Supportive Work Environment in the Hotel Industry: A Review of the Chinese Context

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Abstract

This article takes the supportive work environment as the theme and the current situation of the Chinese hotel industry as the background. Using a systematic literature review method, it summarizes the existing research results on a supportive work environment and the relationship between various sub dimensions and employee retention, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and organizational performance. Research has found that establishing a supportive work environment plays an important role in organizational development. Measures such as creating a good corporate culture, fully empowering employees, improving employee training and development plans, considering work life balance for employees, and matching leadership styles with the organization can reduce employee turnover rates, improve employee satisfaction, and ultimately enhance employee organizational behavior, customer satisfaction, and hotel performance.

Keywords: China, hotel industry, supportive work environment, employee satisfaction, employee retention

1. Introduction

Global research shows that employee turnover is one of the main challenges facing the hotel industry. Due to the need to constantly address differences in the workforce, the department has invested a lot of time and effort in developing and strengthening retention strategies to retain capable and dedicated employees, which is a necessary condition for providing excellent customer experience and maintaining market competitiveness. (Ohunakin et al., 2020; Dwesini, 2019; Madhani, 2020).   Organizations, as mentioned by Naz et al. (2020), that retain their best employees will be able to compete with other organizations and improve their productivity and profitability. Therefore, management needs to provide and maintain a supportive work environment for employees to improve their decision to stay in the organization (Eva et al., 2020). Mandhasari et al., (2023) concluded that the long-term relationship between employees and the company is cultivated by a positive work environment, which is crucial for sustained commitment and efficiency.

Since the reform and opening up, the Chinese economy has achieved remarkable economic achievements in both quantity and quality. At the same time, the rapidly growing tourism market has driven the development of China's hotel industry (Ou et al., 2019). From 1978, only 137 hotels reached the level of 90,600 hotels in 2023 (China Hotel Industry Development Report, 2024), and it is considered as one of the pillar industries (Haibo et al., 2020; Li & Lv, 2021). Zhang (2020) accounted that the Chinese hotel market is an important engine for global hotel industry growth.

The employment in China's hotel industry generally has seasonal characteristics, with labor demand mainly concentrated from October to April, and high liquidity and flexibility (Zhang et al., 2022). Hotel human resource management has always faced the dilemma of "unable to recruit, unable to effectively recruit, and unable to retain" (Lei, 2024), which is manifested in the generally low salary of hotel

employees, unfair salary system, unscientific human resource structure, and imbalanced supply and demand of employees (Shen, 2023). As the working environment is the largest gathering place for two-way interaction between leaders and employees, recent research indicates that in (Rabiul et al., 2022). How to improve hotel employee satisfaction and employment quality from multiple perspectives such as the working environment has become an urgent and important issue that needs to be solved in the Chinese hotel industry (Huang et al., 2019).

On the basis of previous research, the purpose of this study is to combine the current situation of the Chinese hotel industry, focus on clarifying the connotation and sub dimensions of supportive work environment, analyze the specific connotation and role of each dimension, and explore the impact of supportive work environment and its sub dimensions under the background of the Chinese hotel industry. The impact and benefits of supportive work environment on the Chinese hotel industry are discussed, emphasizing the challenges and obstacles of establishing and maintaining a supportive work environment in Chinese hotels, and proposing suggestions and future directions for strengthening research and practice of supportive work environment in the industry.

