

Work engagement and staff turnover in the hospitality industry: An analysis of selected job characteristics

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of the article is to determine the relationships between selected job characteristics in hotel enterprises and employees' work engagement and investigate how this may relate to their intention to leave.

Research Design & Methods: The research involved employees directly serving hotel guests (front office) of six Tricity hotels in Poland. The hotels included in the study were medium and higher standard facilities that provide a wide and comprehensive range of services. We conducted the research using a direct survey, with 108 participating respondents.

Findings: Survey research conducted among employees of Tricity hotels showed a significant correlation between the analyzed job characteristics and work engagement, which in turn significantly weakens hotel employees' intention to leave.

Implications & Recommendations: The obtained results provide valuable information about the relationships between selected characteristics of the work process in the hotel industry and how they affect work engagement and intention to leave. The results may help the management of hospitality companies formulate recommended actions to optimize work conditions so that they are conducive to higher service quality and reduced employee turnover.

Contribution & Value Added: The research results expand knowledge of human resources management, in particular regarding optimization of the work process conditions in the hotel industry to strengthen employees' engagement. This is an original study, which treats the proposed relationships holistically in the context of the specifics of the hotel industry.

Article type: research article

Keywords: hospitality enterprises; hotel employees; work engagement; job characteristics; turnover intention

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INTRODUCTION

The success of a hotel company in conditions of ever-increasing competition requires not only the acquisition and retention of appropriate staff but also engagement of all its employees, especially since the high rate of labour turnover (Glińska-Neweś *et al.*, 2020; Gordon *et al.*, 2019; Lu *et al.*, 2016) and post-pandemic staff shortages (Travel & Tourism Economic Impact: Global Trends, 2022) are a major threat for the tourism industry today. Recently, the phenomenon of excessive staff turnover has intensified in the hotel industry in Poland, with 83% of hoteliers reporting problems with retaining employees (Employee-turnover, 2024). High turnover rates mainly affect hotel operational areas (Glińska-Neweś *et al.*, 2020) whose employees can freely move to other service sectors due to the transferability of their skills, which are applicable across various jobs (Kusluvan, 2003). This creates a continuous challenge and undermines hotels' competitiveness, as chronic problems with at-

tracting and retaining skilled employees result in both tangible and intangible costs, including job stress, low morale, service disruption, and ultimately customer dissatisfaction (Zhao *et al.*, 2016; Ozturk *et al.*, 2014; Lu *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, this situation demands empirical attention to significant determinants of this phenomenon in hotels (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2010). Poland is no exception here, as it also seriously suffers from a shortage of skilled and experienced employees, making the prevention of staff turnover and retention a top priority for the industry.

In this context, work engagement can play a particular role in the success of service enterprises and their employees. Engaged workers tend to be highly energetic and enthusiastic about their work (Liu *et al.*, 2017) and they may be more reluctant to leave their jobs. It is particularly important in the hotel industry, where employees frequently interact with customers (Choi *et al.*, 2012) and their attitudes and behaviours have a direct impact on the quality of provided services. These employees represent the hotel to customers (Karatepe & Kilic, 2007) and play a paramount role in building a strong relationship with guests, thus leading to customer loyalty (Chen *et al.*, 2014).

Given the intense competition and the need to improve productivity and service quality, employee engagement has become an important and valuable area of study (Ghorbannejad & Esakhani, 2016). Although work engagement has been a subject of scientific investigation for many years (mainly in the field of psychology), it is gaining increasing importance in management and quality sciences, as evidenced by numerous scientific articles and empirical studies on the subject (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Chen & Chen, 2012; Choo, 2016; Karatepe, 2015; Lee & Ok, 2015; Xanthopoulou *et al.*, 2009).

Nevertheless, work engagement remains one of the biggest challenges in business (Liu *et al.*, 2017). According to Gallup's latest State of the Global Workplace Report 2024, mental well-being has been declining over the past decade, with 41% of employees worldwide experiencing severe stress every day (State of the Global Workplace, 2024). The nature of the service delivery process in hospitality creates a particularly stressful work environment (Zhao *et al.*, 2016). It is also worrisome that disengaged employees constitute 15% of the global workforce. This situation is even worse in Poland, where employee engagement is alarmingly low, *i.e.* 10%, which is even below the European average (13%) and means that 90% of Polish employees are not engaged (State of the Global Workplace, 2024).

In this light, studies on work engagement are surprisingly limited (Kim *et al.*, 2009), which also includes the hospitality setting (see Grobelna, 2019; Grobelna & Dolot, 2018; Karatepe *et al.*, 2013). Although research analyzing the phenomenon of work engagement in hotel enterprises has been conducted, among others, in countries such as Malaysia (Choo, 2016), USA (Oparka & Nowicka, 2003), the Netherlands (Schaufeli, 2017), Türkiye (Karatepe, 2015), Romania (Karatepe, 2013), and Jordan (Sarhan *et al.*, 2020), in the Polish context, the engagement of hotel employees has been hardly researched. Therefore, more research on work engagement in hospitality is needed (Liu *et al.*, 2017), especially in Poland where hotels need a pool of engaged employees who will be likely to stay in their organizations providing high-quality of hotel services.

