

# Hotel employee profile and employee retention statements: the case of hotels in Cape Town, South Africa

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## Abstract

Previous research results show that the hotel sector has high staff turnover, which has negative impacts on hotels in terms of higher financial costs, inconsistent service quality, and subsequent loss in customer loyalty. A survey of 217 employees in selected hotels in Cape Town, South Africa, explored relationships between employee profile and factors related to employee retention. Descriptive and bivariate analyses' results highlights show that about two-third of hotel employees surveyed have not worked for more than five years in the participating hotels. Room reservations, front office and housekeeping staff, were found to be more willing to be employed for a long time in the hotel than staff in other departments. Finance, Food and Beverage, Convention and Catering staff were also found to be more unwilling to be employed in the hotel for a long time as opposed to staff in other departments, due to their perceptions of unfair compensation and long working hours. Significant numbers of immigrants, females, black and coloured staff also perceive they are not fairly compensated. It is recommended therefore that management consolidate the implementation of staff compensation purely based on the nature of work, and use performance-related-pay and performance-related-promotions so as to create an environment that supports equity, creativity and ownership of responsibilities among hotel employees. Linking hotels' individual employee working hours to employee remuneration and subsequent communication of this during teambuilding exercises may help foster fairness and equity in hotels.

**Keywords:** Employee retention, employee turnover, employee profile, hotel, sub-Saharan Africa.

## Introduction

Previous researchers reported that there is a high staff turnover of employees working in the hotel sector (Davidson & Wang, 2011; Mohsin, Lengler & Kumar, 2013; Pearlman & Schaffer, 2013). This is detrimental towards hotels' management costs and many prospective employees may not find working in hotels, the right choice. High employee turnover costs that may hamper organisational success include financial costs (resulting from Human Resource process of replacing staff), inconsistent service quality (the performance of different staff may differ), and the resulting loss in customer loyalty (Kuria, Alice & Wanderi, 2012; Mohanty & Mohanty, 2014; Yam & Raybould, 2011; Yang, Wan & Fu, 2012).

Some researchers reported the probable cause of hotels' high employee turnover to include long working hours, perceived unfair compensation, minimal growth opportunities, and poor working relationships between superiors and subordinates (AlBattat, Som & Halalat, 2014; Davidson & Wang, 2011; Kuria *et al.*, 2012; Mohanty & Mohanty, 2014). There exist

numerous international studies with a focus of hotel employee retention or turnover, but there is a dearth of literature on this study area in Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa. Mohsin *et al.* (2013) reported that high staff turnover in hotels is not unique to a particular country, but globally common. AlBattat *et al.* (2014) proposed further studies on the human element of high employee turnover and the dynamic conditions in which the hospitality industry must operate. This study focusses on the relationships between employee profile and employee retention in South African hotels. It could be that specific segments of hotel workers are more likely to leave the hotels within a shorter time than the others. The study area is Cape Town, an important world tourism destination, where there are so many hotels. The research was conducted in selected three, four and five star hotels, as these employ non-family members and are bigger in size compared to one or two star hotels. This study started off with a literature review of relevant academic articles.

## **Literature review**

Due to the reported high employee turnover in hotels, many studies have been done with a particular focus on employee retention (such as Chen & Wallace, 2011; Hausknecht, Rodda & Howard, 2008; Hong, Hao, Jung & Yoon, 2015; Karatepe & Karadas, 2012; Kim, Im & Wang, 2015; Kumar, Ramendran & Kadiresan, 2012; Msengeti & Obwogi, 2015). As we pointed out earlier, the problem of high employee turnover is a worldwide issue (Mohsin *et al.*, 2013). Researchers (such as AlBattat *et al.*, 2014; Davidson & Wang, 2011; Kuria *et al.*, 2012; Mohanty & Mohanty, 2014) relate hotel employment to undesirable working conditions or factors such as long working hours, perceived unfair compensation, minimal growth opportunities, and poor working relationships between superiors and subordinates. These factors are discussed in the subsequent sub-sections of this literature study.

### **Compensation**

Employees (hotel employees included) work for financial stability and comfortable life. The compensation that employees receive from work is usually perceived by employees to relate to the nature of work done, and this will undoubtedly play a role towards employees' level of job satisfaction. Ineson, Benke and László (2013) and Jung and Yoon (2015) reported that pay is the most important factor contributing to job satisfaction. Karatepe and Karadas (2012) posit that acceptable pay and related rewards reveal top management commitment to proper service quality. They further asserted that this will support employee satisfaction as they feel that their efforts in the organisation are recognised. This led Jung and Yoon (2015) to report that fair pay will have the ability to enhance employee work engagement and reduce job withdrawal. Mohanty and Mohanty (2014) suggest therefore that management create and approve lucrative reward structures to attract and retain talented employees.

