

## Perceptions and future intentions to stay in the hotel industry: the case of front desk employees in Israel

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### Abstract

The hospitality industry is one of the oldest sub-industries in tourism, yet despite the modernization and technical development of this sub-industry, its main resource remains the human resource. In the hospitality industry the front office serves as the first and one of the most important points of contact with the guest. This study focuses on front office employees in managerial and non-managerial positions at various hotels in Israel and examines how employees' demographic background, skills and perceptions about the possibility for future promotion are related to their intentions to remain in this industry. The research was conducted among 122 front desk employees and 40 front desk managers at hotels in Israel between February 2011 and February 2012. Most of the employees were young (average age 29.11), single and female. The results show that among those in non-managerial positions 60 percent want to leave the industry, while among managers only 30 percent want to leave the industry. In addition, the findings indicate that working at a chain hotel and working as a manager increase the likelihood of evaluating chances of promotion as good. These results may help hotel directors understand the attitudes of their employees and take steps toward improving their motivation and job perceptions that will affect their willingness to remain in the hotel industry.

**Key words:** Human resource, skills, perceptions, hotels, front office



Source: [http://cdn2.agoda.net/hotelimages/192/1921/1921\\_14031915310018765888\\_STD](http://cdn2.agoda.net/hotelimages/192/1921/1921_14031915310018765888_STD).

## INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry is one of the world's largest employers. This industry has a major impact on the economy of most countries, generates close to nine percent of the world's employment (WTTC, 2012) and accounts for nine percent of the world's GDP (WTTC, 2012). The hospitality industry is one of the oldest branches of tourism, yet despite its modernization and technical developments, its main resource remains the human resource, and high employee turnover remains one of the industry's major problems.

International tourists today are sophisticated and experienced and demand certain levels of services while staying at a hotel. Often a guest's first impressions of a hotel come from the front office employees. Therefore, identifying the competencies of front office employees is of major importance. This study examines general job perceptions and perceptions of skills required for their jobs among Israeli front desk employees. In particular, the research focuses on comparing employees in managerial and non-managerial positions.

The objectives are:

1. To determine the socio-demographic characteristics of Israeli front office employees in managerial and non-managerial positions.
2. To compare front office employees' perceptions and future intentions to stay in the hotel industry between those in managerial and in non-managerial positions.
3. To examine whether or not being in a managerial position as opposed to a non-managerial position has an impact on an employee's perceived chances for promotion.
4. To examine whether or not working at a chain hotel versus a non-chain hotel has an impact on an employee's perceived chances for promotion.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the hospitality industry employees are one of a hotel's major resources and can give a hotel a competitive advantage and differentiate it from other hotels (Pfeffer, 1994; Warhurst & Nickson, 2007). Therefore, the skills and qualifications of front desk employees are very important, as these employees play a significant role in building and maintaining the hotel's image and reputation.

Most research sees the hotel industry as an industry that requires low-level skills and very little training (Crang, 1997; Shaw & Williams, 1994; Westwood, 2002). For example, the findings of Baum and Odgers (2001) indicate no correlation between education level and an employee's position. In addition, these researchers found that hotels in Europe do not base recruitment of new employees on experience or on specific traits (Baum & Odgers, 2001). Yet some researchers express the opinion that front office jobs require more than low level skills (Witz, Warhurst, & Nickson, 2003; Burns, 1997; Baum, 1996). Labor market perceptions of jobs in the hotel industry requiring low skilled labor may cause difficulties for hotels in recruiting skilled employees, with the exception of multinational organizations (Baum, 2008). Factors that make it difficult for the hospitality industry to attract and keep suitable employees include low pay, transient workforce and perceived or real lack of formal qualifications (Duncan, Scott, & Baum, 2013).

Previous studies also focused on the competencies desired in front office employees and managers in order to forecast on-the-job success and in order to develop suitable academic programs in hotel schools. For example, important skills for hotel employees include the ability to communicate with guests and employees, the ability to think creatively, the development of a service orientation, total quality management, problem identification and problem-solving and listening skills (Ashely et al., 1995; Jonker

& Jonker, 1990; Lin, 2002; Doyle, 1992; Crouch, 2004; Mahachi, 2012).

