

Employee Engagement in Changing Hospitality Environment: A Hampton by Hilton London Waterloo Hotel Study

(Impact of Brexit, Covid-19 Pandemic and Russia-Ukraine
War)

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In recent years, the hospitality industry of the UK has been going through significant challenges due to several issues such as the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit and Russia-Ukraine War. Back-to-back travel restrictions, changes in economic policies and migration laws have caused a fall in the profitability of hotels. It also has impacted the employee engagement situations in hotels as around 2.13 million hospitality sector employees were furloughed during the 2020-2021 period (Hick & Murphy, 2021). This study will focus on the importance of employee retention and detection of employee engagement situation due to the changes in the UK environment and suggests probable solutions.

1.2 Study Background

This study will take Hampton by Hilton London Waterloo Hotel as the basis of research. Located at 157 Waterloo Road, London SE1 8XA, UK, this hotel is only a 5-minutes walk from Waterloo station. It is situated in an excellent position as the nearby tourist attractions- the London Dungeon, the London Eye, Buckingham Palace and Big Ben etc. are within two miles range. This hotel provides all sorts of amenities needed by the guests such as free Wi-Fi, digital key, free breakfast, fitness centre availability, etc. It has a 4.5/5 rating on TripAdvisor, and an 8.3/10 rating on Booking.com showing its long history of services.

The management of Hilton is to serve the employees well and make them assured of their safety and security. But due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this hotel chain had to furlough approximately 2000 employees (Nhamo et Al., 2020). Though they promised to reappoint them after the pandemic and have done so too, it has created an impact on their motivation. So, detecting engagement situations is important in this regard.

1.3 Scope of the Research

Hilton Worldwide puts the most emphasis on employee retention. But previous furloughing history and recent migration policy changes by the UK government have created unexpected challenges in front them. The economic output of the hotel sector was 21% lower in 2021 than in 2019 (Bloisi, 2021). This has increased the possibility of

employee turnover and poor engagement of the employee. Furthermore, lack of communication and appreciation for service in the workplace may be the reason for lower motivation too. So, this study will analyse these issues:

- Impact of health issues and job securities on employee engagement
- Impact of the current retention policy, workplace environment and appraisal policy on engagement
- Impact of migration and HR policy changes on employee engagement

To analyse properly, this study will use primary and secondary data to collect employee information. Following GDPR it will also ensure anonymity and secrecy of data.

2.0 Methodology and Discussion

2.1 Employee Engagement

The extent to which an employee feels appreciated, recognised and benefitted from the workplace and the level of engagement he/ she feels from the organisational environment. As a service-driven cyclical sector, the hospitality sector relies heavily on the performances of the employees. Disengaged employees are more prone to increase turnover rate. Around 57% of employees in the US and Canada are disengaged in their jobs (Dale Carnegie and Association, 2018). Moreover, organisations with a higher engagement of employees face 65% lower turnovers, increasing the level of expertise and services in the companies (Evangeline & Ragavan, 2016). From receiving guests to providing all sorts of room, pool and bar services, hotel services are highly reliant on the staff's expertise and willingness to work better. If the workplace is unsupportive, with a low level of communication with the supervisors, employees might feel demotivated and disengaged (Riyanto et al., 2021).

2.2 Impact of High Employee Engagement

The engagement of employees in the company enables the alignment of their personal goals to the goal of the company. As the engaged employees feel that their superior is empathetic, so, they feel free to share workplace issues with the supervisors. Moreover, the appraisal system and motivation stretch from good work helps to boost productivity, innovation and effective solution of problems. According to Wickham (2020), companies with more staff engagement produce 4times higher revenues than that with disengagement. Following are the benefits of higher employee engagement:

- Introduction of emotional commitment to the organisation and the long-term goals
- Increased level of investment in the job (e.g. volunteering for additional shifts, proposing new services, giving heightened services than before)
- Reduction of turnover, resulting in lower operational costs. Hilton's renovation effort reduced the turnover by 6% (Staley, 2018)
- Increased productivity by around 18% (Gallup, 2021)
- Enhancement of teamwork and planning the resources

- Increased self-esteem due to frequent feedback. According to Lyons (2017), 43% of the highly engaged employees get at least one feedback per week.