### **Employee development**

Employees normally get some form of continuous training and development in their organisations as part of the reward package they receive from their employers. Employee development programmes in hotels have different trainings in which employees who have interest in them, are allowed to participate in, as part of the team with mandate to deliver acceptable level of services to guests. Some hotels however do not provide enough of these trainings to their employees. Chen and Wallace (2011) posit that multiskilling of employees to increase productivity and versatility (increased ability to fill-in other positions in the organisation) of employees does bring fulfilment in employees, and in turn reduce the chances of employees wanting to leave the organisation after a short-while. It is common knowledge that many employees take up jobs in organisations with challenging work opportunities, where they feel they have enough opportunities for growth and development.

### **Work engagement**

Work engagement or job involvement requires viable communication between managers and subordinates and entails employees' active participation in the job design and the actual carrying out of the job (Zopiatis, Constanti & Theocharous, 2014). Employees in a hotel need to be informed and updated on events, changes in policy and strategy, and also of any changes that affect them. Job involvement therefore provides employees the opportunity to be informed and make decisions in relation to their work (Zopiatis *et al.*, 2014), thereby empowering employees. Employee engagement develops workers' skills and enhances staff productivity, which in turn avails the organisation the opportunity to be internationally competitive (Chen & Wallace, 2011). It can therefore be said that engaging employees actively in their work improves the chances of these employees to stay in the organisation for a long time.

### **Working relations**

A healthy workplace provides a conducive work environment, which in turn motivates employees (Msengeti & Obwogi, 2015). Managers need to provide guidance and support to their subordinates, which will make the latter to feel valued (Lam and Chen, 2012). Employees who feel valued by their organisation tend to have positive emotion and energy, causing them to work as if the organisation belongs to them. Favoritism in a workplace inadvertently creates animosity among the employees. Research found a link between interactional justice and supervisory support (Lam & Chen, 2012). Job satisfaction is not only mediated by financial compensation, but by other factors such as social involvement in workplace (Ineson *et al.*, 2013).

### **Working hours**

Long working hours and the hospitality sector seem to be the two sides of a coin. Accepting long working hours is actually viewed as a prerequisite to work in this sector. People need jobs and most times take up offers as they come their ways, only to become demotivated with time and quit, probably for another job with shorter working hours. Mohanty and Mohanty (2014) stated that long working hours is one of the undesirable working conditions in hotels. Institutions of higher learning where hospitality education are offered do inform the learners or students on the hotel working conditions, including long working hours, and working on weekends. One may argue therefore that many entrants into the hospitality sector, with hospitality qualification do know at the time of entry, how hotels operate and the conditions attached to this operation, which include long working hours.

### **Research design and method**

Tourism and hospitality research, due to the nature of the industry, requires much quantified data to reach conclusions (Ezeuduji, 2013; Veal, 2011). Questionnaire surveys provide such information. This study focusing on employee retention used a structured questionnaire which is respondent-completed to gather information. The questionnaire consists of categorical, ordinal and ranked variables, where ordinal variables are measures using a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree) (Veal, 2011; Babbie, 2010). Most variables used in the questionnaire were identified from the literature study made. Previous researchers on employee turnover or retention (such as Jung & Yoon, 2015; Mohsin *et al.*, 2013; Wells & Welty Peachey, 2011) reported several factors that may cause employees to be willing to stay for a long time in a hotel. The main factors and related variables that influence employee retention were selected and introduced in the questionnaire used for this study, namely fair compensation (Hong *et al.*, 2012; Jung & Yoon, 2015), employee development (Jung & Yoon, 2015; Kong, Cheung & Song, 2012), work engagement (Hong *et al.*, 2012; Jung & Yoon, 2015; Karatepe & Ngeche, 2012),

working relations (Lee, Teng & Chen, 2015; O'Neill & Davis, 2011), and flexible working hours (Davidson & Wang, 2011; Hon, Chan & Lu, 2013; Mohanty & Mohanty, 2014).

A convenience sampling approach (non-probabilistic) was used to get the sample for this study, out of the research population, where only three, four and five star hotels in Cape Town, willing to take part in this study were recruited. In these hotels 217 employees were randomly surveyed, but only 210 returned questionnaires were usable for study analysis.