Given the above, we aimed to determine the relationships between selected job characteristics in hotel enterprises and employees' work engagement and investigate how this may relate to their intention to leave.

Therefore, this study will contribute to extending the research results in this field to another cultural and social background and help better understand the phenomenon of work engagement among hotel employees in Poland.

The research involved critical analysis of the subject literature, factors determining work engagement in the hotel industry, and the causes of staff turnover in enterprises (the theoretical part) as well as a survey conducted among employees of Tri-City hotels (the empirical part). The results of empirical research will help to expand knowledge of human resources management as regards optimizing the work process conditions in hospitality aiming to strengthen employee engagement. The study is original in nature because it treats the proposed relationships holistically and places them in the context of the hotel industry.

In the next section, we present the theoretical background and develop this study's hypotheses. This is followed by a description of the research methodology. Then the study's findings are presented

and discussed in a broader comparative setting. The article concludes with theoretical and practical implications. This study's limitations and directions for future research are also provided.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Essence and Dimensions of Work Engagement

Work engagement means an employee's positive attitude towards the company in which they work and towards the assigned tasks. Engagement in work is accompanied by positive emotions, such as excitement, enthusiasm, contentment, pleasure, and even happiness.

According to Schaufeli and Bakker's theory (2004), work engagement is a constant and deepening affective and cognitive attitude of employees towards duties, people, and objects related to work. According to these authors, work engagement is expressed in three dimensions, *i.e.* vigour, dedication, and absorption. Vigour means a high level of energy and resilience at work, the will to invest effort in work and perseverance in facing difficulties. Dedication to work means strong identification with it, a sense of its importance, enthusiasm, and pride in doing it. Absorption stands for concentration on work, engrossment in it, the feeling of unnaturally fast passage of time while performing one's tasks and difficulties in detaching from them (Derbis & Baka, 2011).

The conducted research shows that work engagement positively correlates with many positive phenomena in human work, such as work efficiency (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), proactive behaviour, development motivation, and customer satisfaction (Salanova *et al.*, 2005). Studies also confirm that work engagement is strongly related to the work environment, *e.g.* with a high level of autonomy, feedback availability, variety of responsibilities, support from superiors and co-workers, and development opportunities (Bakker *et al.*, 2003). Hackman and Oldham's model shows the mentioned conditions of the work process. It distinguishes five axial characteristics (properties) of work (Hackman & Oldham, 1976):

- skill variety – concerns the extent to which performing tasks at a given job position requires the employee to have various skills (the more challenging the job is, the more important it is for the employee),
- task identity – determines how much an employee can complete a task in its entirety, as opposed to performing only its selected elements,
- task significance – determines the extent to which work in a given position affects other people's lives (co-workers and clients),
- autonomy – the employee's independence in performing and planning work; it concerns the degree to which the employee can freely choose how to perform their work,
- feedback – determines the degree to which employees receive precise feedback on the individual effects of their work.

The five basic features of work presented in the Hackman and Oldham model affect employees' three critical mental states (Hsieh, 2013):

- experiencing meaningfulness of work – a degree of a person's beliefs that their work is inherently meaningful and valuable,
- experiencing responsibility for work results – a sense of ownership and responsibility for the output of one's work,
- knowledge of results – employee's understanding of how effective their actions are based on the received feedback.

All these psychological states increase employee motivation, task performance, and job satisfaction.

Positive work characteristics mean that employees experience positive emotions when doing their job well. This situation encourages continued good job performance, consistent with the expectation that good job performance will lead to positive feelings. The strength of individual motivation to perform tasks well (work engagement) depends on the individual need for development and achievement. The stronger this need, the more important the positive feelings that arise from doing good work (Nemmaniwar & Deshpande, 2016).

Engaged employees are among the most crucial factors in an organization's success. Work engagement brings many important benefits both for the organization (such as greater employee performance) and for the well-being of the employees themselves (Kapica *et al.*, 2022). This is substantiated by research (Harter *et al.*, 2006) showing that companies whose ranks were dominated by engaged employees were characterized by 12% greater profitability and 18% greater productivity than those in which the majority of employees were disengaged. Furthermore, there were 27% fewer absentee days among those involved.

Employees of Hotel Enterprises and the Specificity of Their Work

The ability of any organization to accomplish its goals stems from appropriately selected resources and their effective use. In the hotel industry, researchers assign a special role to intangible resources, especially the human capital embodied in employees (Bednarska, 2016). Their knowledge and skills are a condition for the launch and productive use of the material resources of an economic entity. Employees bring their values, as well as abilities and skills to the hotel, which constitute the basis for creating a unique organizational culture that allows the company to effectively achieve its goals.