Other studies focused on the relative importance of competencies such as interpersonal relationship skills and behavioral skills needed to apply technical skills and knowledge in the workplace (Weber, Crawford & Dennison, 2012; Rainsbury, Hodges, Burchell, & Lay, 2002). A study that focused on hotel managers (Kruger, 2014) found that the following factors affect level of job satisfaction: remuneration, chances for promotion, other people on the job, the job itself and work at the current job. He also found that satisfied managers are less likely to leave a job, so their turnover rate is lower. Another important finding of this research is that employees with higher education have greater job satisfaction.

Most previous research focused either on managers or on those in non-managerial positions. This study adds to the existing literature by comparing demographic background and job perception between managers and those in non-managerial positions. In addition, this research examines the correlation between current job position and future intentions. The research results are also compared to similar studies conducted by Baum et al. (2006) in other countries, such as China, Ireland, Brazil, Egypt, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan and Malaysia.

## **Globalization**

Globalization is another important aspect of life today. As industries, technology, communication and transport have developed, globalization has become one of the most important issues for businesses in general and for tourism in particular. As a result of globalization, the skills and requirements for working in hotel front offices are similar in different countries. International tourists expect to receive the same level of service and the same performance of job tasks. Yet the perceptions held by front office employees probably differ and are likely to be culture dependent. Baum et al.

(2006) compared different countries and cultures in order to address and identify the generic and job-specific skills required of hotel front office staff. The results showed differences between countries and respondents on topics such as education, gender, career ambitions and job perceptions, but found very few differences concerning the skills required. Baum and Devine (2007) found that in Northern Ireland communication made an emotional and aesthetic contribution to the work, which was influenced by the cultural and economic context.

In China, Hai-Yan and Baum (2006) found that the hotel industry did not have enough high quality human resources and that educated and trained employees did not want to remain in such a demanding and low paying job. In addition, professional development and further training are needed to help reduce the high turnover rates. These results can differ when multinational companies bring their global workplace practices to a developing country and a high proportion of the employees are international. For example, Hilton International, the only multinational hotel and tourism employer in Kyrgyzstan, has a work ethos that is far "stronger" in character than that of its local competitors because of the culture it brought with it into the country (Baum, 2008).

## **Israel**

Israel has a large potential for tourism, based on its 3000 years of history and its position as a holy place for the world's three major religions (Islam, Christianity and Judaism). Israel is also a great destination for sea and sun lovers due to its mild climate and long coastline along the Mediterranean to the west and the Red Sea to the south. The Red Sea also offers great opportunities for scuba diving (Israel Ministry of Tourism, 2013). Another unique resource is the Dead Sea, with its healing properties (Israel Ministry of Tourism, 2013). The tourism industry accounts for approximately 4% of Israel's GDP and has become the third largest export industry in added value (CBS,

2012). Tourism in Israel is growing steadily despite the many setbacks due to terrorism and security problems (Israel Ministry of Tourism, 2013).

Israel has 360 hotels with a total of 47,168 rooms. The revenue from hotels in 2013 reached 2.6 billion dollars, 42% from tourists, and profits stood at 1655 million dollars (CBS, 2014). In 2009, the Israeli hotel industry employed 29,563 people. The cost of labor accounted for 35% of all hotel expenditures (CBS, 2014).

The hotels in this research include small and large hotels, privately owned hotels and hotels belonging to local or international chains. The only condition for participating in this research was that at least 40% of the guests were international guests (as this is the percentage in Israel) (CBS, 2014).

## THE HYPOTHESES

Based on the results of previous studies, the following hypotheses will be examined:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive correlation between employees' perceived chances for promotion and the likelihood they will remain in the hospitality industry.

This hypothesis is based on Kruger (2014), who found that chances for promotion affect hotel managers' job satisfaction. Therefore, we expect that satisfied managers will be less likely to leave their jobs.