Data analysis used IBM's statistics software (IBM Corporation, 2016), where descriptive analysis (frequencies and mean scores) and non-parametric bivariate analyses (using Chi-Square test to compare two variables) were done at the first and second stage of analyses respectively. Veal (2011) advised the used Chi-Square test to explore bivariate relationships between nominal and/or categorical data. Variables previously coded as ordinal data were recoded into categorical variables to allow for the use of Chi-Square tests. Relationships between variables were only accepted at 95% confidence interval. Lastly (third stage of analysis) ordinal variables used in the study to explain specific factors (employee retention, compensation, employee development, work engagement, working relations, and work hours) were subjected to reliability tests to predict internal consistencies of variables used for each factors. The reliability test used Cronbach's Alpha score to predict consistency among variables in explaining a specific factor (Cortina, 1993; Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Gliem and Gliem (2003) explained that the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient ranges from 0 to 1. Much debate (among authors such as George & Mallery, 2003; Gliem & Gliem, 2003; Nunally, 1978; Peterson; 1994) on the benchmark score that shows enough consistency in the variables appearing in the measurement scale has been reported. George and Mallery (2003) advocated the use of Cronbach's Alpha score of between 0.5 and 0.7 to show consistency. Tavakol and Dennick (2011) further explained that a low Cronbach's Alpha score may be due to a small number of variables being used to explain a construct or a weak interrelatedness among variables used in analysis. The reliability analysis performed in this study accepted a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.6 or above to be acceptable due to relatively small numbers of variables used in each construct for this study (compensation, work engagement, employee development, work relationships, work hours and employee retention).

## Results and discussion

### *Respondents' profile*

This survey of 210 respondents (employees of participating 3 to 5 star hotels) reveal their socio-demographic characteristics (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristic of respondents (n = 210)**

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Female	63.8
	Male	36.2
Age group	18 – 25 years old	16.7
	26 – 35 years old	41.4
	36 – 45 years old	30.5
	46 – 55 years old	8.6
	56 – 65 years old	2.4
	65 + years old	0.4
Cultural group	Black	35.7
	Coloured	35.2
	Indian	5.2
	Asian	1.4
	White	13.0
	Immigrant	9.5

Highest level of education attained	Matriculation or below	46.7
	College	25.2
	University national diploma or first degree	26.7
	University Master's degree or above	1.4
Number of years working in this hotel	1 – 5 years	63.6
	6 – 10 years	19.5
	10 years and above	16.9
Department	Food & Beverage- food production/food services/room service/convention & catering	20.5
	Rooms- reservations/front office/housekeeping/laundry	45.2
	Personnel- employee relations/recruitment/training	7.6
	Finance / accounting	6.7
	Marketing and sales- sales	4.8
	Maintenance & Security – maintenance / security	9.5
	Other <sup>1</sup>	5.7
Position	First line staff- reservations/bell service/concierge/valet/waiter/waitress/counter reception	41.0
	Grassroots leader or supervisor	13.7
	Unit chief (deputy manager or manager)	6.7
	Department supervisor	11.0
	General manager	1.4
	Other <sup>2</sup>	26.2

<sup>1</sup> 'Other' here are managerial staff and staff in such units such as Spa and games

<sup>2</sup> 'other' here depicts managerial staff and staff in units such as Accounts, Human Resource, Kitchen, Spa, Maintenance, Housekeeping and Security.

Female hotel employees dominate in this sample, and more than 50% of the respondents are relatively young (age, less than 36 years). The hotel employees surveyed are mostly individuals from Black and coloured racial groups (representing more than 70% of the sample). About half of the sample have only high school education, showing the dominant education level of employees working in hotels in South Africa. Organisations need employees who have the right knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes to provide excellent service (Ford *et al.*, 2012). It is however believed that a good mix of education and experience are indeed critical for success, for hotel employees. Almost 64% of the employees have worked in the hotel for between one to five years. A significant percentage of the sample work in the hotels' room service sections (about 45%), and another significant size work in the food and beverage section (almost 21%). Much of the employees surveyed are managerial staff, front-line staff, and staff in units such as accounts, human resource, kitchen, spa, maintenance, security and housekeeping.

### **Employee profile versus Employee retention statements**

Factors from literature review identified in this study that relate to hotel employee retention are namely; 1) compensation (Hong *et al.*, 2012; Jung & Yoon, 2015), 2) employee development (Jung & Yoon, 2015; Kong, Cheung & Song, 2012), 3) work engagement (Hong *et al.*, 2012; Jung & Yoon, 2015; Karatepe & Ngeche, 2012), 4) work relationships (Lee, Teng & Chen, 2015; O'Neill & Davis, 2011), and 5) work hours (Davidson & Wang, 2011; Mohanty & Mohanty, 2014); Hon, Chan & Lu, 2013). These and 'employee retention' factor form central part of this study. Respondents were therefore requested to tick their level of agreement to the variables explaining these factors (see Table 2). Reliability statistics show that all these items are consistently related enough to explain these respective factors

(Table 2, acceptable level of Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.6 or above was used for this study).