Hotel staff are very diverse and can be divided into three groups (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2013):

- employees with direct contact with guests (reception staff, parking staff, housekeeping staff, waiters, bartenders, hotel management),
- employees working for guests but having only occasional contact with them (floor service employees, kitchen and pastry workers, security),
- employees without direct contact with guests (administration, accounting, maintenance workers).

Employees play the most vital role in the hotel as they directly serve hotel guests (front office). They are responsible for the guests' well-being during their stay and their readiness to return to the facility in the future. They influence the guests' opinion about the hotel and the assessment of the quality of hotel services, and they directly build relationships with customers (Jeznach *et al.*, 2016). Hotel ground staff and reception staff are the showcase of a hotel company in contact with customers.

The basic tasks of reception staff include:

- taking reservations, checking room availability, and completing the guest check-in process,
- informing about the hotel and its services and local tourist attractions,
- handling complaints and problems reported by guests and ensuring customer satisfaction,
- cooperating with other hotel departments (*e.g.*, coordination of tasks with cleaning staff, contact with the sales department).

The task of the front office employees is to ensure efficient guest service, a unique, peaceful, and welcoming atmosphere, and most importantly, hospitality. Readiness to help is important, both in a friendly attitude towards the guest and in upselling. The level of service provided to tourists in a hotel shapes their opinion about the company.

Another group of employees in the hotel are housekeeping staff (*i.e.*, the head housekeeper and chambermaids). The head housekeeper is responsible for organizing the work of the operational service subordinated to them. This executive's tasks also include organizing training for the chambermaids in terms of new work methods, personal culture, and the ability to behave in special situations. Housekeepers are directly responsible for the proper preparation of accommodation units for hotel guests, and their tasks primarily include maintaining cleanliness in the rooms and ensuring the safety of guests and their property (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2013). Employees of administrative and technical departments are also important to maintain the proper functioning of a hotel facility.

Managers at various levels also play a special role. The highest position in the organizational hierarchy is the hotel director, who manages the company's activities, defines the hotel's strategic, tactical, and operational goals, manages the hotel's HR policy, monitors the work of individual departments, supervises the security of the hotel's property and deals with hotel employees and guests' complaints.

Line managers are a crucial element of the hotel structure, as their role is not limited only to supervising the tasks performed by subordinate employees, but they also influence the achieved results and the atmosphere in the company. They strongly affect the work quality and engagement of the

employees subordinated to them. In their HR activities (especially motivational ones), managers should consider the specific nature of work in hospitality.

Among others, the uniqueness of work in hotel enterprises manifests in the fact that it is continuous, multi-shift, full-week, and independent of officially accepted days off from work (Boella & Goss-Turner, 2013). It is difficult to standardize and set working time within 8 hours. Hotels function 24 hours a day. Furthermore, during the tourist season, tourist traffic increases, which raises the burden on employees involved in its service (especially in facilities located in attractive tourist places).

This entails the need for different regulations of employees' working time, days off, rest and meal breaks, as well as the shaping of interpersonal relations and the atmosphere in the workplace. Moreover, there is a fluctuation in demand for labour. This is related to fluctuations in the volume of demand for hotel services. For this reason, in many hotels, some employees are employed on a fixed-term or part-time basis (Kusluvan, 2003). The work process conditions in the hotel industry determine employees' specific behaviours and attitudes and are also one of the determinants of their decision to resign from work.

Staff Turnover in Hotel Enterprises

Human capital is the key to modern service organizations' success. Therefore both recruiting appropriate employees and maintaining staff stability determine the hotel enterprise development.

High employment fluency is a source of many negative consequences for the organization. This especially applies to situations in which the departure is initiated by the employee and does not result from the employer's planned actions (Huang, 2017). Fluctuation generates additional costs due to the need to start the recruitment process for the vacancy, and then conduct training and take other actions to help new employees adapt. These expenses are usually accompanied by a decline in productivity. Changes in staffing often lead to a deterioration in the quality of service and the ensuing decrease in customer loyalty due to the disorganization of the service provision process and the loss of tacit knowledge (Taylor, 2002). Resignations also affect intra-group social bonds, limiting the processes of building teamwork patterns and lowering employee morale (Taylor, 2002).

Because fluctuation carries a serious threat both to maintaining high quality of hotel services and to satisfactory consumption experiences, it is in the interest of hotel enterprises to take actions aimed at creating conditions conducive to employee loyalty. As a multidimensional category, employee loyalty manifests itself in various attitudes and behaviours. One of its behavioural aspects is the unforced readiness to continue working and maintaining lasting contact with the employer (Huang, 2017).

The effectiveness of activities ensuring the stability of personnel in an enterprise requires knowledge of the sources of employee turnover. The reasons for leaving a job are various. Often, the decision to change an employer results from dissatisfaction with the performed duties or a critical assessment of the employment conditions in a hotel company. Todorov (2017) indicates that the reasons for leaving may be employees' feeling of improper use of their qualifications, insufficient appreciation by their superiors, low remuneration, and communication problems. Other reasons for employees' voluntary departures include factors such as the superiors' attitude, work schedules (*e.g.* shifts maladapted to the employee's needs), work overload, and lack of training (Todorov, 2017).