2. Conceptual Framework:

Nowadays, different organizations and institutions are facing challenges in their work environment. In order to achieve better job satisfaction, the work environment is considered the primary factor that employers consider. In order to maintain stable growth of institutions, it is necessary to maintain employee efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity by providing different facilities (Taheri et al, 2020). A supportive work environment greatly enhances employees' dedication to their roles and job satisfaction as the evidence from multiple sources supports this view in (Taheri et al., 2020; Kurniawaty et al., 2019). This environment consists of several components, such as organizational and managerial support, employee participation in decision-making, autonomy, teamwork, and a comfortable workspace (Taheri et al., 2020; Basalamah & As'ad,2021). On the contrary, the article only focuses on the support of the hotel organization and immediate supervisor. This is supported by Hussein's (2022) research, which focuses on key indicators of supportive environments in the hotel industry, such as job satisfaction and support from organizations and supervisors, which are crucial for promoting employee retention. Social exchange theory can effectively explain the relationship between supportive work environments and employee willingness (Naz et al., 2020; Yusliza et al., 2021; Arasanmi & Krishna, 2019; Meira & Hancer,2021). Employee evaluation of costs such as stress and workload; And the benefits they receive in their workplace. The benefits of exceeding expenses can enhance employees' sense of happiness, encourage loyalty, and a desire to stay in the company. On the other hand, dissatisfaction is due to costs exceeding benefits, which prompts employees to consider leaving. Understanding these interactions can help cultivate an atmosphere for hotel development and maximize employee retention. Therefore, creating a supportive atmosphere is crucial for improving employee retention and cultivating loyal employees in the hotel industry (Hussien, 2021).

Referring to Hussien's research findings, the article selects organizational support and direct supervisor support as important dimensions representing supportive work environments. Based on literature search results, organizational support is refined into four sub items: organizational culture and values, employee empowerment and participation, training and development plans, and work life balance initiatives (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020; Riyanto et al.,2021; Karim et al., 2019; Brough et al.,2020). So far, there are few empirical and systematic analysis studies in Chinese literature that focus on supportive work environments in the hotel industry. In addition, there are some scattered studies, but there is no comprehensive place to collect all the research and provide theoretical, policy, and practical support for a supportive work environment in the Chinese hotel industry. In view of this, the research question guiding this study are:

RQ1: Based on a literature review, what is the current status of supportive work environments in the Chinese hotel industry?

RQ2: What are the challenges and obstacles to a supportive work environment in the Chinese hotel industry?

RQ3: The future development direction of a supportive work environment in China's hotel industry?

3. Methodology:

This article adopts a systematic literature review method to achieve the research objectives. The article analyzes the entire article obtained from Google Scholars and China National Knowledge Infrastructure. The search criteria include: empirical and theoretical papers; retrieved from 2019 to present; the search keywords include: work environment and supportive work environment. After deleting irrelevant articles,119 articles were selected and analyzed. The structure of this article is as follows: it begins with an overview of the connotation and subdivision dimensions of supportive work environment. Following a detailed literature review, the article explores this environment within the context of the Chinese hotel industry. It then examines the impact and benefits of supportive work environment on the hotel industry, identifies the challenges and future development directions for maintaining such environment in the Chinese hotel industry, and concludes with recommendations and suggestions.

4. Supportive Work Environment in the Chinese Hotel Industry:

A supportive work environment is considered an environmental factor, such as support from supervisors or colleagues, as well as limitations and opportunities to perform learned behaviors in the workplace (Yusliza et al., 2021). Providing a supportive work environment to retain talent has become increasingly important as cited in (Purwanto, 2020). According to previous research, the higher the organizational and supervisory support, the stronger the employee's willingness to stay as evident in the studies of (Huning et al., 2020; Iqbal et al., 2020; Herman & Didni, 2020; Islam et al., 2022).

4.1 Organizational support

Organizational support is defined as the degree to which employees perceive management to value their contributions and care about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2022). It is also considered a core attribute of a supportive work environment that can be influenced by management decisions as found in (Sharif et al., 2021).

