

Research Project

“Assessing the impact of staff shortages on delivering effective guest experience, a case study of Ibis Hotel Southampton”

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research background

Maintaining a high standard of guest experience is crucial in the hospitality industry as it directly influences customer satisfaction, loyalty, and the overall brand reputation. Positive guest experiences lead to repeat business, positive reviews and referrals all of which are crucial for the hotel's financial success (Veloso and Gomez-Suarez, 2023). In an increasingly competitive market, exceptional guest experience differentiates the hotel establishment and can significantly impact the overall profitability. However, in the modern business era, the hotel services, and all the guest experiences are likely to be impacted by several internal business factors out of which is the increasing staff shortages (Candra *et al.*, 2023).

1.2 Research aim and objectives

1.2.1 Research aim

- The primary aim of this research study is to assess the impact of staff shortages on delivering an effective guest experience, referring to the case of Ibis Hotel Southampton.

1.2.2 Research objectives

- To investigate how staff shortages affect the operational efficiency of hotel services delivered by Ibis Hotel Southampton.
- To analyse guest satisfaction factors influenced by lack of staff shortages within Ibis Hotel Southampton.
- To identify staff management strategies in combating ineffective guest experience due to staff shortages within Ibis Hotel Southampton.

1.3 Research question

- How do staff shortages within Ibis Hotel Southampton affect the overall delivery of guest experience?

1.4 Research rationale

This research is essential as the hospitality industry faces increasing staff shortages directly impacting the guest experience. By focusing on Ibis Hotel Southampton the study aims to uncover the specific challenges and operational inefficiencies, resulting from the reduced staffing. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for hotel management to implement effective strategies that can enhance service quality and maintain guest satisfaction (Abalaka *et al.*, 2023). Ultimately, this research seeks to

contribute to better staffing practices and improve guest experiences in a competitive hospitality market.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter is based on exploring the literature that helps in having a conceptual and theoretical understanding regarding how the increasing rates of staff shortages influence the delivery of guest experience within the hospitality industry of the UK.

2.2 Conceptual understanding

Impact of staff shortages on the operational efficiency of hotel services within the hospitality industry of the UK

According to Papademetriou *et al.* (2023), the staff shortages in the UK hospitality industry significantly impact overall operational efficiency leading to various challenges that affect the service quality in the context of guest experiences with fewer employees, hotels struggle to maintain optimum staffing levels across departments such as front desk, housekeeping and food and beverage services. This often results in longer wait times for guests during checking, reduced attention to detail in the room, clean image and delays in the service delivery at restaurants or bars. Moreover, the remaining staff may experience an increased workload leading to fatigue and a lower morale which can further create service issues. As per Belias *et al.* (2023), higher employee turnover is common in the industry which can make training new staff a constant challenge resulting in inconsistent service quality. The inadequately trained personnel may struggle to meet the guest's expectations. Ultimately affecting the overall customer satisfaction and hotel reputation. The operational inefficiencies due to staff shortages can lead to revenue loss. To illustrate, understaffed housekeeping may result in the room not being prepared on time, limiting the hotel's ability to accommodate new guests (Amaral *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, the overworked front desk staff may make errors in reservations leading to double bookings on the dissatisfied customer (Vagena *et al.*, 2024). Overall the impact of staff shortages on the operational efficiency in hotels is profound in setting the strategic workforce management to ensure high service standards and make them competitive in the hospitality market.

Guest satisfaction factors influenced by lack of staff shortages within the hospitality industry of the UK

As per Broker (2024), the service responsiveness declines when staff levels are inadequate the guest may experience longer wait times during checking in dining or assistance requests leading to frustration and negative perceptions of the service quality. Likewise, the attention to detail of guest experience also suffers as the inadequate staffing often means that the remaining employees are overburdened which can result in missed tasks such as proper room cleaning or timely maintenance requests (Hinson *et al.*, 2024). This neglect can directly impact the guest's comfort and overall satisfaction. As per Simonis (2023), the quality of interactions within the staff diminishes with fewer employees; interactions may feel rushed or less personal, reducing the overall warmth and hospitality that the guests expect. This can lead to a sense of being undervalued. The availability of services can be compromised, to illustrate that the understaffed dining areas may limit the menu options and are always the operation frustrating the guest who desires to have a comprehensive experience (Abell *et al.*, 2024). Lastly, guest loyalty and word of mouth are affected as the negative experiences stemming from the staff, shortages can lead to poor online reviews, and a decline in repeat business as dissatisfied guests share their experiences with others (Karim and Rabiul, 2024).

Staff management strategies in combating ineffective guest experience and also staff shortages within the hospitality industry of the UK

As per Patrick (2023), flexible scheduling can help align staff availability with peak business hours. By analysing occupancy trends, hotels can create dynamic schedules that optimise staffing levels during the high demand periods, ensuring guests receive timely service. Investing in employee training and development is also crucial in the comprehensive onboarding and continuous training programmes in the staff competencies, enabling the employees to perform multiple roles effectively. This versatility helps to mitigate the impact of staff shortages and improve service quality. According to Almerri (2023), fostering a positive workplace culture is also important for retention, recognizing employee contributions, promoting teamwork and providing opportunities for growth can lead to higher job satisfaction levels that lead to reducing turn overheads and associated costs of recruiting and training new staff. As a result, it positively influences their productivity levels and customer directions leading to a positive guest experience (Ahli *et al.*, 2024). Lastly, the implementation of technology solutions can also streamline operations tools like mobile checking, chatbots for customer enquiries and inventory management systems can also reduce the workload, understaffed and enhance the guest experience even with fewer employees

Also a clear communication strategy is necessary to ensure that staff are aware of expectations and changes (Hubbart, 2023). Regular checking and feedback sessions can help to identify issues only allowing for prompt resolutions.

2.3 Theoretical understanding

Job characteristics model is considered which emphasises the significance of Job design in enhancing employee motivation and satisfaction (Chanie *et al.*, 2023). By ensuring that the roles are enriching and allow for skill variety, the task, significance and autonomy of hospitality managers can cultivate a more engaged workforce.

