined is:

H5: Frontline employees’ openness to experience is positively linked to the number of their implemented suggestions in hospitality firms.

4. Methodology

In order to achieve the objective of the work, a mixed method based both on a quantitative approach and a qualitative one was used. Regarding the quantitative approach, frontline hotel employees from hotels located in the northern part of Tenerife were surveyed. Tenerife is one of the Canary Islands (Spain) and this archipelago is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Europe (e.g., Ahani *et al.*, 2019). Apart from receiving the highest number of visitors on the Canary Islands, Tenerife was the island with the highest number of hotels (243) before the Covid-19 pandemic, followed by Gran Canaria with 180 hotels (ISTAC, 2021). Though it is not a homogenous industry, De Andreis (2020) indicated that the tourism sector of the Canary Islands has reacted to several crisis scenarios in the past with particularly effective answers. Moreover, innovation is fostered by the island government in its tourism strategy (Turismo de Tenerife, 2017). Tenerife is a destination with a high level of hotel competition (Ropero-García, 2006), and competition is expected to stimulate change to adapt to the varying conditions of competitor moves.

This work has focused on receptionists as change agents in the hotel sector, as their constant interaction with customers provides them with valuable information about guests’ needs and preferences, which can be used to propose improvements in the organisation (e.g., Engen and Magnusson, 2015). Hotel receptionists in front-office departments are important frontline employees in hospitality organisations. Thus, this kind of employees has been frequently chosen as adequate study subjects in academic analyses to represent frontline organisational members, as the works by Patah *et al.* (2009) or Pinto *et al.* (2020) show. The population of this study was composed of the receptionists of hotels with a category of three, four and five stars located in the northern part of Tenerife in 2019. Turismo de Tenerife (2019) and tourist accommodation metasearch engines provided information on the number of high-end hotels in the area, reaching 77 hotels. After direct contact with each hotel, the study’s population comprised 484 receptionists.

The survey was based on a questionnaire. The dependent variable was measured as the total number of suggestions that the receptionist proposed during the previous month and which had been implemented. This item was included and revised as part of a research project in which eight experts were interviewed for the definition of variables of interest. To measure the Big Five personality traits, the scale from Rammstedt and John’s (2007) was applied and its items were presented in a 7-point Likert-type format. This measure allows a quick assessment of the five-factor model based on the theoretical framework of Costa and McCrae (1997). The 10-item version of the Big Five Inventory (BFI-10; Rammstedt and John, 2007) aimed to evaluate

these dimensions rapidly, while maintaining adequate psychometric properties, e.g., at the validity and reliability level. Regarding validity, this instrument showed convergent validity with the most known measure to address the Big Five according to the model of Costa and McCrae (1997), the NEO-PI-R.

The survey fieldwork consisted of personal visits to the 77 high-end hotels in the northern area of the selected destination, briefly presenting the study to be performed to the head of reception or the receptionist in charge at the time and asking for collaboration in filling out the questionnaires. In most hotels the response was positive, but 12 hotels refused to participate. A self-selection sampling was used: For every hotel in the population the reception manager or equivalent position was provided with questionnaires and asked to pass one to each receptionist in his/her hotel, including all the front office shifts. A few days after the distribution of the questionnaires, the completed questionnaires were collected personally. The fieldwork resulted in 167 valid responses, which composed the final sample. The rate of responses is hence 34.5% and the margin of error is 6.14% with a confidence level of 95%. A basic description of the individuals in the sample shows that they are mostly females (58.7%), with an average age of 36 years old and an average of 10 years of experience as receptionists.

Regarding the qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted to delve into the quantitative findings. Based on the results previously obtained in the quantitative analysis, several open-ended questions were designed to allow respondents to express their views on why certain personality traits are positively or negatively associated with the suggestions made by receptionists and considered suitable by the company to be implemented. Elo *et al.* (2014) assert that in qualitative research, those individuals who best represent or are familiar with the research topic should comprise the sample. Therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted with 19 hotel receptionists from the north of Tenerife. The interviews were conducted in Spanish by video-call or face-to-face sessions. These interviews had a duration of between 11 and 47 minutes, with an average of 23 minutes, and were audio-recorded.