4.1.1 Organizational culture and values

Organizational culture is the process of guiding individual behavior, values, beliefs, and habits within an organization. Culture enables leaders to see clear behaviors and should imitate and teach employees how to behave. In other words, organizational culture is the value and belief system that shapes the behavior of employees in an organization (Khan et al, 2020).   On the other hand, organizational culture focuses on how members of an organization understand its cultural characteristics. It is usually a philosophical statement that can serve as a binding requirement for organizational members, as it can be formally established in various organizational rules and regulations. Organizational culture is like glue that binds employees and institutional systems together (Vito, 2020). Forming an organizational culture with values can create higher work productivity (Hapsari et al., 2021). Through high work efficiency, organizations can easily apply company values to their employees (Saluyet et al., 2021). A strong and unique culture has a great impact on the success of an organization, and it is widely believed that successful organizations have a strong and unique culture (Al Widi et al., 2021). Failed organizations have different work cultures or cultures that have hindered their adaptation to constantly changing environments in the past (Hardcopf et al., 2021). A strong organizational culture can enhance hotel employee engagement and work performance (Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021), and strengthen employee organizational identity (Sarhan et al., 2020). However, few Chinese hotels have established a good corporate culture and organizational culture

has become a weak link in the construction of supportive work environments in the Chinese hotel industry (Wang, et al., 2020).

4.1.2 Employee Authorization and Participation

Employee authorization means giving employees decision-making power in certain task related activities (Vu, 2020). Employee empowerment focuses on developing trust, motivation, and participation in decision-making, as well as enhancing organizational performance (Baird, K et al,2020）. Empowering employees with decision-making power enables them to be motivated, committed, fulfilled, and assisted in addressing customer needs (Bekirogullari, 2019; Motamarri et al.,2020). Managers should create an environment that supports employees to actively do what they want to do. Management strategies such as authorization, participation in decision-making, and leadership style can promote employee empowerment. Authorization can serve as a guiding principle for improving efficiency, productivity, and employee satisfaction. By accepting more responsibility, employees can be motivated to improve their abilities (Vu, 2020). Higher employee empowerment traits will lead to excellent organizational performance. Creating an environment that supports the application of authorization in the workplace will enhance employee commitment and organizational efficiency (Saleem et al., 2019). In the hotel business, employees often face critical situations where they cannot make customers wait or seek help from other superiors/departments (Kang et al., 2020). Therefore, authorization has been proven to be an indicator of effective hotel performance and successful hotel business performance, as it enhances employee efficiency, performance-based incentives, and training (Ibrahim, 2020). Specifically, psychological authorization should be used as an analytical tool in hotel business, enabling employees to make relevant decisions immediately without the need to frequently consult with superiors to provide appropriate customer service (Obiekwe et al., 2019). In the Chinese hotel industry, authorization has a positive impact on employee job satisfaction and retention intention based on the findings of (Xi et al., 2022; Lu & Liu,2021）. Similarly, customer authorization behavior has a significant positive impact on hotel employee service innovation (Deng et al., 2022).

4.1.3 Training and Development Plan

Training is a process of shaping and equipping employees by enhancing their skills, abilities, knowledge, and behaviors, in order to enable work to be completed faster, more effectively, and more reasonably (Ichsan, 2020). In a narrow sense, by receiving training, employees will acquire specific knowledge and be able to train skills that can be applied to their work in the future. (Adnyani & Dewi, 2019). Training is an activity process that teaches employees skills, attitudes, discipline, and provides skills based on the areas of work they will be doing (Syahruddin et al., 2020). Career development is a process of improving one's employability in order to achieve an ideal career. Employees need sufficient work experience to provide job satisfaction to each employee, thereby having an impact on improving their performance (Adnyani & Dewi, 2019). Therefore, every employee must have the opportunity to develop their abilities and career, and expect to provide the best results for the company (Sitohang, 2019). Career development is an employment activity that helps employees plan their future career in the company, enabling the company and related employees to best develop themselves (Dachner et al., 2021). Career development is a step that companies can use to maintain and improve employee productivity, as well as prepare employees for their future careers (Winda, 2019). Employee training is an important means for hotels to improve employee work efficiency and organizational performance (Belias et al.,2020. The effectiveness of employee training varies among different training modes (Wangchuk & Wetprasit, 2019; King, &

Tang, 2020). A comprehensive training and development plan is a process in which hotels promote individual employee development and continuously optimize it (Khalimova, 2020). Although there are still some problems in employee training in the Chinese hotel industry (Zheng, 2021), it cannot be denied that employee training and development are also effective ways for the Chinese hotel industry to improve its own efficiency (Wang, 2024), and there is a constant demand for the best training model to better enhance employee development and organizational performance (Fang, 2021).