Being a hotel staff is a strenuous job, as it takes effort to please people. So, the increase of stress level along with a sense of being unrecognised makes people less productive. Based on a study by American Psychological Association, every year \$500 billion in losses is incurred due to stress in the workplace (Linggiello et al., 2021).

2.3 Identification of the Relevant Factors based on the IES Model

Employee engagement models help to identify the possible needs of the employees to make them feel recognized and valued. Amongst several models, IES model pinpoints the 10 most important factors that may make employees feel valued and increase revenue as a result (Tsourvakas & Yfantidou, 2018). The model is as follows:

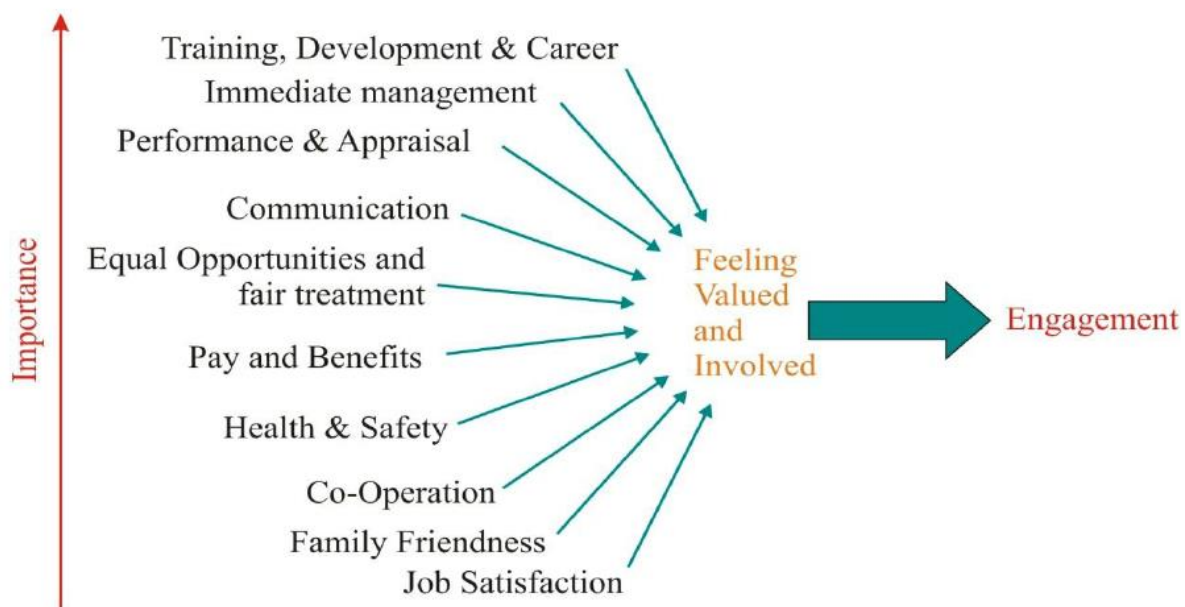


Figure 01: IES Model for Detecting Employee Engagement

Source: Tomar, 2020

In the current hospitality environment of the UK, the employees of Hilton are in a perplexing situation regarding their job security due to the previous furloughing decision of Hilton management (Toksöz, 2021). Additionally, Brexit and Russia-Ukraine war are creating economic turmoil due to increased fuel costs and travel restrictions. Because of

all of these factors, the most appropriate factors from IES model for the employees of this hotel will be performance and appraisal, health and safety, fair treatment and job satisfaction.

2.4 Ways to Gather Information for the Study (Primary and Secondary Research)

Measuring the employee engagement level in the Hampton by Hilton London Waterloo Hotel, data is required. These data can be sourced from the respondents themselves or already published reports (Manu & Akotia, 2021). For the study, two types of research methods are relevant:

- I. Primary Research Method- Here the data is obtained first-hand by the researcher. This data collection includes direct communication with the source rather than relying on pre-established records (Schuurman, 2020). This method might need some time but it ensures the collection of raw and unbiased data. For this study, the following primary research tools will be used:
 - Employee Engagement Feedback Form
 - Face-to-Face Interview
 - 6-month Observation of the Workplace

The questionnaire is the least time-consuming method as the researcher may take only 1 or 2 days for collecting data (Sileyew, 2019).