Hypothesis 2: Being a manager and being part of a hotel chain affect perceived chances for promotion among hotel front office employees.

This hypothesis is partially based on the findings of Teitler-Regev et al. (2014) that being part of a hotel chain increases perceived chances for job promotion among hotel front office employees.

## METHODOLOGY:

### The Sample

The data in the current study are based on data collected by the researchers in a previous study. For the purpose of building the sample, all hotels in Israel with 50 rooms or more were listed. In each region, five to ten hotels were chosen that represent individual hotels, those belonging to local chains and those belonging to international chains. In addition, the chosen hotels represented different levels and different types of hotels (business, recreation, luxury, etc.). Seventy hotels were approached out of the total of 260 hotels with 50 rooms or more (about 27% of the hotels were approached). The hotels were sampled in a convenience sample based on front office staff availability.

Of the 70 hotels approached, about 46 percent (32 hotels) agreed to participate in the research. In the sample hotels, all the front office employees were approached, with an average of about six employees at each hotel. The response rate at the hotels was 88 percent. The total number of completed questionnaires was 170.

Based on employees' answers<sup>1</sup>, on average 48.57 percent of the hotel guests are international guests. Of these, 45.82 percent arrive in groups. Fifty-eight percent of the hotels belonged to chains and 42 percent were independent hotels. The respondents were divided into two groups – those in managerial positions (shift supervisors and front office managers) and those in non-managerial positions.

### Data Collection

During February 2011, a pilot study was conducted at several hotels in Tiberias. The questionnaires were collected and

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<sup>1</sup>Employees' answers may be based on perceptions and not on actual knowledge.

analyzed, and at the end of April the final questionnaire was distributed at the various hotels. The researchers contacted the hotel managers by e-mail and telephone. After receiving written agreement to participate in the research, the research assistant sent the questionnaire to the hotel's front office via the chosen method (mail, e-mail or fax). The questionnaires were completed by front office employees at all levels: front office managers, supervisors and desk clerks. The completed questionnaires were returned by mail. If a hotel manager did not return the completed questionnaire by around eight weeks after agreeing to participate, the research assistant contacted the hotel again by personally visiting the hotel, bringing the questionnaires and leaving them at the hotel to be completed. (Since front office employees work in shifts, not all of them were present during the research assistant's visit.)

Since at many hotels front office work is seasonal and since the idea was to survey employees during all seasons, this process was repeated in October with hotels from the same sample that had not been contacted in the first round.

### **The research tool**

The research questionnaire was partially based on the questionnaire developed by Hai Yan and Baum (2006), and its final version was decided upon after analyzing data from a pilot questionnaire distributed at several hotels in one area.

The questionnaire consisted of the following parts: (1) items requesting socio-demographic information, including age, marital status, education, previous experience, plans for the future and current position; (2) questions about the hotel: whether or not it is part of a chain<sup>2</sup> and whether it deals with international

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<sup>2</sup>This information was given to the researcher, but it was important to include it in the questionnaire to help in analyzing the data.

tourists and groups<sup>3</sup>; (3) questions concerning perceptions about working in the front office, such as "which part of the job do you enjoy most?", questions about how the employee's family and friends perceive the job, questions regarding whether it requires prior experience or education and questions regarding required skills. Those questions were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 ("certainly do not agree") to 5 ("certainly agree"). The last part of the questionnaire was based on the tested and retested questionnaire of Hai Yan & Baum (2006). Finally, the questionnaire's internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha) was checked and found to be greater than 0.70 (for employee perception - 0.744 and for required skills - 0.786). The scores on each of the scales were averaged to create independent variables.

### **Data analysis**

The statistical package SPSS17 was used to conduct the statistical analysis of the data. The current research used the following techniques: Spearman correlation and Chi square test to test the correlation between two variables and independent sample T-test to compare between groups.

