

All at sea: Insights into crew work experiences on a cruise liner

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This research explores employee experiences of working on board a cruise ship. Cruise liners have been described as floating hotels; but increasingly they are more like floating resorts, embracing passenger and crew populations as big as small towns. In addition to the usual service sector experiences and emotional labour requirements of service jobs in the hospitality sector, the shipboard context in which employees live and work put considerably further constraints and pressure on crew. This paper reports on these crew experiences, informed by both participant observation and semi-structured interviews with a stratified sample of frontline hotel services staff. For most crew, the relative value of earnings on the cruise helped compensate for being away from home in challenging working and living conditions and work relationships involving colleagues from diverse national and linguistic backgrounds.

Keywords: floating hotels, crew motivation, workforce diversity, living conditions

Introduction

According to Bow (2002), the cruise industry is one of the fastest growing holiday formats within the tourism sector. Despite this growth, limited research has been done on the cruise industry, and specifically on the crew experiences of working and living at sea. Mancini (2011, 3), states that “a cruise is a trip by ship”, with staff on board serving passengers who are able to relax and enjoy their time away from the stresses of home. The core focus is on the passenger, providing an enjoyable holiday, not on the transportation itself. Nowadays, cruise lines are building larger ships offering their facilities to a wide variety of customers. The biggest ship in the world can carry approximately 5 400 passengers. Cruise ship passengers represent a broad demographic profile spanning wide-ranging age, geographic, and socio-economic backgrounds (Mancini, 2011). Cruise liner companies actively research customers’ preferences because the constrained environment requires active customer engagement – a programme of live shows, leisure facilities as well as bars and dining options are built into the shipboard passenger experience. The passenger is therefore engaged in a total twenty-four/seven service setting.

Whilst passengers yield a potentially rich research field, this paper reports on a study that focuses on crew experiences of working in these floating resorts. Ship design typically prioritises passenger living and leisure areas, and minimises the space devoted to the crew providing hotel and leisure services. Crew have to tend to guests in physically challenging conditions, often working with personnel from diverse backgrounds and cultures; cut off from family and friends, and in off-duty time in spaces that are physically constrained and provide limited opportunities for personalisation. This paper reports on the findings organised around three themes – working conditions – workforce diversity, and living conditions. The research is

informed by both participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with a stratified sample of front-line hotel service crew.

Life at sea

Working conditions are an important aspect to consider regarding work experiences on board a ship. Hotel services crew have to face many challenges (Gibson, 2006). The scale of ship operations, living conditions, organisational structures and working at sea present a total institution (Sevcikova & Sehkaran, 2011) in which the ship has overall control over employees, both on and off-duty. Cruise ships are at sea for many days at a time and the impact of the ship’s movement adds to the physical difficulties. The pitching and rolling of the ship, slippery surfaces and steep staircases all create extra challenges for crew delivering hotel services to passengers. Besides this isolated environment and the movement on board, working hours can also be a challenge. Cruise ships are twenty-four/seven businesses, meaning that employees are needed at all times. According to Nevins (2008), cruise liner crew have to work for 100 hours a week, with no days off and low payment rates.

Even when hotel services crew are off-duty, they can still be called back to work when needed. Weaver (2005) studied performance experiences aboard cruise ships and focused on the working conditions and motivations of employees. This looked at cruise ship employees working at sea over a three-year period. The study found that during their off-duty time employees are still on board the ship and they are thereby limited in things they can do. Even when in port, employees have little time to explore, and this was identified as a source of dissatisfaction amongst employees. Larsen, Marnburg and Ogaard (2012) also found that these restrictions created

crew dissatisfaction. Interviewees reported that “free time and length of contract” was of significant concern to many of them. Crew members frequently claimed that they were not given permission to go on shore by their supervisors, even during their time off. Cruise ships were said to be “total institution” because time off and time away from work is controlled by the organisation. In addition, crew do not have much privacy, because they share cabins, showers and crew relaxation areas.

There is limited time to contact friends and family and this distance can impact on employee emotions. Weaver (2005) adds that hotel services personnel are not only cruise ship employees, but also typically have responsibilities at home as a partner and a parent. Sevcikova and Sehkaran's (2011) research found, however, that most employees were satisfied about the time off and time to spend on-shore. Gibson (2008) who researched life/work experiences of hotel staff on a cruise ship suggested that management styles and approaches were crucial. When managers were sensitive to crew needs, and maintained a balance for employees between work and time off, and non-work spaces, employees were satisfied with their experiences.

Although cruise-based holidays are growing in popularity, cruise operators do not invest enough in labour market forward planning (Zilbershtein & Spicer, 2011), and often face recruitment difficulties for these new super cruise liners. Weaver (2005) also found that cruise ships are regularly understaffed. Staff shortages create extra challenges for crew, because they are expected to deliver similar service levels as when a ship that has the full complement of staff. Crew therefore sometimes need to work extended hours, and this can cause feelings of exhaustion. Lang (2011) also reflected these results, indicating that reducing the number of crewmembers caused stress due to longer working hours, shorter breaks and hotel crew even being awoken from sleep when staff shortages demanded.