5. Results and discussion

In this study, the main variable to be considered was the number of suggestions that employees proposed and had been successfully implemented by their organisations. The number of suggestions by employees implemented during the last month in the hospitality firms considered are shown in Table I. Most respondents (52.2%) did not propose any suggestions that were implemented; however, a large percentage of receptionists (39.5%) proposed one or two suggestions in their respective hotels during the last month that were approved by their company. It is interesting to note that the sample included a small number of respondents (4.2%) who are high contributors of valid, accepted suggestions (more than four per month) in their firms.

[Table I]

Table II shows the Pearson correlation coefficients between the dependent variable (implemented suggestions) and the variables related to the employees' five personality traits. Mean values were computed for each personality dimension. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to statistically test the research hypotheses.

[Table II]

Table III presents the most significant aspects of the regression model. Respondent's gender and age were included as control variables. The F-value indicate the explanatory

influence of the independent variables; consequently, the independent variables improve the fit of the sample data and it points out the relevance of personality on implemented suggestions. No multicollinearity problems were detected since no VIF value is higher than 10.

[Table III]

An overview of the results indicates that there are three significant independent variables that explain the implemented suggestions that have been proposed by hotel receptionists. These significant variables are extraversion, neuroticism (linked to restless individuals), and lack of direction. Consequently, hypotheses 1 and 3 are accepted, hypothesis 2 is rejected, and hypotheses 4 and 5 are not accepted.

The in-depth interviews corroborate the results of the quantitative study to a greater extent. Thus, regarding the receptionist's extraversion, most interviewees supported their relevance. One of them indicated that extraverted receptionists tend to "obtain more insights from customers about their needs and preferences or about what the hotel's competitors are doing". Another interviewee mentioned that extraverted receptionists "express themselves more easily and make their ideas known". An additional interesting statement taken from the interviews was that "extraverted receptionists have a greater ability to argue and defend their ideas, thus convincing management and getting their suggestions implemented". As for the receptionists' neuroticism, interviewees showed their support for the findings. One of them noted that "neurotic receptionists are extremely sensitive to situations that cause them anger or annoyance, so they anticipate this and strive to identify faults or possible opportunities for improvement in processes". Another interesting response was that "when neurotic receptionists become obsessed with a problem, they take responsibility for solving it themselves and do not rest until they have done so". Regarding conscientiousness, one of the interviewees indicated that conscientious receptionists "focus on the rules and procedures already established, internalising them, and becoming experts in planning and control, reaching a state of order from which they do not want to leave". Another one stated that "conscientious receptionists do not dare to come up with ideas because they do not allow themselves to fail, that is why they do not take risks", in contrast to the receptionists who show lack of direction.

On the other hand, interviewees also gave their feedback on the variables that were not significant in the regression analysis. Thus, regarding the receptionists' agreeableness, one of them pointed out that "agreeable receptionists may avoid coming up with ideas in case they are considered 'bad' or 'invalid' by management or colleagues". Likewise, several interviewees claimed that these receptionists always try to please everyone, so they don't want to go into aspects that generate conflict. Finally, the openness to experience of receptionists was a topic that generated a lot of interest from interviewees. One statement worth noting was that "receptionists who are open to experience often come up with a lot of ideas, but they tend not to filter them or analyse whether it is possible to implement them in the company". Another interviewee added that "they may propose crazy suggestions that are far removed from the reality of the company", and that "they may focus on quantity, but not on the quality of what they suggest". Thus, the results of the in-depth interviews demonstrate that what was previously developed in the work is in line with the reality or situation of hotel receptionists.

