

December 2023

Retaining Staff: Is It a Matter of Instilling Pride?

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Recommended Citation

Hancer, Murat and Chaulagain, Suja (2023) "Retaining Staff: Is It a Matter of Instilling Pride?," *Rosen Research Review*. Vol. 4: Iss. 2, Article 6.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/rosen-research-review/vol4/iss2/6>

RETAINING STAFF – IS IT A MATTER OF INSTILLING PRIDE?



Hotels struggle to attract staff; you can partly blame the public perception of hotel jobs for that. But, why is it difficult to retain staff once they start? Perhaps an answer lies in whether they feel pride in what they do. Professors Murat Hancer and Suja Chaulagain at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management led a team of researchers to unpack the notion of pride among hotel staff in the United States and Vietnam. What they learned has significant importance for a sector that crosses cultures.

Few events in recent history have impacted the hospitality industry more than the COVID-19 pandemic. As hotels emptied and restaurants closed, staff found themselves without work. When the pandemic abated, and the industry tried to return to normal, it found itself struggling to re-employ those staff or

find others to fill their posts. There are reasons for that rooted in popular perceptions of the industry. The great 'reset' that accompanied the pandemic gave those within hospitality a reason to reevaluate the meaning of their work. Frustrating though that may be for employers, it presented an opportunity for researchers to examine a hitherto largely

unexplored component to reducing staff turnover: the impact of pride in one's work. A team from UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management tapped into the sentiment of hotel employees in two countries with very different cultures about what their work means to them. What they discovered significantly impacts a global industry staffed by employees from diverse cultural backgrounds.

As an opportunity for employment, hotels have something of an image problem. Hotel jobs suffer the popular perception that they are largely low-skilled and low-paid, demanding long and irregular working hours that impact family life and come with limited promotional opportunities. As such, working in a hotel can



Hancer and Chaulagain unpack the notion of pride among hotel staff in the United States and Vietnam.

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CULTURALLY POLES APART

Culturally speaking, the United States and Vietnam are poles apart. The U.S., like many other Western countries, embraces individualism, a cultural value emphasizing the importance of individual goals, rights, and freedoms over collective or group interests. Vietnam, on the other hand, like other Asian countries, emphasizes collectivism—the importance of collective or group goals over individual interests. For the research team, a study that could tap into what work meant to hotel staff in each of the two countries would therefore provide a highly valuable cross-cultural understanding of the notion of pride and its possible role in encouraging people to enter the hospitality industry and, importantly, to stay.

Current empirical evidence within the hospitality industry indicates a correlation between the meaning of work (MOW) and employees' internal motives. That makes sense—if a job encourages a positive self-perception in a staff member, it's less likely they would consider leaving. However, that encourages us to question what makes a job meaningful. It may differ between cultures. Some cultures value notions of service to

others over personal progression; success is reflected in the satisfaction of those served. Other cultures may see personal growth as a measure of success, and work that promotes that is more meaningful. This variation is reflected in research on MOW across cultures, which shows that MOW dimensions can differ vastly. This presented a challenge for Professors Hancer and Chaulagain and their colleagues: what MOW dimension could they use for a study across two different cultures?

ESTABLISHING A MEANING OF WORK

Following a robust literature review, the researchers decided on a multidisciplinary construct of MOW. They identified four dimensions they could use in a cross-cultural survey: work centrality, entitlement norms, obligation norms, and work value. Work centrality refers to the extent to which work is considered a crucial part of an individual's life. Entitlement norms are employees' expectations about what they should receive from their organization, such as salary and benefits, but also respect and recognition. Obligation norms, on the other hand, refer to largely social beliefs or expectations about what employees owe to their organization.

be seen as purely functional—a way to earn a basic income, probably temporarily to fill a career gap—and not befitting significant pride. For industry professionals who have chosen a career in hospitality, this may seem incongruent and is perhaps why empirical research on pride within the industry is scarce, and assumptions of staff motivational programs risk missing their mark, especially where staff have conflicting values on the meaning of work. To fill this space, Rosen College's Professors Murat Hancer and Suja Chaulagain and their colleagues unpack the notion of pride among hotel staff in the United States and Vietnam to search for commonalities and any possible differences. The choice of the two countries was not random.

The study explored what motivates hotel staff.



For the researchers, work value had three components: economic orientation—the financial benefits gained from the job; interpersonal relation—the quality of relationships with colleagues and supervisors; and expressive orientation—how much fun, interest, or satisfaction the job provided. For this study, it was hypothesized workers should feel ‘pride’ in a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction about their work in line with the above constructs of ‘meaning’.