So as to maintain workforce flexibility, many companies do not employ a full-time workforce (Weaver, 2005). Crew employment contracts are often short and not fixed, and this increases the level of uncertainty for employees. The organisation has a ready source of labour when shipboard occupancy rates are good, but have no obligation to employ crew when demand is lower. The study also found that the cruise organisation has power over their lives both when the cruise workers are on board, and also when they are home with their families. Would-be employees are never certain if they are going to be employed until the company staffs up each cruise. Larsen, Marnburg and Ogaard (2012) confirmed that employees felt worried about the recruitment office, having no power in the length of contract and location, but also about the medical tests needed before starting employment.

Cruise lines are international organisations that recruit employees from diverse backgrounds with different nationalities, and cultural backgrounds (Terry, 2011). Hancin (2005, 68) defined workforce diversity as “the differences among employees”. These differences can be categorised as differences in age, education, culture (Brownell, 2008), race, ethnicity, colour, religion and gender (Hancin, 2005). Bartz, Hillman, Lehrer and Mauhugh (1990, 321) also add disabilities and work experience as a characteristic of diversity. The study of Sevcikova and Sehkaran (2011) found that working with people from different nationalities was a major difficulty for

some employees. Key areas of difference were in languages spoken; diverse eating habits, varied perspectives of the world, as well as political and religious backgrounds. Gibson (2008), however, found that some employees enjoyed the multicultural setting on board, and suggested it might provide a good example for land-based organisations.

Cruise ships can employ staff from as many as forty different nationalities on board one vessel (Brownell, 2008). Generally, employees from developing countries are located in the lower-ranked positions. Terry (2011) studied global labour market flexibility and its human resource impacts, focusing on the cruise industry. This found that the employee position in the organisation is highly influenced by ethnicity, race and gender. This research reported upon in this paper confirms that people from similar ethnic groups are working in similar job roles. Crew from developing countries often occupy the lower positions, whilst people from developed countries occupy the more skilled and senior roles. Gibson's (2008) study also indicates that employees in the lowest status roles were mainly from the underdeveloped parts of Eastern Europe, Central America and Southeast Asia. Middle ranked employees were mainly from developing Western or Eastern Europe countries and crew members in the higher status positions employees were from the more developed countries, the United Kingdom and Australia. Zhao (2002), and Sevcikova and Sehkaran (2011) also identified this pattern of hierarchical segmentation amongst service crew.

Gender segmentation is also a feature of cruise ship employment. Eighty per cent of the workforce is male. Indeed, there is a perception that working on a cruise ship is seen as “man-work”, hard and physically demanding, and thus more suitable for males. Females are represented in service-oriented positions. This is not solely an outcome of cruise line employment policy to hire male-workers for certain jobs, but is also the perception of the would-be recruit about the nature of the job. Hence segmentation can occur before application, with males applying for “men's jobs” and women applying for roles that were either seen as “women's jobs” or gender neutral. Gibson (2008) found that this perceived maleness of the role often results in unfair treatment of women crew by their male counterparts. These perceptions are likely to be a dimension of the cultural diversity of crewmembers. Those originating from more traditional societies are likely to expect male and female work to be different in both status and location.

Flags of convenience make it easier for cruise lines to recruit employees from all over the world. Ships are often flagged in countries with the best economic advantages for the ship owner. Flags of convenience allow cruise operators to be registered in these “flag states” where restrictions on operations, and crew employment protections are minimal. Owners of cruise ships prefer to have limited regulations on working conditions, pay levels, nationalities employed, tax obligations, environmental restrictions and other rules, thereby enabling them to minimise costs and maximise company profits. Other advantages that these flag states offer cover the market value of the ship, conditions of the vessel, operating costs and minimal repairs costs required (Shaughnessy & Tobin, 2006). An American ship that is built in the USA must have at least 75% of U.S. workers, whereas a ship that sails under the Bahamian flag has no rules for workforce nationalities (Terry, 2011). The study of Sevcikova and Sehkaran (2011) also

concluded that a ship sailing under a flag of convenience is not bound by wage standards. Employee wages are often very low compared with company national base pay rates. However, many crew originate from low-wage economies and the rates paid aboard can be judged to be good by comparison. Furthermore, there are few spending opportunities for crew whilst at sea, and the money-saving possibility enhances the perception of the pay package for hotel services crew.

In conclusion, the floating hotel nature of cruise ships means that many of these crew working experiences have much in common with land-based properties. Despite the rhetoric that the customer comes first, the primary business objectives are cost minimisation and profit maximisation. Hence management objectives frequently prioritise labour costs management as a way of generating extra profits. Staffing levels that are below the level required for customer numbers and service needs may result in longer customer waiting times and increased complaints. This in turn leads to increased crew workloads and job stress. For cruise ship crew, these contradictions are compounded by the nature of the working environment. The constraining nature of the working environment and limited leisure facilities all increase the work stress experienced by many crew. The literature review, therefore, suggests three dominant themes for research crew experiences aboard – working conditions, workforce diversity, and living conditions

Research approach

The purpose of this research project is to explore the motivations of employees working on board a cruise ship and the impact of management actions on crew motivation. It is suggested that management on cruise ships might gain from a better understanding of employee experiences and the causes of low motivation. There have been a number of studies of employee motivation in the international hospitality industry, but most were within land-based organisations; few have explored hotel service crew on board. Cruise ships differ in many ways from land-based hotels: the size and scale of operations, the scope of services on offer, the profile of passengers, organisational structure, workforce diversity as well as culture and language differences all create major issues for onboard working relationships. As a consequence, it is necessary to explore workforce experiences around three themes identified by prior research and publications – working conditions, workforce diversity, and living conditions.