SERVQUAL Model

The SERVQUAL Model Highlights and suggests that service quality is determined by the gap between customer expectations and perceptions of service delivered The SERVQUAL Model comes under service quality theory which highlights the direct correlation between employee performance and guest satisfaction (Tarnanidis and Tarnanidis, 2024). The industry standard SERVQUAL Model promotes better service delivery by Ibis Hotel Southampton employees despite workforce shortages. Under staff challenges the model assists delivery of superior service through its five major elements including tangible's reliability, responsiveness assurance and empathy.

Tangibles:

The visible elements of guest service include how clean and attractive the space looks plus what facilities are provided. When there is a staff shortage hotel quality remains visible through neat rooms and well-upheld public areas which shows guests their dedication to delivering great service. The smart use of available time in focus sports plus staying ready with basic supplies can boost how well guests see hotel quality.

Reliability:

The company must provide expected services without any disruptions. When it has fewer staff to work with, it establishes confidence by meeting guest expectations for check-ins, room setup, and offering breakfast services. When staff concentrate on important tasks they make technology systems work better such as self-service kiosks.

Responsiveness:

Desired guest assistance arrives quickly. With fewer team members available the staff should make guests aware of delays while answering requests quickly. Good communication makes people easier to handle and better to understand.

Assurance:

The company team can provide guests peace of mind by showing how skilled and polite they are. Training should teach team members how to handle several tasks at

once without losing their professional attitude. Any answer that guests can easily understand will improve their trust in us.

Empathy:

Staff members need to sense and solve what their visitors require. When facing issues, staff can show appreciation by giving free refreshments to passengers.

2.4 Literature Gap

The literature gap can be drawn from the lack of significant research in understanding the specific impact of bearing staffing levels and service quality across the different hotel segments. There is a limited exploration of effective management strategies that are tailored to mitigate these issues in real-time. Further, studies are needed to examine how technology can support staff efficiency and enhance the overall guest experience during shortages.

3. Methodology

Research philosophy

Research philosophy represents the core beliefs that determine how studies happen and what information to use later. Researchers use three main ways to study and understand the world: they collect concrete numbers from the outside world through Positivism; they delve into people's feelings and scenarios through Interpretivism; and they combine these methods for real-life problem-solving as Pragmatists (Mbanaso *et al.*, 2023). In the context of the topic, "Assessing the impact of staff shortages on delivering effective guest experience: In the analysis of Ibis Hotel Southampton the research method of pragmatism has been applied that provides excellent results. Combining statistical information with personal input allows researchers to define all aspects of a particular matter. Using combined research methods helps specialists discover specific ways to solve staff shortage issues that hurt guest satisfaction. The goal of straightforward research is to create configurative strategies based directly on data and hotel environment needs.

Research approach

A research approach creates a study plan that tells researchers how they should collect and analyse data. The basic research approaches consist of deduction which tests established ideas with data and induction which finds new theories from data patterns (Yao, 2024). For the topic, "Assessing the impact of staff shortages on delivering effective guest experience: For our study of Ibis Hotel Southampton, it has used deductive research techniques. Researchers have put proven staff management ideas alongside guest satisfaction findings to build experimentally testable theories they confirm using guest feedback and performance measurements. Our approach has created an organised way to examine staff shortages against guest satisfaction at Ibis Hotel Southampton using hospitality-specific metrics.

Research strategy

A research strategy shows how a study will work including what data to gather and examine. Research takes two major paths: analysing numeric data to validate theories and find trends while studying subjective aspects through uncountable information such as interviews (Tracy, 2024). For the topic, "Assessing the impact of staff shortages on delivering effective guest experience: Our research into Ibis Hotel Southampton shows both methods have produced valuable results. Combining both

approaches has helped to create a detailed understanding since it studies both statistical figures and staff interviews to tackle our problem.

Data collection

The researcher has considered both primary and secondary data collection methods leading to having both numerical and non-numerical data respectively. The data will be collected through a ***semistructured interview*** with the 3 hotel staff managers irrespective of their departments. The interview will provide qualitative insights into the operational challenges faced due to the staffing shortages. Likewise, the data will also be collected with the use of a ***survey*** among the 25 staff of Ibis Hotel Southampton that will help to quantify their views regarding the staff's struggles to meet the guest demand. Therefore, the data collection will enable together diverse data services leading to reaching actionable insights for hotel management.

Data analysis

Data analysis refers to the concept and practice of analysing collected data using specific methods and tools. For this research study, the researcher has made use of statistical data analysis methods in order to analyse the data collected through surveys. Also to note that the data collected through the interview has been analysed in a descriptive manner in regards to every question.

Ethical consideration

This research will be developed in an ethical manner with the wide consideration of research ethics ranging from voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and potential for harm to anonymity (Verbeke *et al.*, 2023). To be more specific, the survey response will be based in an anonymous manner leading to protecting the privacy of individuals who participated. Likewise, the participants for the survey and interviews will be approached in a formal manner with their own personal will and under no such monetary influence leading to reflect the ethical consideration of voluntary participation (Wallwey and Kajfez, 2023).

4. Discussion

4.1 Semi-structured interview

Question 1	For how long have you been serving the role of a manager at Ibis Hotel Southampton?
Manager 1	I have been working as a manager for 3 and half years at Ibis Hotel Southampton.
Manager 2	I have been working as a manager for four years at Ibis Hotel Southampton.
Manager 3	I have been serving the role of manager at Ibis Hotel, Southampton for four and half years.

Table 01: Interview Question 1

Source (created by the learner)

Question 2	How have staff shortages impacted day-to-day operations at the hotel?
Manager 1	Our daily work has suffered because we lack enough employees. Our services take longer to do because we have fewer staff for checking guests in and housekeeping tasks. Managing basic operations turns into a challenging ongoing task due to a lack of enough team members.
Manager 2	Overtime work exhausts staff members who have to cover all open positions. The limited number of workers makes tasks slower to complete and creates wasteful practices.

Manager 3	We had to scale back services in specific service areas. When you have fewer employees on staff they spend less time with guests and lower the total service quality.
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Table 02: Interview Question 2

Source (created by the learner)

Question 3	What challenges do you face in maintaining service quality with limited staff?
Manager 1	It becomes harder to deliver excellent service when your team members handle more than one job type. Reduced staff limits quality control while increasing the chances of mistakes and decreases staff time to deliver personalised service to guests.
Manager 2	The hospitality industry struggles to deliver good service while maintaining stable standards because staff shortages create too much work and lead to errors.
Manager 3	The ongoing guest demands push our team to work faster which produces longer response times for requests. A limited workforce complicates achieving both fast guest services and high-quality performance.