In terms of the 'employee retention' factor, room reservations staff, front office staff and housekeeping staff seem to be more willing to be employed in the hotel for a long time than staff in the other departments, as they disagreed more that 'it would be easy for them to leave the hotel'. However staff from the departments of finance, food and beverage, convention and catering, seem to disagree more regarding the item - 'I want to remain in this hotel for a long time'. Regarding the factor 'compensation', more food and beverage, convention and catering staff perceive their salary and benefits in hotels as unfair when compared to their responsibilities. Significant numbers of Immigrants, females, Black and Coloured employees working in these hotels also perceive their compensation to be unfair. The issue of equity in compensation, regardless of nationality, race and gender, is therefore important if hotels want to have employees who perceive they are being treated fairly compared with others. Significant number of Coloured employees disagreed more than employees belonging to other cultural groups to the statements - 'if I do good work, I can count on being promoted' and 'support for my long-term career development is provided in this hotel'. More Black employees stated that they do not have enough opportunities to use their initiative than employees from other cultural groups, while more significant number of White employees (in comparison with other cultural groups) posited they are not strictly supervised or controlled, working in these hotels.

**Table 2: Employee retention statements and employee profile (n = 210)**

<b>1 Employee retention</b>		
<b>Statements</b>	<b>Mean score (Level of agreement)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Compared with employee profile<sup>b</sup></b>
1.1 I feel attached to this hotel	2.35	N.S.
1.2 It would be difficult for me to leave this hotel	2.86	N.S.
1.3 Working in this hotel is a labour of love for me	2.50	N.S.
1.4 It would be easy for me to leave this hotel	3.12	*Rooms- reservations/front office/housekeeping staff agreed less than staff in other departments.
1.5 I want to remain in this hotel for a long time	2.80	* Finance / accounting; Food & Beverage- food production/food services/room service/convention & catering staff agree less than staff in other departments
1.6 I cannot wait to leave this hotel	3.79	N.S.
<b>Reliability Statistics (employee retention), Cronbach's Alpha = .857, N of Items = 6 Valid cases = 207(98.6%), Excluded cases = 3(1.4%), Total = 210</b>		
<b>2 Compensation</b>		
2.1 The amount of pay I receive in this hotel is the industry wage for my position	2.58	N.S.
2.2 My monthly salary in this hotel is not satisfactory	3.18	N.S.
2.3 My salary in this hotel is fair for my responsibilities	2.98	*Food & Beverage- food production/food services/room service/ convention & catering staff agree less than staff in other departments ** Immigrants agreed less than South Africans
2.4 Benefits provided as a package in this hotel (e.g. sick leave, maternity & paternity) give me stability	2.16	**Food & Beverage- food production/food services/room service/ convention & catering staff agree less than staff in other departments