## **RESULTS**

### **Descriptive statistics**

The demographic findings indicate that 25% of all hotel front office employees hold managerial positions (including shift managers), while the rest (75%) are not managers. All the demographic data have a similar distribution among those who are managers and those who are not. For example, 75% of the managers and 75.4% of those who are not managers were born in Israel. In addition, among those in

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<sup>3</sup>The researcher's purpose was to test the differences between hotels that deal with groups and with international tourists. There was no significant difference between hotels so this question was not analyzed.

managerial and non-managerial positions 87.9% and 92.5% respectively are Jewish, while all the others are from different religions. The majority of employees are women (65.9% and 62.8% respectively for managerial and non-managerial positions). The main difference is in educational level. Among managers 59.5% are highly educated, compared to 34.1% of those who are not in managerial positions. This difference is statistically significant.

The findings show that 67.5 percent of those in non-managerial positions and 66.7 percent of managers speak more than one foreign language, 30.2 percent of those in non-managerial positions and 29.6 percent of managers speak only one foreign language and only 2.4 percent of those in non-managerial positions and 4.8 of the managers speak only Hebrew. No

significant difference was found between those in managerial and non-managerial positions regarding knowledge of foreign languages. The foreign languages included English, Russian and Turkish.

The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 to 63, with an average age of 29.11. The findings also show that the average age of the managers is significantly higher than the average age of those in non-managerial positions.

Table 1 shows the respondents' employment history and future plans, including their intentions regarding their next career move and their perceptions regarding their chances for promotion.

**Table 1: Respondents' employment history and future plans**

		Not managers N=122	Managers N=40
Time at current position	Less than one year	50.0%*	27.5%
	Between one and five years	41.0%	52.5%
	More than five years	9.0%	20.0%
	Total	100%	100%
Intention for next career move	Promotion at the hotel	29.2%***	60.5%
	Move to another hotel	8.0%	7.9%
	Move out of the hotel sector	38.9%	15.8%
	Other	23.9%	15.8%
	Total	100%	100%
Perception of chances for promotion	Good	28.5%***	57.5%
	Low	71.5%	42.5%
	Total	100%	100%

\* p < .05 ; \*\* p < .01 ; \*\*\* p < .001

The results in Table 1 show that 9% of those in non-managerial positions have been at their current position more than five years, while among the managers 20% have been at their jobs more than

five years. In addition, among those who are not managers 50 percent have been at their current job more than one year, while among managers, only 27.5 percent have

been at their current job less than one year.

Regarding their next career move, 29.2 percent of those in non-managerial positions and 60.5 percent of managers plan to stay at their current job, while about 9 percent of both the managers and those in non-managerial positions plan to move to a different hotel. Moreover, 38.9 percent of those who are not managers and 15.8 percent of the managers plan to leave the hotel industry. Most of those in non-managerial positions do not want to stay in the hospitality industry. They treat the job as a passing phase and not as a step in a career. There is no managerial track. Most managers see their future in the hospitality industry, but even among them, 30 percent stated their intentions to leave the industry.

About thirty percent of those in non-managerial positions have high expectations of getting a better job at their current hotel, while among the managers almost 60 percent have high expectations. Forty-four percent of those in non-managerial positions perceive their chances for promotion as low, as do about 30 percent of the managers. Twenty-eight percent of those in non-managerial positions and 15 percent of managers were unable to evaluate their chances of being promoted.

A Chi-square test was conducted to test the correlation between perceptions of chances for promotion and next career move (whether or not individual intended

to stay in the industry). A statistically significant medium-sized relationship emerged between the variables ( $\chi^2(12)=38.675$ ,  $C=0.293$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Those who evaluated their chances for promotion as reasonable or excellent saw their future in the hospitality industry, while those who evaluated their chances as low or were unable to assess those chances expressed their intention to leave the industry.

The correlation between education and current position was found to be medium-sized, positive and statistically significant ( $R_s=0.290$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). This means that as education level increases, an employee's position improves as well, and vice versa.