The perception of the content of work and the conditions of its performance may become an important determinant of the decision to change the workplace (Lewicka, 2016). Among the circumstances that may strongly influence the leaving intention, job satisfaction, and engagement remain the most important ones (Bednarska, 2016).

Based on the literature review and previous empirical findings, the present work attempts to identify correlations that selected job characteristics and hotel employees' work engagement have with their turnover intentions. Previous studies, including those from hospitality setting, have provided empirical support for a claim that job characteristics positively influence job satisfaction (Kim & Jogaratnam, 2010) and negatively affect job stress (Zhao *et al.*, 2016). Specifically, skill variety, task significance, and task identity reflect meaningfulness experienced at work (Zhao *et al.*, 2016). Noteworthy, in their study among restaurant and hotel employees in Seoul (South Korea), Jung and Yoon (2016) revealed that employees' sense of the meaningfulness of work is a major factor in increasing

engagement in work. In other words, employees who perceive their work as highly meaningful perform it more enthusiastically than those who do not. Moreover, Hadi and Adil (2010) found that all job characteristics proved to correlate significantly and positively with intrinsic motivation, which, as shown in the study by Putra *et al.* (2015) conducted among hospitality employees in a Midwestern town (the United States), played an important role in improving employees' work engagement.

Therefore, the literature review and empirical findings lead to the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant and positive relationship between certain job characteristics, namely autonomy (H1a), task significance (H1b), task identity (H1c), skill variety (H1d), and hotel employees' work engagement.

Work engagement helps employees to apply their full potential in their jobs (Liu *et al.*, 2017). Engaged workers are fulfilled in their jobs and thus highly productive, which positively affects business profits (Liu *et al.*, 2017). They are highly energetic and enthusiastic about their work, and often fully absorbed in their work (Karatepe & Ngeche, 2012). Unfortunately, compared to workers in other industries, hospitality employees generally face greater psychological pressure (Liu *et al.*, 2017) due to long antisocial work hours, heavy workloads, inconvenient work schedules, customer aggression or extensive emotional labour (Karatepe & Kilic, 2007; Karatepe & Uludag, 2007; Kusluvan, 2003). These are among the potential stressors that may hinder work engagement and lead to leaving intention, which is a significant predictor of actual employee turnover behaviour (Liu *et al.*, 2017).

Previous studies provide empirical support that work engagement negatively correlates to front-line employees' turnover intention, as shown, for example, by Lu *et al.* (2016) in their study among employees of hotels managed by a North American branded hotel management company, Liu *et al.* (2017) in a study on hospitality employees in a Midwestern US town, or the latest study by Asghar *et al.* (2020) in the hospitality context. Therefore, based on the literature studies and the rationale of empirical findings, we formulated the following hypothesis:

H2: Hotel employees' work engagement significantly and negatively correlated with their leaving intentions.

Figure 1 presents the hypothetical relationships between the investigated variables. We based the empirical verification of the proposed model on research conducted among hotel employees in the Pomeranian Voivodeship.

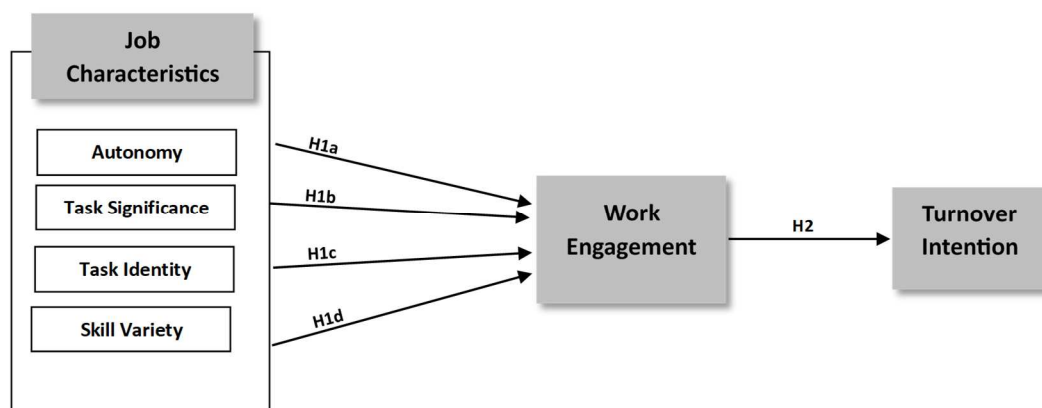


Figure 1. Research model of the correlations between job characteristics, hotel employees' work engagement and their intention to leave

Source: own elaboration.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sources of Data

This case study is part of a bigger project on the influence of selected jobs and individual characteristics on hotel employees' attitudes and behaviours at work (Grobelna & Wyszowska-Wróbel, 2023). It involved contacting hotel employees of hotel enterprises located in Tricity who have direct relationships with guests. We selected six hotels by convenience sampling due to their availability, prior cooperation, and/or the researcher's acquaintance with their management (Kim, 2008; Lam & Chen, 2012).