The findings of this work indicate that the extraversion of frontline employees is positively linked to the suggestions implemented in firms in the hospitality sector. Extraversion is positively related to change behaviour (e.g., Karlsen and Langvik, 2021). This idea is solid in the scientific literature as several studies stated that extraverted individuals find the opportunity through voice behaviour to express themselves and influence their environment (e.g., Avery, 2003). Furthermore, extraverts are prone to take risks and often propose change-oriented suggestions to modify and improve the *status quo* (Tedone and Bruk-Lee, 2021). On the other hand, the results show that frontline employees' conscientiousness is negatively

associated with the implementation of their suggestions. Conscientious individuals do not tend to be open to new thoughts or ideas, which is detrimental to their contribution of useful suggestions for implementation (Coelho *et al.*, 2018). Thus, individuals who exhibit a low level of conscientiousness or a lack of direction could have more diverse thoughts and take risks, which would foster the contribution of original and valid suggestions for implementation. Highly conscientious employees' underlying lack of impulsiveness (e.g., Wang *et al.*, 2020) could be also a reason for knowledge hiding (Rao *et al.*, 2021) since they are in a position to have a longer period of time to analyse the potential rewards of knowledge disclosure.

With regard to the unexpected results in this study, employees' neuroticism seems to be positively associated with the implementation of their suggestions. Inozu *et al.* (2020) indicate that neuroticism is a personality dimension that is closely related to symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), whereby it may lead to compulsive behaviours. Likewise, an employee with a high level of neuroticism may become obsessed with a problem, focus on it and remain persistent and motivated until it is effectively solved, and innovation is achieved (Brattström *et al.*, 2018). Employee perseverance is associated with finding solutions to problems (Vele and Toader, 2016).

Furthermore, results show that there is no significant association between employees' agreeableness or openness to experience and their implemented suggestions in hospitality firms. Despite the negative relationship hypothesised in this work, agreeableness can positively affect organisational citizenship behaviour in the hospitality sector (e.g., Park *et al.*, 2021) where suggestions for improvement is a relevant element. Moreover, leadership can influence the effect of employee personality on several dimensions of performance including organisational citizenship behaviour (Aboramadan *et al.*, 2020; Yang *et al.*, 2020), and those external factors could become more salient for certain personality traits like openness to experience (e.g., Zhang *et al.*, 2020).

6. Conclusion

This work has analysed the influence of frontline employee personality on organisational change in hospitality firms through the proposal and defence of valid suggestions. Hospitality firms are proactive in producing innovations or forced to adapt their strategies and operations to competitive/contextual pressures. Both paths require organisational change. In line with modern approaches based on talent and knowledge-based management, these changes can stem from employees who have operational and competitive knowledge to suggest modifications in practices and even strategic orientations. Employee-driven change is even more solid if the underlying ideas are originated in employees in contact with customers and thus indirectly with competitive dynamics. However, for frontline employee-driven change to happen, two different processes are required: the proposal of a suggestion by frontline employees, and the evaluation and positive decision about the implementation of that suggestion. Though the role of the worker in the first process is clear, his/her participation in the analysis and communication of the foundations regarding the suggestion is also decisive in the second process. Personality traits of certain employees become then relevant in the achievement of a competitive positioning of hospitality firms through the generation and implementation of organisational changes. The framework provided by the Five-Factor Model of personality provides a solid theoretical approach to address the study of frontline employees' personality traits regarding the proposal and analysis of suggestions as an input for organisational change.

This work has shown that frontline employees' extraversion, neuroticism, and lack of direction are relevant to implement an employee-driven change strategy in hospitality firms. These findings entail interesting theoretical implications. The study of novel ideas and behaviours has focused on the importance of states, i.e., phenomena that are momentary and easily modified (e.g., emotions; Jaussi *et al.*, 2017), or motivated behaviours (e.g., what types