4.1.4 Work Life Balance Initiative

Work life balance (WLB) initiatives and programs are investments in organizations aimed at improving productivity, reducing absenteeism, improving customer service, improving health, flexible work, and increasing employee satisfaction and motivation (Sindhuja & Subramanian, 2020). WLB reflects the concept of balancing employee work and personal life, including sensitivity to social and leisure time (Chan et al., 2020; Weale et al., 2020). Anti-social and inflexible work hours, as well as excessive workload, can lead to work life imbalances, resulting in many negative outcomes such as absenteeism, intention to quit, low organizational commitment, low job satisfaction, and marital dissatisfaction (Kaya & Karatepe, 2020). The key role of WLB policies in attracting, motivating, and retaining outstanding employees (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al, 2020). Implementing the WLB plan in a company will produce ideal results, such as job performance (Tamunomiebi & Oyibo, 2020). With the continuous improvement of quality of life, people's demands for hotel services are increasing. In such a competitive market environment, hotel management must provide a series of WLB measures to acquire and retain employees, in order to provide better services and gain advantages in market competition (Chang et al., 2019). Consequently, hotels must provide better compensation and rewards for employees, help them balance work and life as much as possible, reduce employee turnover rates, and enhance organizational competitiveness (Santhanam et al., 2021). WLB influences the organizational commitment of Chinese hotel industry employees (Chang et al, 2019) and plays an important mediating and moderating role in employee engagement and innovative behavior (Ali et al., 2021).

4.2 Immediate supervisor support

Supervisor support is defined as employees' views on how their supervisors value their contributions and care about their well-being as recent studies have highlighted the evolving dynamics of instructional strategies. (Hamzah et al., 2021; Pattnaik & Panda, 2020). Leadership style, as the most important manifestation of supervisor support, can have a profound impact on employee behavior and organizational performance (Hansen & Pihl, 2019; Lee et al., 2019).

Leadership style is defined as the characteristic behavior or behavior pattern of a leader when guiding, guiding, and motivating a group of people, which in turn affects the behavior of followers (Piwowar & Iqbal, 2023). Scholars have studied and defined many leadership styles, such as transformational leadership (Kha et al., 2020), transactional leadership, laissez faire leadership (Sandstro & Reynolds, 2020), and servant leadership (Karatepe et al., 2020). The consequences of different leadership styles can lead to differences in organizational performance (Wen et al., 2019), employee turnover rate (Khuwaja et al., 2020), and organizational commitment (Abasilim et al., 2019). In the context of the hotel industry, servant leadership and transformational leadership are positively correlated with employee work engagement (Rabiul & Yean, 2021; Huertas et al., 2019). Wrong leadership styles can affect hotel performance (Alzoubi & Jaaffar, 2020), and a successful hotel general manager often employs multiple

leadership style abilities (Sandstrom & Reynolds, 2020). In China, leadership style is more commonly used to study the relationship between work performance, turnover intention (Zhen, 2019), and employee satisfaction (Huang et al., 2019). In addition, the impact of leadership style on employee innovation behavior and green behavior has also become a focus of attention for scholars (Lu & Chen, 2023; Dai & Ma,2020）.

5. Impact and Benefits:

Global research shows that employee turnover is one of the main challenges facing the hotel industry. Organizations that retain their best employees will be better positioned to compete with other organizations and improve their productivity and profitability (Naz et al., 2020). Therefore, management needs to provide and maintain a supportive work environment for employees. According to Taheri et al., (2020) and Kurniawaty et al., (2019), a supportive work environment greatly enhances employees' work engagement and dedication to their roles.