### Employee perceptions

The questions referring to employees' perceptions of their job included several statements based on Hai Yan and Baum (2006). The front office employees were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "do not agree" to 5 "very much agree". The individual results were then averaged in order to obtain the average perception. Table 2 presents the mean for managers and non-managers and indicates whether the difference is significant (according to t-test).

The results of respondents' perceptions about their jobs are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2: Job Perceptions**

	Manager/ Non-managers	N	Mean response on five-point scale
Front office work is all about personality	No	126	4.35 (0.83)
	Yes	42	4.57 (0.63)
I enjoy meeting and greeting customers as part of my job	No	126	4.08 (0.89)
	Yes	41	4.32 (0.79)
Front office work is a challenging and demanding area of work	No	126	3.83 (1.10)**
	Yes	40	4.45 (0.67)
A specialist college course (in hotel work) is useful for front office work.	No	124	3.93 (1.1)*
	Yes	41	4.37 (0.73)

I enjoy the organizational parts of my job	No	125	3.58 (1.1)*
	Yes	41	4.00 (1)
Most of the front office work is common sense	No	124	3.83 (1)
	Yes	41	4.12 (0.87)
My area of work is well respected by my family and friends	No	126	3.72 (0.99)*
	Yes	42	4.17 (0.89)
I enjoy the use of technology as part of my job	No	126	3.30 (1.1)**
	Yes	42	3.98 (1.2)
I was familiar with most of the tasks of the front office before I started working in this area	No	126	3.17 (1.4)*
	Yes	42	3.69 (1.45)
I would like to have the opportunity to work in other areas of the hotel industry	No	124	2.93 (1.4)*
	Yes	40	3.55 (1.4)
Front office is my preferred field for work and career progress	No	125	2.62 (1.3)**
	Yes	41	3.41(1.4)

1 = Do not agree at all,

5=Very much agree;

\* p < .05 ; \*\* p < .01 ; \*\*\* p < .001

The results show that both managers and those in non-managerial positions strongly agreed with the statements that front office work was "all about personality" (4.57 for managers and 4.35 for non-managers), "they enjoy meeting people" (4.32 for managers and 4.08 for non-managers) and that "a specialist college course (in hotel work) is useful for front office work" (4.37 for managers and 3.93 for non-managers).

Employees indicated relatively low levels of agreement with the following statements: they would like the "opportunity to work in other areas of the hotel" (3.55 for managers and 2.93 for non-managers) and the "hotel business is their preferred field of work" (3.41 for managers and 2.62 for non-managers). These statements may indicate that hotel work was not the employees' first choice of employment or that it is not part of their future plans. They also agreed less with the statement that they "were familiar with the tasks prior to starting working in this area" (3.69 for managers and 3.17 for non-managers). In addition, the table reveals significant differences in job perceptions between managers and non-managers. In particular, managers exhibit

significantly higher levels of agreement than those in non-managerial positions on the following items: "Front office work is a challenging and demanding area of work"; "A specialist college course (in hotel work) is useful for front office work"; "I enjoy the organizational parts of my job"; "My area of work is well respected by my family and friends"; "I enjoy the use of technology as part of my job"; "Front office is my preferred field for work and career progress"; "I was familiar with most of the tasks of the front office before I started working in this area"; and "I would like to have the opportunity to work in other areas of the hotel industry".

### Required skills

The results for the questions relating to the importance of skills included several statements based on Hai Yan and Baum (2006). The employees were asked to rate their agreement with the statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "do not agree" to 5 "very much agree". The individual results were averaged to reach the average perception. Table 3 presents the mean for employees in managerial and non-managerial positions and whether the difference is significant regarding the

importance of the various skills as perceived by the employees (according to t-test).