Table 03: Interview Question 3

Source (created by the learner)

Question 4	How have staff shortages affected team dynamics and employee morale?
Manager 1	Teams are less enthusiastic because people need to

	cover more roles than before. Their heavy workload reduces their energy which hurts their work efficiency. Team collaboration has declined because of these shortages.
Manager 2	Team morale sinks because workers stay longer with burned-out problems. Too many duties overburden every team member and make them work alone.
Manager 3	Team members feel more isolated because they lack proper communication as our workforce remains dwindling.

Table 04: Interview Question 4

Source (created by the learner)

Question 5	How have guests reacted to the staff shortages, and how does this affect their experience?
Manager 1	Customers spot wait periods stretching out and see lower quality service delivery. People who stayed at the hotel complained the most about front-desk operation and how rooms were prepared for arrival.
Manager 2	Guests contact us regularly about their late service. Most guests want consistent service but fewer staff makes it hard to provide what they expect.
Manager 3	The majority of our guests show understanding but we encounter guest complaints frequently. Our team now uses compensation and room upgrades to defend against customer complaints about their experience.

Table 05: Interview Question 5

Source (created by the learner)

Question 6	What strategies have you implemented to manage the impact of staff shortages on service delivery?
Manager 1	Our team reallocated work hours to best staff customers during heavy traffic times. Our staff members now accept more varied responsibilities to maintain our main operation functions.
Manager 2	Our temporary staff lacks training during this rush period because we hired them with short notice. Team assignments depend on the tasks we prioritise and distribute to our team members according to availability.
Manager 3	Our team now works better together because we made the system more efficient. Our system now integrates technology for automated procedures that lessen staff workload.

Table 06: Interview Question 6

Source (created by the learner)

Question 7	How do you manage guest expectations when services are limited due to staff shortages?
Manager 1	Our team puts guests ahead by telling them early about schedule changes and planning with them what they can expect. Providing free drinks lets our guests handle their waiting time more gracefully.
Manager 2	We put extra effort into services that we can handle. Our team provides friendly welcome steps and room amenity upgrades because some hotel services are unavailable.
Manager 3	Honest communication is key. Guests receive

	complete information about staffing problems before their stay and we give them extra benefits to make their visit more pleasant.
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Table 07: Interview Question 7

Source (created by the learner)

Question 8	Have staff shortages affected the training and development of new employees?
Manager 1	Our employee training programme has decreased because we don't have enough time to deliver complete mentoring. The training process for new employees starts while they perform their daily tasks which affects their performance during this time.
Manager 2	Organisations assign new staff challenging duties even though they only receive limited instruction. Our team works on urgent duties rather than developing full training programmes.
Manager 3	The training delivery standards continue to deteriorate. Despite our efforts to teach essential tasks our staff problem leads to inadequate practical training for newcomers.

Table 08: Interview Question 8

Source (created by the learner)

Question 9	What impact have staff shortages had on the overall guest satisfaction?
Manager 1	Guest satisfaction has worsened because of it. Fewer staff makes it hard for us to deliver guest service at the high standard they demand which hurts their entire stay.

Manager 2	Our guest ratings show decreased scores particularly in response times. Guests clearly show their dissatisfaction when they perceive lower quality service detail compared to previous visits.
Manager 3	Despite understanding from a few guests the slow service has reduced visitor contentment significantly.

Table 09: Interview Question 9

Source (created by the learner)

Question 10	How do you envision overcoming the challenges posed by staff shortages in the future?
Manager 1	We need to study new ways to manage staff like creating flexible time options or installing self-serve equipment to support our available employees.
Manager 2	Better hiring choices plus higher staff salary packages will help us keep our existing employees. Supporting employee health and well-being will help to keep workers at their jobs.
Manager 3	Training and holding employees becomes our main investment priority. By streamlining operations and automating daily work people can handle increased demands.

Table 01: Interview Question 10

Source (created by the learner)

4.2 Survey

Question 1	How often do you feel overwhelmed with tasks due to staff shortages?
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Options	Total respondents	Responses	Percentage
Always	25	15	60%
Rarely	25	10	40%
Never	25	0	0%

Table 01: Survey Question 1

Source (created by the learner)

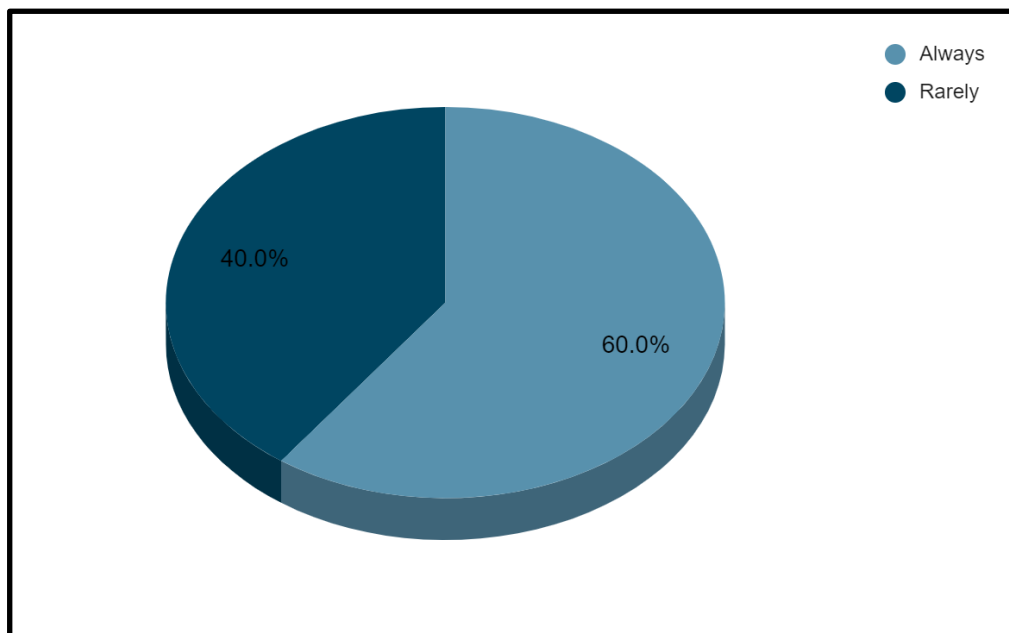


Figure 01: Survey Question 1

Source (created by the learner)

Analysis: In analysis here it can be said that 60% of the survey participants tend to always feel overwhelmed with tasks due to staff shortages while 40% are rarely overwhelmed with tasks due to staff shortages.