According to legal and administrative requirements (Rozporządzenie Ministra Gospodarki i Pracy z dnia 19 sierpnia 2004 roku), the studied hotels were medium and higher standard full-service establishments with different operational departments and providing a wide range of services. Hence, we could reach a wide range of employees who had numerous direct interactions with hotel guests and who were particularly responsible for providing high-quality service and shaping guests' satisfactory experiences of stay (Faulkner & Patiar, 1997). Moreover, by collecting data from different hotel departments, we could reduce a single-department bias, thus supporting the external validity of the research (Chang & Teng, 2017). Before the research, we conducted consultations with hotel managers, during which we discussed the purpose, content, and procedure of its realization.

The survey involved 108 participants. Among them, 72.2% were women and 27.8% – men. Most respondents (73.2%) were between the ages of 21 and 40. Furthermore, 13.9% were between 41 and 50 years old, while 4.6% were under 20, and 8.3% were over 50. A sizeable portion of participants had upper secondary (47.2%) or higher education (44.4%). The majority (84.3%) worked full-time in hotel jobs, with only 15.7% being employed part-time.

Research Methods

This study collected data via a questionnaire survey, a tool which is very popular and often used in social research (Gray *et al.*, 2007). The literature on the subject emphasizes numerous advantages of survey research (Gray *et al.*, 2007), including relatively low cost, adaptable time to complete the survey, lack of pressure to provide an immediate answer as respondents have an opportunity to adequately consider a question which requires a deeper reflection, greater propensity to provide honest answers, especially in the context of sensitive questions such as those related to feelings regarding performed work. Moreover, the measurement control by gathering questionnaires by interviewers may ensure more than twice the percentage of responses (Punch, 2013). Respondents were assured of their voluntary and anonymous participation, and that we would later present the research results only in an aggregate form.

We tested the study hypotheses with the Pearson correlation coefficient (Pearson's r) and analyzed the data with IBM SPSS Statistics (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Measurement

We operationalized the study constructs (illustrated in Figure 1) using items obtained from earlier empirical research in the relevant literature. We measured job characteristics in this study, namely job autonomy, task identity and significance, and skill variety using statements adapted from the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS) (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Sashkin, 1982). We used three statements adequately to measure each of the job characteristics. The sample items were as follows: 'My job permits me to decide on my own how to go about doing the work' (Autonomy; AU); 'My job itself is very significant and important in the broader scheme of things' (Task Significance; T_S); 'My job provides me with a chance to completely finish the pieces of work I begin' (Task Identity; T_I); 'My job requires me to do many different things at work, using a variety of my skills and talents' (Skill Variety; S_V). Noteworthy, these statements have been also successfully applied in many previous studies (Al-Tit & Suifan, 2015; Hadi & Adil, 2010; Kumar *et al.*, 2011; Morris & Venkatesh, 2010), including those related to hospitality, in Poland and abroad (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017; Grobelna, 2019; Lee-Ross, 2005; Zhao *et al.*, 2016). We ensured the high reliability and validity of the scales.

We assessed work engagement (W_E) using nine items (three items respectively to measure each dimension, namely vigour (VIG), dedication (DED), and absorption (ABS)) from the abridged Utrecht Work Engagement Scale, with previously confirmed cross-national validity (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, this scale, both in its full and shortened version, has also been extensively used in previous hospitality research (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009; Kim *et al.*, 2009; Lee & Ok, 2015; Park & Gursoy, 2012). Sample items for VIG, DED, and ABS were: 'At my work, I feel bursting with energy,' 'I am enthusiastic about my job,' and 'I am immersed in my work,' respectively.

We measured turnover intention (T_INT) using Boshoff and Allen's three items (2000) in line with Karatepe *et al.* (2006). These measures have also been widely used in previous hospitality studies (Karatepe & Uludag, 2007; Park & Gursoy, 2012; Yavas *et al.*, 2008). A sample item is as follows: 'I will probably be looking for another job soon.'

We rated all items on a five-point scale, with '1 = strongly disagree' to '5 = strongly agree.' To ensure accurate understanding and equivalent meaning of the scale items, we first prepared the survey in English and then translated it into Polish through the back-translation method. We conducted pilot tests under conditions matching the main research (Punch, 2013), which confirmed that employees had no difficulties in comprehending the survey items clearly and adequately.

We assessed the scale reliability using Cronbach's alpha (α) with values above 0.7 indicating high reliability (Choi *et al.*, 2014; Choi, 2006; Nunnally, 1978). In this study, the alpha coefficients were 0.899 for W_E, 0.892 for T_INT, 0.869 for AU, 0.726 and 0.794 for T_S and T_I, respectively, and 0.795 for S_V, which confirmed the measures' internal reliability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study results (Figure 2) revealed that all variables tested in the relationship model significantly correlated and supported the assumed directions. Thus, we positively verified the proposed research hypotheses (H1a-d; H2) as we found support for it in the empirical data.