- II. Secondary Research Method- Also known as desk research, this method includes compiling data that has already been published. Data are generally collected from external sources such as government institutions, organisational databank, or the internet (Martin et Al., 2018). The journals, annual reports, articles etc. help to compile data

This research will use a mixture of these two types of research methods. For gathering employee-specific data, about their engagement level, primary data will be used mostly. For hotel data, secondary data will be used.

Employee Engagement Feedback Form

This is one of the most renowned and used methods of data collection. Though it is costly to the extent of printing cost, question setting, designing etc., it ensures the anonymity of the respondents. Because of GDPR or General Data Protection Regulation, the researcher has to maintain secrecy and utmost good faith with the respondents (Mourby et al., 2019). So, the employees of this hotel can be assured that their names will not be disclosed. Additionally, this method is favoured over the questionnaire method as it omits the possibility of interview biases and errors. Following is a fragment of the full feedback form prepared for the employees of Hampton while the full form is in Appendix 01:

D. YOUR WORKPLACE RECOGNITION & ENGAGEMENT	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe that my duty is important for the hotel	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I frequently get individual feedbacks from superiors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel motivated and recognized for what I do	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My team is well behaved and friendly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My supervisor's feedback motivates me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am happy with my current colleagues and communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel that my career growth is possible through the work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I don't feel any kind of threat while working here	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I did not face any bullying, harassment and discrimination in my workplace	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Table 01: Employee Engagement Feedback Form

Source: Own Creation

Face-to-Face Interview

The interview session will be done with all levels of employees of the Hampton by Hilton London Waterloo Hotel, from the porters, housekeepers, waiter/ waitresses, bartenders and chefs to hotel managers. The main focus of the interviewer will be to ask the questions neutrally without giving any favourable answer hints to the respondents (Gooch & Vavreck, 2019). The questions are to be set cautiously so that the answers are short and precise. It is to be mentioned that GDPR will also be applicable here (Cornock, 2018). The interviewer will assure the secrecy of the respondent's identity and their answers. Below are some questions that can be asked during the interview:

NO.	QUESTIONS
01	Do you find your work interesting?
02	How do you feel about the daily challenges while working here?
03	Are you motivated enough to come to work every day?
04	State some of the challenges and tell how you overcome those?
05	Do you work in a team? What is your feeling about the team management?
06	Do you get enough support from your team leader?
07	What is the general communication situation here? Are people open to suggestions?
08	Can you share your problems openly with your supervisor?
09	Do you feel appreciated and recognized for your services?
10	What is your opinion about the rebuke policy?
11	Is it hard to maintain work-life balance? Do you feel extensive pressure?
12	How often do you get feedbacks? Is it enough to you?
13	Do you see career growth in your job?
14	Are you satisfied with the financial and non-financial benefits here?
15	Do you see yourself working here after 5 years?
16	Do you recommend working here to your friends often? If yes or no, then why?
17	Are there any recommendations regarding HR policies?

Table 02: Probable Questions to Ask in Interview

Source: Own Creation

Secondary Research Method

Due to recent changes in the economic, political, social and technological environment in the hospitality industry of the UK, the industry trend is changing. This study will need the trends and forecasts regarding employee selection, development and retention to study future engagement scenarios. So, secondary data sources, such as research papers, articles, journals, quarterly and annual reports etc. will provide the support to gather these data (Trinh, 2018). Several papers are available about the impact of Brexit and Covid-19 on the hospitality sector. As the Russia-Ukraine war is a comparatively new issue, newspaper data can be used to predict the probable factors to impact the employee engagement situation in the respective hotel.

Several region-wise employee turnover charts, employee turnover rates in the EU region, and the changes in migration laws as many of the hospitality employees are immigrants. Additionally, previously issued survey data on employee engagement, impact on employee health and security due to furlough policies, impact of the trade war and travel restrictions on the hospitality sectors are to be used for the fulfilment of the study (Dabahli et al., 2020). One thing to be cautious of is to use data published from reliable sources, otherwise, data may suffer from errors and biases.

3.0 Research Method Evaluation & Conclusion

This study will use both types of research methods based on convenience. Each of the types has its pros and cons which should be taken into account.