From July to September 2020, the researchers employed online self-administered surveys among hotel workers via the Prolific Academic platform in the United States and via several closed

PRIDE IN THE WORKPLACE

As Professors Hancer and Chaulagain and their co-authors hypothesized, the study found that hotel employees who viewed their jobs as crucial and believed they had certain rights and responsibilities were more likely to consider their work meaningful and take pride in it. Furthermore, in terms of work values, hotel employees found pride in their work if it was financially rewarding, if they derived satisfaction from it, and had good relationships at the workplace. Interestingly, these values were broadly consistent across the two test groups.

Where the differences were clear was on whether pride in their work translated to an intention to stay in it. The study showed only a

This is especially important to international hospitality brands with a presence across culturally diverse countries. But it is equally vital to hotels—and the broader hospitality sector—in individual countries where staff are drawn from diverse cultural backgrounds. It therefore underlines the understanding that human resource strategies must be tailored to fit the cultural context in which a hotel organization operates.

DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM OTHER SECTORS

This study suggests hoteliers should re-evaluate their human resource strategies. Given the public perception that hotel jobs are low-skilled and low-paid and demand long and irregular hours, it’s no surprise that hotels suffer high staff turnover. The researchers have shown that hoteliers can motivate employees to overcome their challenges at work and stay in the field by stimulating their job pride. They have also presented a concise framework for understanding the cross-cultural meaning of work. They recommend that hoteliers use the suggested MOW dimensions in personnel hiring and selection procedures and, after that, in the design of orientation, training interventions, and team-building exercises.

Furthermore, the researchers have shown that giving someone more money to do a job won’t necessarily make them feel prouder about doing it. Sometimes, that requires listening to their contributing ideas and concerns, providing training courses to enrich their job skills, offering them decision-making authority, and maintaining organizational transparency. Sometimes, all it may take is involving their input in the design of their uniforms.

Such changes within hospitality won’t be easy, but other sectors hold some guidance, and the researchers point to nurses and the military for inspiration for building pride within hotel staff for what they do.

The findings of this study provide valuable theoretical contributions regarding employees’ behavioral intentions from a multicultural perspective. But more than that, Professors Hancer and Chaulagain and their colleagues have significantly contributed to our understanding of what motivates hotel staff, and hopefully, by shifting an entire sector’s mindset, could change public opinion about careers in hospitality.

THIS STUDY SUGGESTS HOTELIERS SHOULD REEVALUATE THEIR HUMAN RESOURCE STRATEGIES.

Facebook groups designed explicitly for selected hotel staff in Vietnam—online crowdsourcing platforms for academic research are not common in Vietnam, whereas Facebook is widely used. In total, the researchers secured 455 qualified responses, spread relatively evenly across the two countries, with similar spreads in the samples in terms of gender, age, marital status, and education. There were some clear distinctions, such as around ethnicity—while respondents in the U.S. were diverse, all Vietnamese respondents were Asian. How they responded sent a clear message about what develops pride in the workplace and whether it influences decisions among hotel staff to remain in a job.

strong and statistically significant relationship between job pride and turnover intention among the U.S. respondents. In other words, the more pride American hotel employees felt in their jobs, the less likely they were to leave. The Vietnamese respondents may have shared the values of their U.S. counterparts of what makes a job meaningful, but whether they felt pride in it was not a critical factor in whether or not they would stay in it.

This finding is significant because it shows that cultural values and norms can influence work-related attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, it suggests that the effectiveness of strategies aimed at increasing job pride to reduce turnover may vary from one culture to another.

RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Murat Hancer, Dr. Suja Chaulagain, and colleagues explored whether employees' turnover intention was decreased by promoting their pride in jobs and how job pride was predicted by dimensions of the meaning of work.

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PERSONAL RESPONSE

How would you like to see this research developed further?

// The study presents a nuanced exploration of how cultural contexts influence work-related pride and employee turnover in the hospitality sector, focusing on the U.S. and Vietnam. Future research could aim to broaden the cultural scope by incorporating additional cultures, examining the influence of sub-cultures, and expanding the focus to other service sectors or specific roles within hospitality. Methodologically, integrating longitudinal data could offer a more comprehensive understanding. //

How would you like to see your findings used to generate impact for the industry?

// The hotel industry heavily relies on having many competent and qualified staff and there is an urgent need to retain and motivate employees to stay within their jobs. Our findings offer insight into employees' behavioral intention from a multicultural perspective, and this has important managerial implications for hoteliers in human resources management practices.

Since hotel jobs are characterized by low job satisfaction and a high turnover rate induced by low pay, irregular and long working hours, and high stress, we believe that by stimulating employees' job pride, hoteliers can motivate their employees to overcome their challenges at work and stay in the field. In this way, there is the potential to generate real impact for the industry. //

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