Question 2	What level of impact do you believe staff shortages have on the quality of guest experience at the hotel?		
Options	Total respondents	Responses	Percentage

Significant impact	25	14	56%
Moderate impact	25	10	40%
No or slight impact	25	1	4%

Table 02: Survey Question 2

Source (created by the learner)

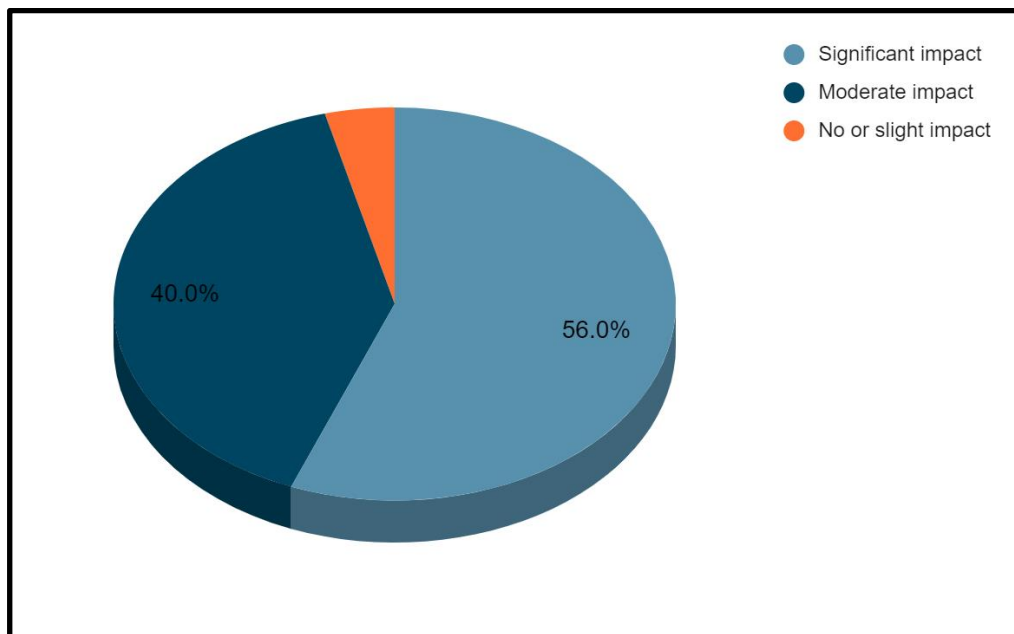


Figure 02: Survey Question 2

Source (created by the learner)

Analysis: 56% of participants agree staff shortages seriously affect guest happiness according to them. Most staff members believe that employee shortages directly affect guest satisfaction levels.

Question 3	How frequently do you notice guest dissatisfaction due to delayed services caused by staff shortages?		
Options	Total	Responses	Percentage

	respondents		
Always	25	8	32%
Rarely	25	10	40%
Never	25	7	28%

Table 03: Survey Question 3

Source (created by the learner)

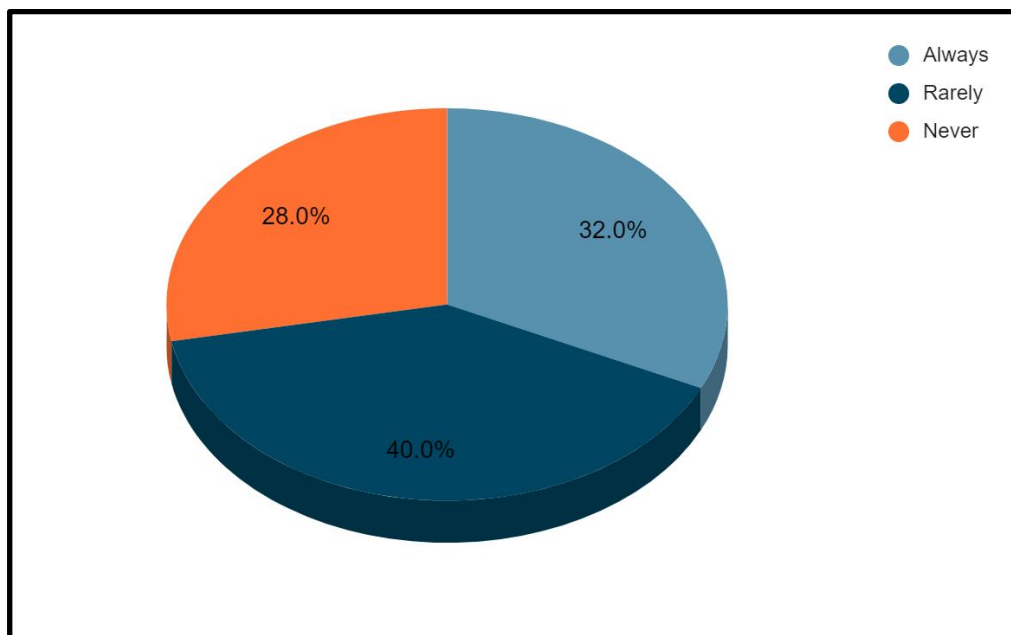


Figure 03: Survey Question 3

Source (created by the learner)

Analysis: Each respondent regularly experiences guest dissatisfaction although staff shortages create problems for 40%. 28% of staff does not detect guest dissatisfaction possibly because they lack constant connection with customers.