3.1 Primary Research Method

Advantages and disadvantages (Heap & Waters, 2019)

Advantages of Survey Form	Disadvantages of Survey Form
• Customised and unbiased questions • Questions are set as per the ease to answer • Maintenance of anonymity • Less time-consuming	• Costlier than other methods
Advantages of Personal Interview	Disadvantages of Personal Interview
• Detailed answers from respondents • Chances to clear out the confusion by asking questions to the interviewer • Collaborative and friendly environment	• Costly and time-consuming • More chances of being biased by the way of asking questions the interviewer

3.2 Secondary Research Method

Advantages & Disadvantages (Islam & Islam, 2020)

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Provide the sources of basic interview and survey form questions • Help to ask the right question at the right time • Cost-effectiveness • Easy availability • Less time-consuming	• Possibility of gathering biased and forged data • Lack of appropriateness • Probability of gathering irrelevant data

From the analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of both research methods, it can be said that, secondary research methods are to be used for laying out the initial research questions of the engagement questionnaire. It should not be used for drawing a conclusion or indicating the staff engagement situation in this hotel. Using the primary research method a proper result can be formulated.

3.3 Conclusion

To successfully analyse and investigate the employee engagement situation in Hampton by Hilton London Waterloo Hotel, proper research planning is essential. The motive of this study is to analyse the impact of changing environment on the hospitality industry due to Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. So, a combination of primary and secondary data will be used for the convenience of research. For finding out the core questions about job uncertainty, employee retention and engagement programs, charts, graphs and research findings will help. Based on these data, two question sets can be prepared for the interview and the feedback form. It is to be mentioned that, GDPR must be followed when performing one-to-one data collection via forms or interviews. Because of the nature of the research, the primary method will provide the most unbiased and error-free relevant data. After using the methods properly, the employee engagement situation in the hotel will be identified, which will also help to plan the employee retention scheme and HR policies in the changing economic and political situation of the UK.

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Appendix 01

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY FORM

Thank you giving time for taking part in this engagement survey. Please give a feedback about your work environment and whether you feel appreciated and engaged. It will take about 5-10 minutes to complete. Please be assured that it is confidential and you will not be identified. No individual answer will be disclosed.

A. YOUR JOB	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am inspired by my workplace and thrive to be better	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I love the work environment	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I get a sense of personal accomplishment from the job	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The culture of the workplace is friendly and open	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I recommend my friends to work here	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I intend to work in this hotel for next 5 years	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

B. YOUR WORK-LIFE BALANCE	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
It is tough to maintain work-life balance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I get enough support from my workplace to support my family in need	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Paternal leave is prevalent here	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have opportunities to manage my stress levels	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

C. YOUR EXPERIENCES IN CHALLENGING SITUATIONS	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
During Covid-19 pandemic, I got furloughed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was reappointed after being furloughed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My supervisor tried to take care during pandemic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was told of the possibility to be laid-off due to migration policy change	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I trust that my organization will help me in future needs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

D. YOUR WORKPLACE RECOGNITION & ENGAGEMENT	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe that my duty is important for the hotel	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I frequently get individual feedbacks from superiors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel motivated and recognized for what I do	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My team is well behaved and friendly	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My supervisor's feedback motivates me	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am happy with my current colleagues and communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel that my career growth is possible through the work	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I don't feel any kind of threat while working here	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I did not face any bullying, harassment and discrimination in my workplace	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

E. RECOMMENDATION FOR THE COMPANY

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Thank you very much for your kind participation.

Appendix 02

Questions for asking in the interview:

NO.	QUESTIONS
01	Do you find your work interesting?
02	How do you feel about the daily challenges while working here?
03	Are you motivated enough to come to work every day?
04	State some of the challenges and tell how you overcome those?
05	Do you work in a team? What is your feeling about the team management?
06	Do you get enough support from your team leader?
07	What is the general communication situation here? Are people open to suggestions?
08	Can you share your problems openly with your supervisor?
09	Do you feel appreciated and recognized for your services?
10	What is your opinion about the rebuke policy?
11	Is it hard to maintain work-life balance? Do you feel extensive pressure?
12	How often do you get feedbacks? Is it enough to you?
13	Do you see career growth in your job?
14	Are you satisfied with the financial and non-financial benefits here?
15	Do you see yourself working here after 5 years?
16	Do you recommend working here to your friends often? If yes or no, then why?
17	Are there any recommendations regarding HR policies?