**Table 3: Employees' perceptions regarding importance of skills**

	Manager	N	Mean response (SD) on 5-point scale
Customer care	No	124	4.76 (0.55)
	Yes	41	4.85 (0.42)
Communication (oral)	No	124	4.68 (0.67)
	Yes	42	4.79 (0.72)
Knowledge of foreign language(s)	No	124	4.65 (0.71)
	Yes	42	4.76 (0.53)
Interpersonal skills	No	124	4.59 (0.78) **
	Yes	42	4.86 (0.42)
Professional and ethical standards	No	123	4.57 (0.67)
	Yes	41	4.59 (0.74)
Team work	No	123	4.51 (0.78)
	Yes	42	4.67 (0.61)
Leadership qualities	No	124	3.75 (1.1)**
	Yes	42	4.31(0.81)
Use of front office equipment	No	122	3.99 (1.02)
	Yes	42	4.17 (1.12)
Communication (written)	No	124	3.75 (1.09)
	Yes	41	3.93 (1.1)
Use of technology	No	124	3.48 (1.1)
	Yes	42	3.79 (1.16)
Marketing	No	124	3.41 (1.15)
	Yes	42	3.60 (1.1)
Health and safety	No	124	3.31 (1.18)*
	Yes	41	3.83 (1.2)
Accounting	No	122	3.04 (1.2)*
	Yes	42	3.57 (1.1)
Legal issues	No	123	2.54 (1.3)*
	Yes	41	3.05 (1.2)

1 = Do not agree at all, 5=Very much agree;

\* p < .05 ; \*\* p < .01 ; \*\*\* p < .001

These results show that the skill considered most important was "customer care" (4.85 for managers and 4.76 for non-managers), followed by "communication (oral)" (4.79 for managers and 4.68 for non-managers), "knowledge of foreign

language(s)" (4.76 for managers and 4.65 for non-managers) ,"interpersonal skills" (4.86 for managers and 4.59 for non-managers), "professional and ethical standards" (4.59 for managers and 4.57 for non-managers) and "team work" (4.67

for managers and 4.51 for non-managers). The least important skill as perceived by the employees was "legal issues" (3.05 for managers and 2.54 for non-managers). Other skills that were perceived as less important but significantly more important than legal issues included the following: "accounting" (3.57 for managers and 3.04 for non-managers), "health and safety" (3.83 for managers and 3.31 for non-managers) and "marketing" (3.60 for managers and 3.41 for non-managers). A comparison between hotel managers and those in non-managerial positions revealed significant differences regarding leadership qualities, health and safety, legal issues and accounting. It is important to mention that in all cases the perceived importance of required skills among hotel

managers was higher than among hotel employees not in managerial positions.

#### Analytical model - Logistic Regression

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to predict employees' perceptions of their chances for promotion. The dependent variable was "chances for promotion" in two categories – good chances for promotion and "low or unable to evaluate". The independent variables included gender, a dummy variable for whether or not the hotel belonged to a chain, a dummy variable for whether or not the employee is a manager, country of origin (born in Israel or not), age, gender and marital status.

**Table 4: Logistic regression for employees' perceptions of their chances for promotion**

	B	S.E.	Sig.	Exp(B)
Age	.005	.026	.846	1.005
Origin (base=Born in Israel)	-.122	.479	.798	.885
Education (base=High)	-.206	.433	.634	.814
Is the hotel a part of a chain? (base= yes)	1.200	.435	<b>.006</b>	3.320
Manager (base= yes)	1.070	.492	<b>.030</b>	2.914
Gender (base= male)	-.768	.475	.106	.464
Marital status (base= married)	-.052	.602	.931	.949
Religion (base=Jew)	-.593	.722	.412	.553
Constant	-.788	1.183	.505	.455

N= 124 ( $\chi^2_{(df=8)} = 20.080, p < 0.010$ ).

The regression model was found to be statistically significant. Predictor variables (Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>) explain 20.6% of the variance of the dependent variable, which represents a median relationship between prediction and grouping. Overall prediction success was 70.2% (90.1% for "low chances of being promoted" and 32.6% for "good chances of being promoted"). Respondent's origin, higher education (yes/no), marital status (yes/no), nationality and gender were all found to be not statistically significant.