Question 4	How do you feel staff shortages affect your job satisfaction?		
Options	Total respondents	Responses	Percentage
Negatively	25	9	36%

positively	25	7	28%
Neutral	25	9	36%

Table 04: Survey Question 4

Source (created by the learner)

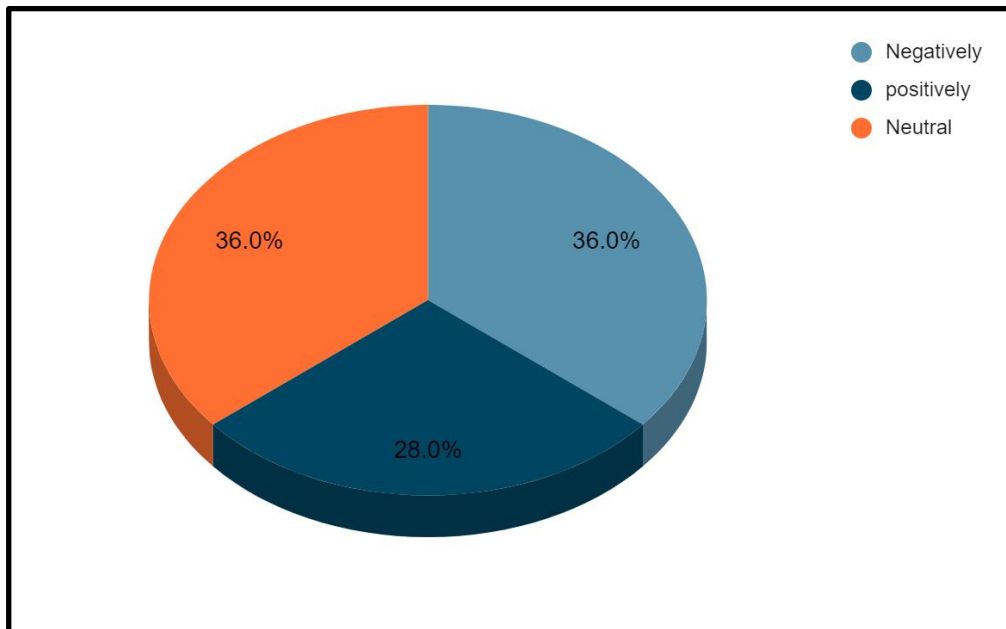


Figure 04: Survey Question 4

Source (created by the learner)

Analysis: Staff shortages create work-related stress for 36% of the audience because they affect their satisfaction at work. The lack of staff gives 28% workers better opportunities for growth and adds responsibilities they enjoy. About half of employees have shown some adaptation to this staffing shortage while the rest maintain a detached mindset toward it.

Question 5	How often do you feel that the hotel is unable to meet guest demands because of a shortage of staff?		
Options	Total respondents	Responses	Percentage
Always	25	5	20%
Rarely	25	15	60%

Never	25	5	20%
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Table 05: Survey Question 5

Source (created by the learner)

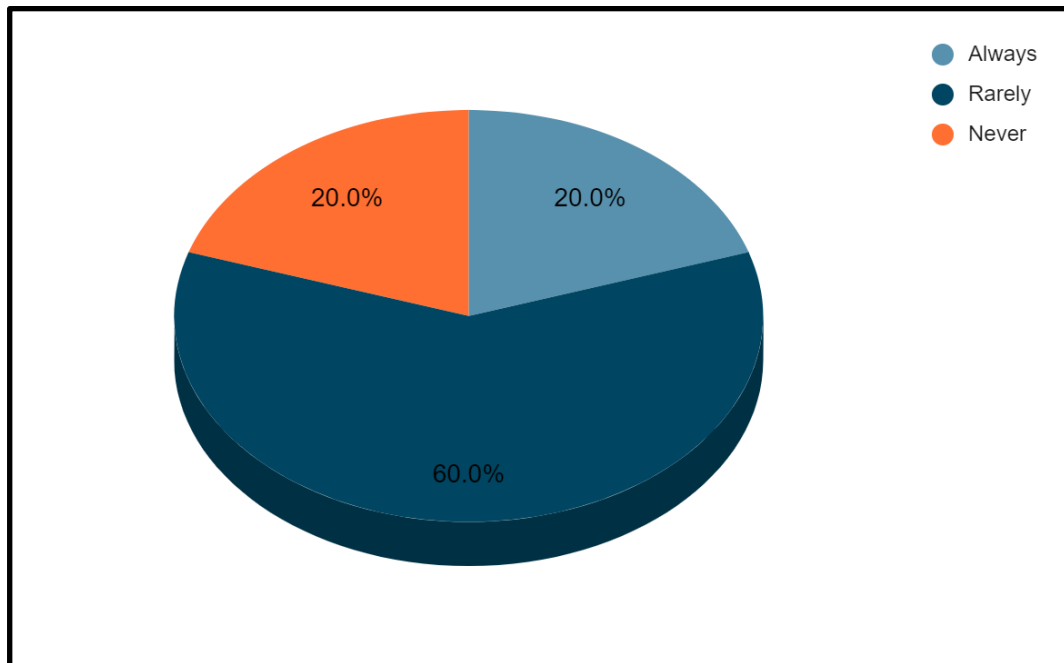


Figure 05: Survey Question 5

Source (created by the learner)

Analysis: Our study finds that guest demands are successfully handled during normal occasions although staff shortages persist. Their designated tasks protect them from this problem because 20% of staff never face it.

Question 6	How well do you feel supported by management during times of staff shortage?		
Options	Total respondents	Responses	Percentage
Very well supported	25	6	24%
Moderate support	25	9	36%

No support	25	10	20%
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Table 06: Survey Question 6

Source (created by the learner)