Specifically, we proved the positive and significant relationships between job characteristics examined in this study and work engagement. However, we observed the strongest correlation between AU and W_E ($r=0.561$; $p<0.001$). Therefore, if employees experienced considerable freedom, independence, and discretion in scheduling and performing their tasks, they may feel significantly stronger work engagement. By contrast, the weakest relationship, however still significant, has been observed between T_I and W_E ($r=0.283$; $p=0.003$). In other words, to some extent, the level of employees' engagement may also depend on how employees perceive the identity (completeness) of the tasks they perform, *i.e.* whether they perform a task from start to end with visible outcomes or whether they concentrate only on part of the task. The results show that if employees know what they do at work, know why they do it, and understand what the effects are, the level of their work engagement may significantly increase.

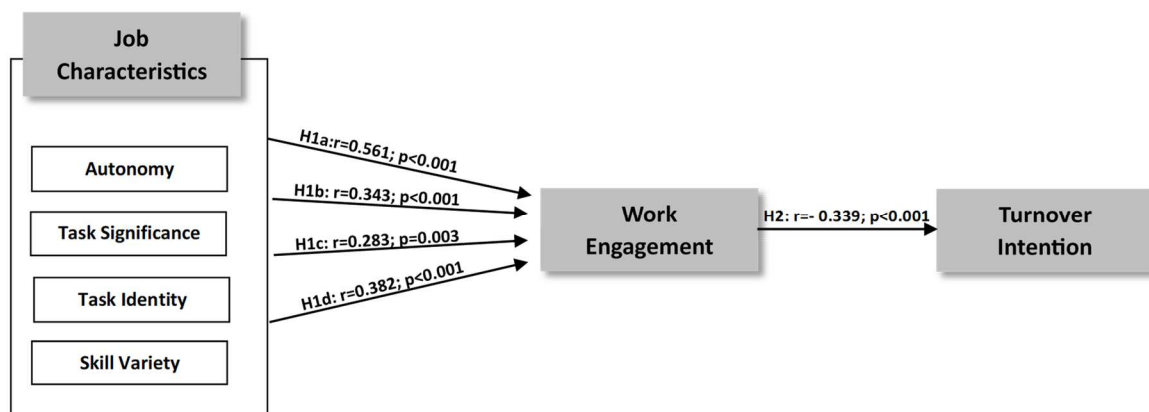


Figure 2. Verified model of the correlations between job characteristics, hotel employees' work engagement and their intention to leave

Source: own elaboration.

Similarly, the study findings revealed that work engagement may be significantly enhanced if employees perceive their work as important, with a substantial impact on others. The results of the Pearson correlation suggested a significant and positive correlation between T_S and W_E ($r=0.343$; $p<0.001$). In other words, work with meaning and sense understandable to employees, especially in the context of influencing others, has a much higher motivational potential than work which in the employee's opinion is completely meaningless.

The results also demonstrated positive and significant correlations between S_V and W_E ($r=0.382$; $p<0.001$). This suggests that when employees view their work as complex, involving diverse activities, requiring various skills and talents, they tend to be more engaged. As the literature emphasizes, performing various tasks using various skills and talents may result in the employee's belief in the personal importance of the work performed and increase their motivation to work (Paliga, 2021; Sultan, 2012).

The study also demonstrated a negative and significant relationship between W_E and T_INT ($r=-0.339$; $p<0.001$). This indicates that hotel employees who feel energized, enthusiastic, and proud of their work are more likely to form strong bonds with their jobs, which may significantly reduce their intention to leave.

Additionally, a post-hoc analysis examined the relationships between job characteristics, specific dimensions of work engagement, and their consequences for turnover intention. As shown in Table 1, the strength of the relationship between selected job characteristics and the three dimensions of work engagement varies. Among other characteristics, autonomy correlates the most strongly with all dimensions of work engagement, especially with DED and VIG, as two dimensions of W_E ($r=0.592$, $p<0.001$; $r=0.435$, $p<0.001$, respectively). Employees who feel independence and freedom while performing their work duties may identify with their work more strongly, feeling its greater meaning, purpose, and importance.

Table 1. Relationships between job characteristics and work engagement dimensions

| Variables / Statistics | | Vigor | Dedication | Absorption |
|------------------------|-----------------------|--------|------------|-------------|
| Autonomy | Pearson's Correlation | 0.435 | 0.592 | 0.429 |
| | p-value | <0.001 | <0.001 | <0.001 |
| | N | 108 | 108 | 108 |
| Task significance | Pearson's Correlation | 0.207 | 0.340 | 0.346 |
| | p-value | 0.032 | <0.001 | <0.001 |
| | N | 108 | 108 | 108 |
| Task identity | Pearson's Correlation | 0.256 | 0.322 | 0.152 (ns)* |
| | p-value | 0.007 | <0.001 | 0.116 |
| | N | 108 | 108 | 108 |
| Skill variety | Pearson's Correlation | 0.243 | 0.327 | 0.427 |
| | p-value | 0.011 | <0.001 | <0.001 |
| | N | 108 | 108 | 108 |

Note: *(ns) not significant.