The findings indicate that working at a hotel chain and working as a manager increase the likelihood of evaluating one's chances of being promoted as good by 3.320 times ( $p=0.006$ ) and 2.914 times ( $p=0.030$ ), respectively. These results are in line with Hypothesis 2.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The current study examined how skills, perceptions of current position and perceptions of possibility of future promotion are related to intention to stay in the hotel industry among hotel front desk employees in Israel. In addition, we examined whether or not being in a managerial position and working at a chain hotel have an impact on an employee's perceived chances for promotion, which in turn affect the intention to leave the industry.

We are not aware of previous studies that examined and compared perceptions and intentions of managers to those of employees in non-managerial positions in the hotel industry. In general, our findings indicate that the perceptions of front office employees about their job support the results found in earlier studies (Baum, 2008; Duncan, Scott, & Baum, 2013; Richardson, 2009; Teitler-Regev, Goziker & Shaharbani, 2014).

Nevertheless, our results indicate that those in managerial positions are more likely to stay in the industry than are those in non-managerial positions. Moreover, those who perceive their chances for promotion as higher have greater intentions of staying in the industry. The

implications of this finding suggest that in order to reduce the turnover rates in the hotel industry, employee career paths should be created in advance.

In addition, the results of the analytical model show that being a manager and belonging to a chain hotel increase an employee's perceived chances for job promotion. These results are related to the findings in Kruger (2014) showing that perceived chances for promotion affect hotel managers' job satisfaction, and in turn that satisfied managers are less likely to leave their jobs. With respect to job perception, we found that the majority of employees in our sample of Israeli hotels agreed that working in the front office is "all about personality". Yet Baum et al. (2006) found that this statement was rated first only in Malaysia and Kyrgyzstan, but not in the other countries they examined (Kenya, Egypt, China, Brazil and Northern Ireland), where this item was rated fifth or lower. The item "I enjoy meeting and greeting customers as part of my job" was rated high among Israeli employees and in other countries as well.

In addition, employees (especially those in non-managerial positions) indicated a relatively low level of agreement to the following statements: "I would like to have the opportunity to work in other areas of the hotel industry" and the "hotel business is my preferred field of work". These statements may indicate that the hotel industry was not the employees' first choice for employment, especially for those in non-managerial positions. These results are also compatible with the perceptions of front office employees in Brazil and China with respect to the front office being rated relatively low as a preferred place of work, and with those in Egypt and Northern Ireland, where employees gave a relatively low rating to the statement that they would like the opportunity to work in other areas of the hotel (Baum, 1996; Baum, et al., 2006; Baum & Devine, 2007).

Yet in Kenya, Kyrgyzstan and Malaysia, employees gave these two statements a relatively high rating. These results

support the notion that job perceptions are culture dependent and differ from one country to another, while the skills perceived as important by Israeli front office employees were similar to those rated as important in other countries.

Another result of the current research indicates a positive correlation between current position and level of education. We found that higher levels of education are related to more prestigious positions. This result does not support the results of Baum and Odgers (2001), who found no correlation between educational level and employee position in their research conducted at 4 and 5 star hotels in North Ireland. A possible explanation for this difference in results is that Baum and Odgers conducted their research many years ago. Since then work in the front office has become more complex and as a result the need for educated employees has increased.

To conclude, there is an evident gap between the perceptions of hotel front office employees in non-managerial positions and those of managers regarding their willingness to remain in the hospitality profession.

These results should indicate to hotel administrators that if they want to decrease turnover they should develop career paths and create a feeling among front office employees and managers that they have a future in the industry. In addition, further research is recommended in order to identify the exact reasons for intentions to leave the industry.

Finally, based on this research, the following is recommended to industry leaders: (a) The relatively low level of agreement with the statement that the hotel is a favorable place to work for front office employees in non-managerial positions implies that this job considered as a "last resort" option and implies that the profession needs to be promoted. Long-term actions are needed to change perceptions of front office employees specifically and of the hospitality industry in general regarding working in the industry as a career. (b) Contrary to the

perception that front office work requires low level skills, the hotel industry in Israel is looking for people with higher education. For this reason, education programs in the field of hospitality need to be developed.

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