of motivation lead to higher creativity levels; Jesus *et al.*, 2013). This study proposed a different perspective by considering the role of personality traits, which are stable and durable, in the occurrence of employee suggestions. Frontline hotel employees constantly deal with the demands of colleagues, managers, and customers, so it is crucial to understand how they transform these demands into creative behaviours. This transformation from input (i.e., demands) into output (i.e., novel ideas) is closely related to employee personality, since there are traits that predispose workers to propose suggestions that improve work processes, which can act as catalysts to enhance hospitality firm performance. In addition, this work also contributes to the development of the literature on employee-driven change in hospitality firms by outlining the need for considering not only the change proposal but also the evaluation and implementation decision of the change. Despite the emphasis on creativity and idea proposal, the activities leading to idea evaluation and acceptance are also paramount in the change processes of hospitality firms. Moreover, another major implication of this work is that an employee's personality should not be neglected when analysing successful strategies to understand and foster change in hospitality firms from the individual level of analysis. Thus, the line of thought that defends those individual factors are only needed for obtaining suggestions and that organisational factors are more important in the evaluation and potential acceptance of those suggestions (e.g., Axtell *et al.*, 2000) is further developed. The intervention of the author of the suggestion and his/her personality can be paramount in the communication and analytical process that the suggestion must go through after its proposal and before a decision is made about its validity and feasibility. This has also been hinted by Huang *et al.* (2020) in their discussion of the positive relationship between psychological traits and several performance dimensions in hotels. The tenet that personality traits are also required for increasing employee-driven change and innovation outputs in hospitality organisations beyond classical individual characteristics such as creativity, knowledge, and motivation is hence strengthened. This theoretical contribution can be made going beyond the recent statement by Al-Hawari *et al.* (2021) regarding the limited empirical research available to verify the link between frontline employees' personality traits and innovative behaviours in the hospitality sector. A final theoretical contribution lies in the need for observing the influence of each individual personality trait (and not of personality as a whole) on desired outputs of hospitality organisational processes, since only some of them exert a relevant impact on dynamics such as change and innovation.

Regarding practical implications, managers in hospitality firms should bear in mind that frontline employees can be a relevant source of organisational change through the implementation of their own ideas. Though access to managerial knowledge possessed by organisational managers and external agents such as consultants can be also relevant, the specific position of frontline employees as boundary spanners due to their frequent and often intense contacts with customers makes their knowledge a valuable driver for obtaining and implementing ideas that reinforce or advance the hospitality firm's strategic positioning. Another major practical implication of this work is that managers should increase and take advantage of several psychological traits in their staff as they seem to be related to more effective employee-driven change. Stemming from those practical implications, several recommendations can be proposed for human resource managers, general managers, and managers of operational front-of-the-house departments. Firstly, the selection process to hire employees should consider the evaluation of psychological traits not only for the fit of job candidates but also for the positive effect that employees' extraversion, neuroticism, and lack of direction have on organisational change and innovation. Moreover, the suggestion system should take a 'soft approach' with respect to the analysis and evaluation of suggestions. In that line, a two-step evaluation process would present clear advantages since it would allow for a first step with an informal meeting with fewer attendants and mostly with the presence of low-

ranked managers, preferably supervisors of the proposing employee. This first meeting would serve as a voice channel for the employee to express the competitive foundations of the idea and comment on its validity, adequacy, and feasibility. The friendlier environment of this first meeting or analysis compared to formal meetings would tend to avoid problematic barriers for introverted individuals, bad impressions caused by the lack of direction of employees with a low level of conscientiousness/preparation, and tensions that a neurotic individual could not stand so easily. In addition, teamwork problem solving and training in social skills to overcome the problems of introversion in a work context, or creativity seminars to improve the skills of very organised employees could also become positive drivers for employee-driven change. Furthermore, considering extraversion and adaptability as selection criteria for frontline employees to be transferred to converted outlets/establishments requiring adapted change to smooth the process after hospitality acquisitions and mergers could be also very helpful.

The study has some limitations that must be considered. The use of a questionnaire to gather the data limited the knowledge of in-depth personality dynamics. Another aspect to consider is that the quantitative results have been obtained from data drawn from a small sample; it could be a question of concern, though Claudy (1978) specifically analyses research on psychological aspects and indicates that many applied studies employ multiple regression analysis for examining determinants from relatively small samples in the social and behavioural sciences. Moreover, the geographical context where the empirical approach has been undertaken poses barriers for extrapolation of the results. In that same line, and despite the relevance of the front-office department in many hotels, the focus on receptionists could also limit the generalisation of findings to other frontline employees of hospitality firms; research on other employees in this category could be interesting to shed light in potential particularities regarding the provided service, the length of contact with customers, or the nature of the encounter (e.g., physical distance, customers who can choose the serving employee versus those who are forced to be assisted by a certain one). Another limitation is related to the use of the five-factor model. Although this model is the most consensual in personality psychology, there is no total agreement on the number of personality dimensions nor regarding their labelling (Goldberg, 1993).

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