The job satisfaction of employees is often reflected in their overall sense of happiness experienced in the work environment (Dziuba et al., 2020). A negative work environment can lead to employee dissatisfaction and increased willingness to quit (Munandar et al., 2020). A positive work environment can significantly affect employee loyalty to the company, especially in the hotel industry (Koo et al., 2020). Therefore, creating a supportive atmosphere is crucial for improving employee retention and cultivating loyal employees in the hotel industry (Hussien, 2021). In a supportive work environment, employees will feel support and encouragement (Pusparani et al., 2021). A supportive work environment increases employee interest in work, enhances employee engagement (Talukder, 2019) and productivity (Dinge & Maffett, 2023), and enables customers to enjoy more value and satisfaction (Kurdi et al., 2020), thereby improving overall organizational performance (Sugiarti, 2022) and forming higher organizational commitment (Naz et al., 2020). Over 80% of employees are willing to work in a beneficial and resource rich environment. Therefore, it is crucial to explore how the work environment plays a role in the unique cultural background of Chinese hotels, in order to provide valuable targeted strategies for employee retention and satisfaction. (Wei et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2020).

6. Challenges and Future Directions:

As one of the three pillar industries of China's tourism industry, the hotel industry plays an important role in promoting economic growth (Lu, 2022). As a traditional service industry, talent has always been an important factor hindering the development of China's hotel industry. The overall work environment, including work atmosphere, training and development, salary and benefits, career promotion, and work pressure, directly affects the satisfaction and retention rate of hotel talents (Xi et al., 2022; Liu, 2021; Gao & Song, 2021). The quality of the work environment and the level of professional identity are directly reflected in employee motivation and organizational performance (Xu et al., 2023). The overall performance of the Chinese hotel industry according to Huang et al., is characterized by low employee satisfaction and high turnover rate. Specifically, it is manifested in the lack of organizational culture, insufficient employee authorization, lack of targeted training and development, difficulty in balancing work and life, and a single leadership and management style (Wang, 2024; Tan,2023; Li,2023; Li & Chen,2021; Gao, 2021), and on how to systematically integrate the supportive work environment based

on the current situation of the Chinese hotel industry to improve overall employee satisfaction, customer recognition, and organizational growth has become the direction of future research.

7. Conclusion:

The article found through a review of existing literature that Chinese scholars pay more attention to aspects such as hotel employee turnover intention, work motivation, and satisfaction (Wu, 2023; Zhang & Xie, 2020; He, 2019), and pay more attention to brand competitiveness in discussions of star rated hotels (Sun, 2022; Xia et al., 2020). However, there is insufficient discussion on the working environment and retention intention of China's star rated hotel industry. In addition, there are significant differences between the Chinese and Western hotel industries in many aspects, including cultural values, organizational structure, and business practices (Dong & Lang, 2023; Wei et al., 2020). Chinese culture is deeply rooted in the highly valued collectivism, team harmony, and cooperation. In contrast, Western society tends to prioritize individualistic values, emphasizing personal achievement and self-interest. This cultural difference may affect the job performance of different employees (Gu et al., 2022; Han et al., 2021). Exploring how supportive work environments can play a role in the unique cultural context of Chinese hotels is necessary and urgent, as it can provide valuable targeted strategies for employee retention and satisfaction. (Wei et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2020)

This article provides an overview of the connotation and segmentation of supportive work environment in the overall context of the development of China's hotel industry, as well as the impact of various dimensions on employee satisfaction, willingness to stay, and organizational performance. The evidence provided in the literature indicates that a supportive work environment reduces employee turnover intention, improves employee satisfaction, and organizational performance. The findings provided in this article offer a foundation for further research in related fields. In particular, researchers can consider further studying the specific elements of a supportive work environment to determine the extent to which each element affects employee retention, job satisfaction, and organizational performance. The findings of this article are expected to enhance the understanding of the relationship between supportive work environments, employee willingness to stay, employee behavior, and organizational performance. Further clarification around these important concepts should enable companies to identify and create supportive work environments that are conducive to employee development, and develop strategies to improve employee job satisfaction. This effort is expected to enhance the willingness of employees to stay and bring huge benefits to the organization, especially in terms of retaining talents and unleashing their value.

8. References

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