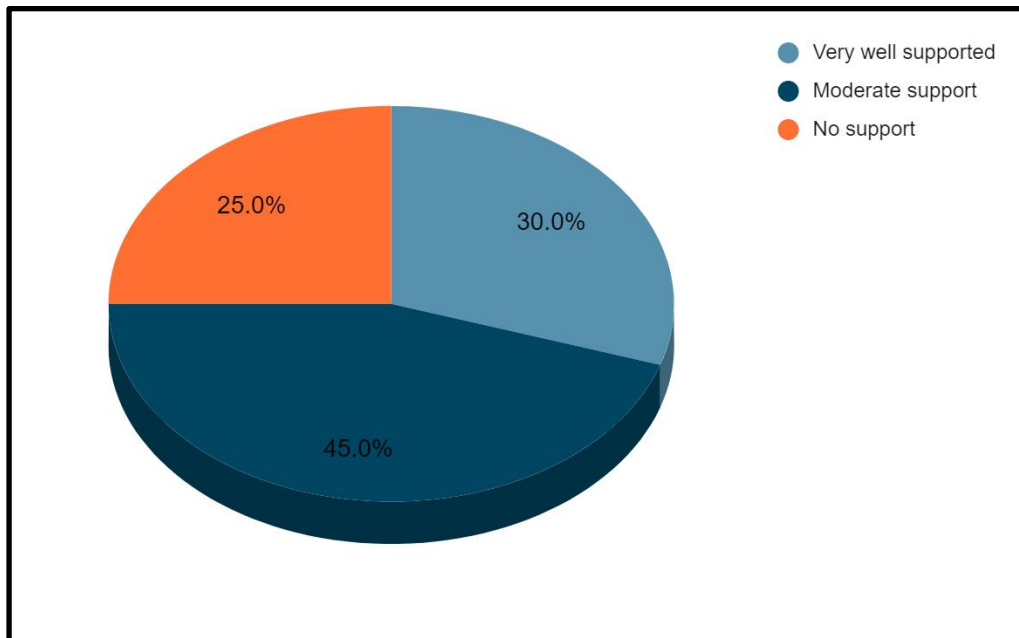


Figure 05: Survey Question 5

Source (created by the learner)

Analysis: At work during staffing shortages 40% of respondents said management provided them zero support which demonstrates a shortage of management resources and action. 36% stated they receive enough support from their managers while 24% reported strong assistance. A small portion of employees receive excellent help from managers during workforce shortages according to 24% of participants.

5. Theme Exploration

5.1 Introduction

Staff shortages in the hospitality industry present a significant challenge that directly affects service delivery, guest satisfaction, and long-term brand loyalty. The ability of hotels to maintain high standards of service even during staff shortages is important not only for maintaining operational efficiency but also for ensuring that guest experiences are positive (Margaretha *et al.*, 2022). The following chapter will critically

analyse the impact of self-shortages on delivering effective guest experiences using Ibis Hotel, Southampton. Through an exploration of academic literature that is supported by real-world examples and evidence from the hotel, the chapter will identify the challenges imposed by the staffing shortages and suggest areas for improvement and development.

5.2 Theme Exploration

5.2.1 Theoretical framework and literature review

The hospitality industry is inherently service intensive and the relationship between the staff and guest is essential to the delivery of exceptional guest service. A growing body of research indicates that staff shortages have a direct and often negative impact on guest satisfaction and loyalty. As per Matey (2024), service quality in the hospitality industry is largely determined by the competence of staff. When the staff levels are insufficient, it directly leads to the inability to meet the guest expectations which leads to service delays, increased stress for staff and eventually a lower quality of experience for the guest in the hotel. The SERVQUAL model highlights that there is a likeable gap which often exists between guest expectations and perceptions of service (Santoso *et al.*, 2021). These gaps widen as the staff are unable to fulfil the case needs in an effective manner, increasing the likelihood of negative guest feedback, such satisfaction can lead to a decrease in customer loyalty which is particularly detrimental in the highly competitive market of the hotel industry. As per Sahaf and Fazili (2024), indicate that guests are more likely to forgive service failures due to the situation with external factors such as staff shortages are clearly communicated and transparent for the guest to be known. However, the guest perceives that the hotel is understaffed and this is not communicated or addressed in an effective manner. The emotional labour involved in guest interaction is heightened during periods of staff shortages as the employees feel increased pressure to maintain the high quality of service despite the inadequate resources.

5.2.2 role of staffing in guest experience

The direct correlation between staffing levels and guest satisfaction has been well documented with the staff numbers, although with time increases and personalised service becoming harder to deliver staff burnout is inevitable (Crossman, 2024). Staff shortages often result in longer times for the guest to be more specific in reception and also manifests as a slower check-in and check-out process in the restaurants. It

leads to slower service or the missed request (Pinho *et al.*, 2024). As a result, service speed is a crucial element of guest satisfaction, especially for business travellers who prioritise efficiency. As per Wen *et al.* (2020), personalised service is a significant detriment to guest loyalty as staff shortages can result in employees being inadequately able to engage in personalised interactions as they may be focused on completing tasks rather than catering to individual guest needs. The high levels of stress among the employees due to being understaffed can impact their emotional labour, leading to decreased job satisfaction, and increased turnover (Dangaiso and Mukucha, 2024). Likewise, employee burnout can affect the guest interaction as overwalked staff may not have the energy to provide the high high-level of service that the guest expects (Min *et al.*, 2023). Service recovery is often critical in maintaining customer loyalty, however, when hotels are understaffed guest complaints may go on, adjust or take longer to resolve leading to trust and satisfaction.

5.2.3 Impact of staff shortages at Ibis Hotel Southampton

The Ibis Hotel Southampton has been deeply affected by the staff shortages, which have been caused due to several external factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit-related labour shortages, and the high turnover rate in the hospitality industry. These issues have not only impacted the operational efficiency of the hotel but have also negatively influenced the guest experience. According to Williams and Erickson (2024), the hospitality sector particularly in the UK has long straw girls with staff shortages, but the situation has been significantly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit. The hospitality industry saw a sharp decline in staffing labour during the pandemic with many workers in the sector due to health concerns, lack of job security and financial instability (Kumar *et al.*, 2024). While the situation has improved since the pandemic peak, many hotels continue to face challenges in terms of staffing. This has been compounded by Brexit, which has further reduced the flow of EU nationals into the UK workforce, leaving many businesses, including those in the hospitality industry, starting to feel the ideal roles. According to Fagyas and Datta (2023), one of the most common complaints at Ibis Hotel, Southampton has been the delays in the check-in and checkout processes. The hotel which typically experiences high volumes of guests, especially in the peak times has found it increasingly difficult to manage these operations effectively due to the insufficient front desk, staffing. The staff shortages have led to the longer term for the guests during the both check-in and check-out processes leading to frustration and negative feedback (Birdir and Sahilli Birdir, 2024). Prior to the pandemic and the labour shortages, the average check-in

time at the hotel was around five minutes. However, the recent report suggests that this has increased to 10 minutes on average. This may seem like a small increase, but it can be significant during busy periods, especially when the guests arrive in large groups or during big holiday times, the delays in the check-in and check-out processes extend beyond the front desk as the guest has reported waiting longer than expected for the rooms to be ready, which further compounds the inconvenience and lead to the guest, guest satisfaction. The checkout delay is also frequently mentioned to be a core issue as the guests have to wait longer to complete their departure, especially when the front desk is understaffed and there are fewer employees available to manage the checkout processes.