Source: own study.

The next analyzed job characteristic, *i.e.* task identity, correlated most strongly with the dedication dimension of W_E ($r=0.322$, $p<0.001$). Hence, the employees' perception of greater task completeness, *i.e.* when they work on the complete task and see its results, positively correlated with their dedication to work, *i.e.* their perceived sense of their work and their greater enthusiasm, inspiration, or pride in it. However, we found no statistically significant correlation between this characteristic and hotel employees' work absorption, whereas the remaining job characteristics, namely task significance and skill variety, correlated most strongly just with this dimension ($r=0.346$, $p<0.001$; $r=0.427$, $p<0.001$, respectively). This may suggest that the more employees perceive their work as significant, having an impact on others and requiring various skills and talents, the deeper their immersion in their tasks, the more they feel time passes quickly and find it challenging to disconnect from their work responsibilities.

Analyzing the relationships between specific dimensions of work engagement and hotel employees' turnover intention (Table 2), we noted that all these dimensions of W_E significantly and negatively correlate with employees' leaving intentions. However, we observed the strongest relationship

between DED and T_INT ($r=-0.440$, $p<0.001$). Thus, we may state that the more enthusiastic and purposeful employees in hotels feel about their work, particularly when facing challenges in accomplishing goals, the less likely they are to leave their work.

Table 2. Relationships between dimensions of work engagement and hotel employees' turnover intention

| Variables / Statistics | | Vigor | Dedication | Absorption |
|------------------------|-----------------------|--------|------------|------------|
| Turnover Intention | Pearson's Correlation | -0.339 | -0.440 | -0.190 |
| | p-value | <0.001 | <0.001 | 0.049 |
| | N | 108 | 108 | 108 |

Source: own study.

Discussion

Work in hospitality is often viewed as tedious, characterized by low status and unfavourable employment conditions (Kusluvan, 2003). Therefore, it is often performed without adequate engagement (Ferreira *et al.*, 2017) or effective motivation on the part of managers. Consequently, this promotes employees' leaving intentions, which seems to be critical given the high rate of employee turnover (Lu *et al.*, 2016), especially in the contemporary post-pandemic reality which has been extremely challenging for the already fragile tourism and hospitality industry, raising serious doubts as to its survival (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021).

This study developed and tested a research model examining the relationships between selected job characteristics (*i.e.* autonomy, task significance, task identity, and skill variety) and hotel employees' work engagement, while also exploring examining its connection to turnover intention. The empirical data supported all hypothesized relationships. The results of this study confirmed the motivational potential of each tested job characteristic, which may significantly strengthen employees' work engagement.

Previous studies reported similar findings. For instance, Saks (2006) reported core job characteristics to positively relate to job engagement, whereas Grobelna (2019) proved a significant and positive impact of task significance on hotel employees' work engagement in the hospitality setting. Similarly, Christian *et al.* (2011) showed that task significance and variety seem to be linked to engagement, thus suggesting a stronger correlation between work engagement and the characteristics that relate to the perceived meaningfulness of the work itself. As indicated in this study, with regard to autonomy, it is important to remember that the more autonomy employees have, the higher level of energy and enthusiasm they may experience, which may result from the fact that such employees are more likely to make substantial effort while performing their work and try to persevere in it, even when facing certain difficulties (Kapica *et al.*, 2022).

Similar findings have been reported in previous studies and discussed in the literature. For example, Saks (2006) found that core job characteristics positively influence job engagement, and Grobelna (2019) demonstrated a significant positive effect of task significance on hotel employees' work engagement in the hospitality industry. Christian *et al.* (2011) also indicated that task significance and variety are linked to engagement, suggesting a stronger correlation between work engagement and job characteristics that relate to the perceived meaningfulness of the work itself. Regarding autonomy, this study emphasized that employees with more autonomy tend to experience higher levels of energy and enthusiasm, likely because they are more motivated to exert effort and persevere in their tasks, even when facing difficulties (Kapica *et al.*, 2022).

Moreover, the correlation analysis showed that the higher work engagement, particularly within the dimension of dedication, the lower turnover intention hotel employees have. These findings align with previous research (Chen & Chen, 2012; Saks, 2006), including studies from the hospitality context (Karatepe, 2015; Karatepe *et al.*, 2018; Lu *et al.*, 2016) which also demonstrated that work engagement significantly reduces employees' turnover intentions.

CONCLUSIONS

Work engagement is a vital construct in management research due to its positive impact on organizations. Unfortunately, such research in the hospitality context remains relatively limited (Liu *et al.*, 2017). The available empirical evidence on these relationships in the hospitality management literature is scarce, with very few studies addressing job characteristics in the hospitality industry (Ozturk *et al.*, 2014).