		**Females disagree more than males
2.5 My pay in this hotel is not necessarily subject to organisational performance	2.81	N.S.
2.6 Employee initiative in this hotel is always compensated	2.81	*Black and coloured employees agree less than other cultural groups
<b>Reliability Statistics (compensation), Cronbach's Alpha =.676, N of Items = 5 (when item 2.5 in the Table – 'pay', is deleted)</b>		
<b>Cronbach's Alpha =.616, N of Items = 6 (when all items in the Table are included)</b>		
<b>Valid cases = 210(100%), Excluded cases = 0(0%), Total = 210</b>		
<b>3 Employee development</b>		
3.1 If I do good work in this hotel, I can count on being promoted	2.70	*Coloured employees agree less than other cultural groups
3.2 I did not receive extensive customer service training in this hotel	3.60	N.S.
3.3 Continuous training is provided in this hotel	2.20	N.S.
3.4 Support for my long term career development is provided in this hotel	2.60	** Coloured employees agree less than other cultural groups
3.5 My supervisors in this hotel explain the key success factors on the job	2.36	N.S.
3.6 This hotel has opportunities for skills development	2.32	N.S.
<b>Reliability Statistics (employee development), Cronbach's Alpha =.829, N of Items = 6</b>		
<b>Valid cases = 210 (100%), Excluded cases = 0(0%), Total = 210</b>		
<b>4 Work engagement</b>		
4.1 In my job in this hotel, I have sufficient opportunities to use my initiative	2.45	* Black employees agree less than other cultural groups
4.2 For a large part I determine how I work in this hotel	2.69	* First line staff- reservations/bell service/concierge/valet/waiter/waitress/ counter reception staff agree less than staff in other positions
4.3 I am not empowered to solve customer problems in this hotel	3.51	N.S.
4.4 I am not strictly supervised or controlled in this hotel	3.25	*White employees agree more than other cultural groups
4.5 I enjoy meeting and serving customers in this hotel	1.70	N.S.
4.6 I am afforded an opportunity to decide how to do my work from time to time in this hotel	2.42	* First line staff- reservations/bell service/concierge/valet/waiter/waitress/ counter reception staff agree less than staff in other positions
<b>Reliability Statistics (work engagement), Cronbach's Alpha =.639, N of Items = 6</b>		
<b>Valid cases = 210 (100%), Excluded cases = 0(0%), Total = 210</b>		
<b>5 Working relations</b>		
5.1 I have a good working relationship with my supervisors in this hotel	2.22	N.S.
5.2 I work very well with everyone in this hotel	1.77	N.S.
5.3 I enjoy good communications with my supervisors in this hotel	2.25	N.S.
5.4 I enjoy good communications with my colleagues in this hotel	1.62	N.S.
5.5 I think of the workplace as my second home and my colleagues as my family in this hotel	2.31	N.S.
5.6 I have good working relationships with my colleagues in this hotel	1.76	N.S.
<b>Reliability Statistics (working relations), Cronbach's Alpha =.803, N of Items = 6</b>		
<b>Valid cases = 210 (100%), Excluded cases = 0(0%), Total = 210</b>		
<b>6 Working hours</b>		
6.1 My working hours are adequate in this hotel	2.34	** Finance / accounting; Marketing and sales- sales staff agree less than staff in other departments

6.2 My job schedule in this hotel does not interfere with my family life	2.82	N.S.
6.3 In this hotel, I am given enough time to do what is expected of me in my job	2.35	N.S.
6.4 Working hours in this hotel infringe on my personal quality time with friends	3.12	N.S.
6.5 Long working hours are not a problem to me	2.94	N.S.
6.6 The hotel's long working hours are unreasonable	3.41	* Coloured employees agree less than other cultural groups
<b>Reliability Statistics (working hours), Cronbach's Alpha = .717, N of Items = 6</b> <b>Valid cases = 210 (100%), Excluded cases = 0(0%), Total = 210</b>		

Notes: <sup>a</sup>Questionnaire were itemised along a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1, strongly agree; 2, tend to agree; 3, neutral; 4, tend to disagree; 5, strongly disagree

<sup>b</sup>Pearson Chi-Square test significance. N.S., no significant results. \*,  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*,  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*,  $p < 0.000$ .

All these results reveal that members of Black and Coloured racial groups believe strongly they are not being treated fairly compared with other racial groups. More so, first line staff believe more than staff in the other positions that they do not determine largely how they work, revealing weak 'work engagement' for these staff.

While more Coloured employees than other racial groups have no much problem with the hotel's long working hours (even though they feel more that they are not compensated fairly or reasonably developed on the long-term); more finance, marketing and sales' staff have problems with the working hours.

Lam and Chen (2012) posit that hotel managers will have to reduce employees' negative emotions by guiding and supporting them through a fair treatment. Lee *et al.* (2015) went further to state that high-quality relationships among co-employees will lead to influence and co-ordination among team members.

## Conclusion and recommendations

The issue of equity in compensation, regardless of nationality, race and gender, is important if hotels want to have employees who perceive they are being treated fairly compared with others. Fair and equal treatment among workers in the same organisation will foster positive energy and teamwork and a conducive environment for high quality service delivery. Many employees surveyed have not worked in the hotel for a fairly long-time, supporting the popular notion that there is a high staff turnover among employees in the hotel sector.

The results of this study show that staff in room reservations, front office and housekeeping departments are more willing to be employed in the hotel for a long time than staff in other departments. Whereas staff in finance, food and beverage, convention and catering departments are found to be more unwilling to be employed in the hotel for a long time than staff in other departments, due to their perceptions of unfair compensation and working hours.

Significant number of employees with immigration background, female staff, black and coloured staff also perceive they are not fairly compensated according to their responsibilities. It is recommended therefore that management carefully consolidate the implementation of staff compensation purely based on the nature of work, and use performance-related-pay and performance-related-promotions to create an environment that supports equity, creativity and ownership of responsibilities among hotel employees. Also linking hotels' individual employee working hours to employee remuneration and subsequent communication of this during teambuilding activities will likely foster the spirit of fairness and equity among employees working in hotels.

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