According to Yacoub and ElHajjar (2021), another area where the staff shortages have had a noticeable impact on the hotel is in the restaurants and bar services. The reduced number of available staff has led to slower service, especially during the busy period which has affected both guest service and direct feedback, the hotel restaurants which offer a buffet star breakfast and dining have experienced delays in food preparation and delivery, particularly during the peak hours, such as breakfast and dinner (Isaac and Keelson, 2023). During the peak breakfast times, guests have reported longer times for food orders and in some cases, there have been incomplete orders. There is a large reduction in kitchen and service staff meaning that the restaurant is not able to operate in a smooth manner leading to providing guests with fewer services (Wood, 2024). Room services on the other hand have been affected with guests experiencing longer times for the orders to be fulfilled, leading to decreased satisfaction and also influencing their overall perception of the hotel's ability to meet their expectations (Cheong and Law, 2023). Guests who have previously enjoyed efficient and high-quality service during their stay have now found themselves waiting significantly longer for even basic services (Ayodeji *et al.*, 2023). Such issues with the service level can make the guest experience feel less enjoyable and create a sense of frustration among the visitors leading to decreased satisfaction, the job service standards, particularly in the restaurants and bar under the hotel, an ability to meet the brand promise of our comfort, stay leading to lower guest satisfaction, and decreased repeat bookings.

As per Pelet *et al.* (2021), the reduced personalised interactions are also one of the significant impacts of the staff shortages at the hotel. This is so because many guests appreciate the personal touches that are provided in the hotel such as greetings by name, customised recommendations and personalised service (Vashishth *et al.*,

2024). However, as the staff levels have decreased, many employees are forced to focus primarily on completing the essential operational tasks, such as checking guests in answering rooms are prepared rather than engaging in these more personalised interactions, the feedback from guest has reflected a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the lack of these personal touches (Çeltek, 2024). The guests have reported feeling like they were treated more as numbers or room bookings than as individuals. Likewise, it is also reported that the guest has a lack of personal connection leading to a significant impact on the perception of the hotel. One of the keys selling points of staying at a branded hotel is the consistency of service and the ability to feel valued as a guest (Jeong *et al.*, 2023). Personalised interactions are a key factor in building brand loyalty and repeat business and a reduction of these introductions has the potential to damage the reputation and image in the market.

As per Ghani *et al.* (2022), in order to address the challenges, the company focuses on improving the recruitment efforts and returning existing staff which is critical by offering competitive wages, improved working conditions, and better training. Likewise, the hotel can even automate certain aspects of gas service, such as the self-checkout on mobile service orders which can help to reduce some of the operational pressures that are caused by staff shortages (August, 2023).

5.2.4 Guest feedback and response to staff shortages

As per Jain *et al.* (2023), some guests at the Ibis Hotel, Southampton have shown understanding when the hotel is transparent about the issues regarding the understaffed. A review of guest feedback indicates that clear communication regarding the delays or the radio services can meet the frustration, especially in times when alternative solutions are provided to the guests who are informed upfront about the potential delays whether it's during the check-in or checkout processes (Zhang, 2024). It can be more understanding as it allows them to adjust their interactions and expectations accordingly. Conversely, when guests are not informed, they are more likely to leave negative reviews, focusing on poor service or lack of responsiveness (Patil and Rane, 2023). The guest satisfaction service from the hotel for underscores are correlation between the perceived staff availability and the overall guest satisfaction. Guests who feel the hotel is understaffed or insufficient are significantly more likely to express dissatisfaction (Li *et al.*, 2024). These guests often feel neglected or undervalued, which can result in a lower rating and an anatomist overall experience. There is a noticeable increase in overall satisfaction, even when the expectations are not fully met, which underscores that staff shortages can negatively

impact the service. Transparent communication can help to save guest satisfaction (Gavilan and Al-shboul, 202).

5.2.5 Areas for development and improvement

As per Morosan and Bowen (2022), while the staff shortages are challenging, one of the potential solutions is cross-training employees to handle multiple roles which allows the hotel to maintain flexibility during the peak times. The front desk staff also be trained in basic food and beverage operations allowing them to assist in the restaurant during the high traffic period (Zemlina *et al.*, 2023). This can help to reduce the effects of reduced staffing without compromising service quality. Likewise, the company can implement self-service technology such as mobile check-in, digital room keys, and an automated room service request which can reduce the strain on the front desk and operational staff by following the guests to handle certain tasks themselves (Roy and Pagaldiviti, 2023). The hotel can manage fewer staff while also offering them a personalized experience. Clear, transparent communication about staff shortages can go a long way in maintaining guest, trust, and satisfaction (Padma. and Ahn, 2020). To be more specific, proactively informing the guest about the delays at check-in or offering discounts or complimentary services when the issue arises can help to preserve loyalty (Matey, 2024). Supporting staff through programmes focused on reducing burnout and improving morale is also important in this regard. Initiatives such as regular breaks, mental health support and ensuring staffing levels during the peak period will also improve staff performance and guest satisfaction (Saito *et al.*, 2024). The company can even focus on implementing dynamic scheduling systems which take into account guest demand patterns and help to ensure that the hotel has better staff during peak times using data analytics to forecast busy periods can allow for better scheduling and reduce the risk of staff shortages during critical times (Patil *et al.*, 2024).

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

6.1 Conclusion

Summarising the overall research study, it can be said that the research on investigating the impact of staff shortages on delivering effective guest experience of Ibis Hotel, Southampton has been successfully carried out. The research objective of investigating how staff shortages affect the operational efficiency of services delivered

by the Ibis Hotel Southampton has been addressed as theme 1 in the literature review chapter and also through the data collection. The literature review findings suggest that hotels struggle to maintain optimum staffing levels across departments such as front desk, housekeeping and food and beverage services. This often results in longer wait times for guests during checking, reduced attention to detail in the room, clean image and delays in the service delivery at restaurants or bars. The interview findings suggest that from taking longer time at the reception to being unable to assist during peak times, every core aspect has been affected due to the staff shortage, likewise 60% of the staff rarely feel that they receive guest complaints related to the delay or reduced services due to the lack of staff which directly links to the effect in operational efficiency of services due to the staff shortages. The second research objective of analysing guest satisfaction factors that are influenced by the lack of staff shortages within the Ibis Hotel, Southampton has been addressed as theme 2 in the literature review and from the data collection. The literature review findings suggest that the quality of interactions within the staff diminishes with fewer employees; interactions may feel rushed or less personal. The attention to detail of guest experience also suffers as the inadequate staffing often means that the remaining employees are overburdened which can result in missed tasks such as proper room cleaning or timely maintenance requests (Mızrak, 2024). All these are linked to the guest satisfaction factors that are influenced by the lack of staff shortages which, left unnoticed, can lead to decreased guest satisfaction.