Therefore, the present study provides a deeper theoretical insight into the relationships between job characteristics and hotel employees' work engagement and their leaving intentions. The results of the previous research presented in this article as well as a review of extensive literature confirm that the work environment affects work engagement. The study's results showed that each of the tested job characteristics has its own particular importance in shaping work engagement and its individual dimensions.

This study aimed to expand knowledge in human resource management, especially by optimizing the work process in the hotel industry by enhancing the motivational potential of the core job characteristics. Specifically, this research adds to the existing research on hotel employees' work engagement (Karatepe *et al.*, 2013; Chen *et al.*, 2014; Grobelna, 2019; Karatepe *et al.*, 2018) and helps to understand this phenomenon better by testing the relationships between job characteristics, work engagement, and leaving intentions among hotel employees in Poland. Thus, this research offers new perspectives in the context of East-Central Europe, an area that still needs further empirical investigation.

The study also offers practical recommendations for hotel managers seeking effective methods to increase employee engagement and decrease staff turnover.

Notably, as regards work engagement, autonomy plays the most important role and should be increased in various ways, among others, by providing employees with additional responsibility or control appropriate to management (Paliga, 2021), which could make their work more interesting. Moreover, autonomy is key for fostering intrinsic motivation (Andrew *et al.*, 2016), driven by true passion and interest in the work itself (Amabile, 1998). When people are intrinsically motivated, they engage in the work because of the challenges it brings and the genuine pleasure they derive from it. Providing employees with autonomy is crucial, especially in hotels, where employees deal with extremely high variability and unpredictability of the service process, which can increase service quality and recovery performance (Jaiswal, 2017), as employees experiencing more autonomy are more able to develop their own individual strategies and operational practices, implementing them successfully to increase the effectiveness of their work (Grobelna, 2019). Moreover, involving employees in decision-making can help them feel more valued in the organization (Andrew *et al.*, 2016). However, they should be adequately trained to boost their confidence in this process (Ro & Chen, 2011).

To increase the perceived importance and work completeness, tasks require logical organization to help employees achieve specific and satisfactory goals. Moreover, employees should understand how their work contributes to the overall success of the hotel, so managers should clearly communicate how individual effort affects guests' satisfaction and the overall functioning of the hotel and its reputation. Feedback from managers can help employees recognize their value in the organization (Lu *et al.*, 2016). Recognition programs, such as public acknowledgement, incentives, financial bonuses, etc. (Lu *et al.*, 2016) may further reinforce their conviction that their efforts are appreciated, valued, recognized, and respected.

Managers should also ensure that employees can perform a variety of tasks requiring different skills. A job rotation system could help employees acquire new skills and avoid monotony (Yang, 2010). Moreover, tasks should be combined or new ones introduced to diversify job responsibilities (Paliga, 2021). Rigorous recruitment and selection processes should be applied to hire candidates with appropriate skills, and new training programs should be regularly provided to address skill gaps (Andrew *et al.*, 2016). These should be regularly identified and determined within hotel organizations.

These actions should strengthen work engagement, which is likely to reduce turnover intentions and foster stronger bonds with the organization. However, this requires a systemic approach (Karinuada & Suwandana, 2022) that prioritizes employee engagement and well-being within human resource management strategies.

Improving employees' work engagement can contribute to better guest service, higher professional satisfaction, and lower staff turnover (Rumpoko *et al.*, 2022), ultimately strengthening the hotel's competitive position in the contemporary market. Therefore, managers should particularly care about building a work environment with motivational potential that will be conducive to employees' work engagement. This study attempted to identify the relationships between selected job characteristics and hotel employees' engagement as well as its effects on their leaving intentions. The results confirmed the significant importance of the tested job characteristics in strengthening and boosting engagement, which may contribute to reducing employee turnover.

The study contributes to the hospitality management literature by expanding research on job characteristics and work engagement to a different context using data from frontline hotel employees in Poland. The results show that job characteristics are instrumental in designing roles that build the motivational potential of work, leading to higher engagement levels and reducing employees' intentions to leave.

However, this study also has some limitations. Firstly, as it is a case study, its results should not be generalized; they may refer only to the employees investigated in this study. However, the results may provide useful information for hotel managers on how to manage the motivational potential of work to increase employees' engagement and reduce their turnover. Hence, this study advances engagement theory and constitutes a basis for further extensive research. Further studies could expand the proposed model by incorporating other individual and organizational characteristics to examine their impact on work engagement and its different outcomes, both attitudinal and behavioural. It would also be worth extending the scope of the study to the whole country and considering less subjective measurement instruments.

Moreover, further research should investigate whether there is a relationship between the personalization of professional development, such as training tailored to employees' individual needs (*e.g.* using educational platforms with elements of gamification) and employee engagement. It would also be valuable to explore how and to what extent artificial intelligence (AI) can influence work in hospitality, particularly its effect on the nature of hotel jobs and, consequently, the level of employees' work engagement.

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Conflict of Interest

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