Lastly, the objective of identifying staff management strategies in combating ineffective guest experiences due to staff shortages within the hotel has been achieved as theme 3 in the literature review chapter and from the data collection. The literature review findings suggest that flexible scheduling, fostering a positive workplace culture for retention, recognizing employee contributions, promoting teamwork and providing opportunities for growth can lead to higher job satisfaction levels that lead to reducing turn overheads and associated costs of recruiting and training new staff. The interview findings suggest that one of the key strategies that have been successful in mitigating the impact of staff shortages on guest satisfaction include self-service technology, technology like online service requests and so on that has led to reducing the strain on the frontline staff. As a result, a failure to free up employees to focus on more crucial tasks that directly impact guest satisfaction. Thus, all the findings result in informing the research aim and objectives.

6.2 Recommendation

- Based on findings, staff working in Ibis Hotel Southampton feel that they are provided with moderate support by the management in terms of handling the challenges associated with the staff shortages. Thus, in this regard, it is recommended that the hotel focus on holding regular meetings with the staff to discuss staffing levels, potential shortages and solutions (Solnet and Golubovskaya, 2023). As a result, it will help the staff to feel informed and involved in the decision-making process. Likewise, encouraging staff to voice concerns and suggestions can also foster a culture of transparency and responsiveness from management (Hina and Siddiqui, 2023).
- It is recommended that the company focus on improving employee well-being and mental health support as it can have a significant impact on the delivery of guest service (Kim *et al.*, 2023). It is important for the management to not only provide practical solutions but also offer emotional support to have the employee scope up with these challenges. For instance, the company can provide the staff with access to mental health support counselling services or workshops on stress management (Irvine and Suter, 2023). As a result, they are more likely to be mentally, healthy and resilient in nature leading to offering positive outcomes.

7. Reflective account

During my placement at the Ibis Hotel, Southampton, I had the opportunity to observe the effects of staff shortages on both operational efficiency and the quality of guest experience. While I was aware of the challenges imposed by the staff shortages before my placement, it was not until I experienced the issue in the first hand manner, that I gained a deeper understanding of the complexities present through the direct observation interactions with both guest and staff and my involvement in the daily activities. I have gained valuable insights and knowledge into the impact of shortages and how they affect the overall functioning of hotel operation operations. One of the first things that stood out to me upon beginning my placement was the frequent issue regarding slower service and delayed responses during peak periods. Whether it was at the check-in or at the restaurant, the strain of reduced workforce was clearly evident as I noticed that the fronts in particular were often on the staff which created bottlenecks, especially during the check-in and checkout processes (Fox *et al.*, 2023). Guests frequently have to wait longer than expected and on several occasions. I witnessed a few guests experiencing frustration due to the delays. It became clear that when staff are overwhelmed or stretched, the ability to provide personalised service is compromised. It was also evidenced during periods of high demand such as weekends or when the hotel was fully booked, one guest in particular voiced disappointment that the hotel was unable to accommodate the request for a room with a better view (Hossain *et al.*, 2023). Request the maid in advance given the staff shortages. The receptionist did not have the capacity to fulfil the request, and I noticed that the guest left the hotel feeling less satisfied with the overall stay. While I actively understood that the staff shortages were causing this issue, I began to realise the quality of service was not simply a matter of operational efficiency and adequate resources, but also a staffing level was actively required. Also to note that the emotional labour involved in the hospitality was greatly influenced, the staff members were clearly stressed and running between the tasks without the time to engage meaningfully with the guests, the personal interactions which created any emotional connection such as welcoming guests by name, offering local recommendation or simply taking a moment to enquire about their day was becoming increasingly difficult to achieve (Xiong *et al.*, 2023). As a part of working in Ibis Hotel Southampton I had the opportunity to learn various lessons and aspects in regards to the hospitality industry. I have learnt regarding the management of the restaurant, specifically regarding the guest seating to take orders

and serving food and also managing the bar. I have been able to gain various insights regarding the bar operations, including mixing of drinks and handling the financial processes (Wen. and Liu-Lastres, 2023). Such experiences helped me to be aware of how the food and beverage department is critical to the success of hospitality operations. As from the experiences gained in this department, it was significant for me to formulate an acceptable plan which helped me to put the past learning to improve the future performance of the department. The plan also focused on increasing the customer service, developing menu, training staff, and increasing the operational efficiency. However, one of the organizational issues which I was exposed to within the food and beverage department include the high staff turnover which leads to impacting my working pattern negatively.

The gap between the guest expectations and the reality of staff at the question became a consistent team during my investment. It was evident that many guests expected the same level of service, regardless of the staff shortages. This mismatch led to frequent guest complaints about the times of the inability to fulfil the special request. However, I witnessed that clear communication and transparency will play a significant role in managing guest expectations during times of staff shortages, on a few occasions, the management made an active effort to communicate with guests about delays or reduced services and these seemed to improve the guest perceptions (Suwanto *et al.*, 2023). When the hotel was experiencing our staffing shortage in the restaurant, the front desk staff informed the guest in advance about the longer time and provided options for dining outside the hotel. The guests who were informed upfront were found to be more understanding than those who were caught by God by the delays. However, there were instances in which poor communication led to guest frustration, a guest who was unaware that the hotel was short-staffed became frustrated after waiting 30 minutes for a response to a room service, request, this lack of transparency led to negative feedback as the guest felt ignored, even though the staff was genuinely trying to keep up with the overwhelming workload (Bazina, 2023). This experience taught me that the significance of being transparent with guests managing the expectations and providing them with timely updates is crucial. Therefore, I believe that implementing strategic solutions such as improved communication, technology, technology, and staff well-being initiatives in hotel hotels like the Ibis Hotel,

Southampton can continue to deliver an excellent guest experience during times of staffing shortages.

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