A qualitative research design was used. The qualitative research approach was adopted because the researcher was looking for explanations, behaviours and experiences of employees. Survey questionnaires did not seem to be relevant for this study, since they do not provide in-depth information. Respondents would be bound by set questions, whereas qualitative research allowed respondents more freedom to express their own thoughts and opinions. Hence numerical data was not gathered or used but instead descriptions of the employees' motives, behaviour and experiences on board were highlighted. This was judged to be more appropriate for addressing the problem statement, which focused on the motivation and experiences of crew working on board cruise ships. Research questions explored the reasons employees are working on board, as well as the experiences of crewmembers. This included working and living conditions and the diversity of

the workforce. There was therefore a focus on the behaviours, thoughts, opinions and experiences of people in their daily operations.

As a participant observer, the researcher was able to witness working arrangements, and the behaviour of managers and crew in context. These observations were supported by semi-structured interviews with a stratified sample of frontline crew. Interview questions were partly structured and the questions were matched to the topic to make sure the data gathered would be useful for the research project (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviewer was open to listen to explanations of the interviewees because they gave a better idea of the interviewees' opinions.

Interview questions were structured, starting with questions on personal background so as to relax the interviewee. Then open-ended questions focused more on the opinion of the interviewee and were more discursive. Themes were related to perspectives about motivation, competencies, hierarchical structure, job satisfaction and communication. Interviews were completed individually, face-to-face with the employees. These were scheduled in advance to make the interviewees feel more at ease. As the researcher was already a member of the workforce, she was known to the interviewees. Interviews were carried out in the spring of 2014 and were completed over several days, according to crewmember availability. All interviews were held in English. As a consequence, interviewee comments reported later are not always linguistically correct but are verbatim transcripts from interviewee statements.

Participative observation was undertaken in the workplace before the interviewing commenced so as to gain more information about crew behaviour in their work setting (Kawulich, 2005). The researcher had a participating role, meaning that the observer was involved into the day-to-day operations, but focused on collecting data. The researcher was working amongst the crew for over eight months and this enhanced the insights from the observations made (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). The workforce was made aware about the author's research.

The researcher made notes of critical incidents related to the research, but these incidents were described anonymously. Field notes were detailed, and included the time and date, and different topics associated with the observation. The researcher observed individual member behaviour as well as crew behaviour in groups. Participant observation allowed the researcher to take note of the actions, words and body language of crew. The observer was also involved in informal conversations with crew both on and off duty (Kawulich, 2005).

Stratified sampling was used to select the participants (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). Six employees were selected. Interviewees were chosen from departments involving different frontline crew work experience: Housekeeping, Food, Beverage, Guest Services, Finance and Entertainment. The interviewees were of different nationalities and had been working for the company for varied lengths of time. None of the interviewees held management positions. There were equal numbers of male and female interviewees.

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Notes were also made during the interviews. Pre-planned notes guided the interviewer in asking in guiding the interviews (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Interviews were transcribed into

Microsoft Word and the transcriptions were structured first by adding similar topics that were brought to the interviewers' attention together. These similar concepts and themes were then critically reviewed to see if they were related to the problem statement and research questions. Then fragments were given a code and unnecessary information was eliminated. After all concepts and themes were coded, the information was analysed further and the process of data reduction followed. Fragments were given categories, known as axial coding (Baarda, 2009). After axial coding, selective coding followed, searching for the main concepts.

Findings

Prior research on crew work experiences suggested a number of themes that need to be considered when examining working life on board cruise liners. Working conditions intensify the experiences of those supplying hotel services to paying passengers. Employment relationships and policies that ensure workforce flexibility for the organisation create uncertainty and inconsistent employment for crew. These experiences are further impacted by the employment of a diverse workforce with different linguistic and cultural traditions, and expectations of pay. Given the realities of the total environment that crew experience aboard these cruise liners, it is also necessary to explore crew living conditions.

Working conditions

The observation of work confirmed the intense nature of the work. One interviewee, the partner of a housekeeping employee, stated that her husband is often very tired after his shift. Embarkation days are particularly demanding; housekeeping personnel have to work a very long day. They clean the rooms in the morning; bring all the suitcases from the arriving passengers on board in the afternoon; and undertake the turn down service in the evening. Another employee from the bar also reported dissatisfaction with working hours. Cleaning was scheduled after each shift and this often took longer than the scheduled hours. Bar staff therefore worked extended hours, with shorter breaks between shifts, resulting in tiredness and exhaustion. Another employee, from the front office, stated that she experienced stress because other team members were not able to do the job properly due to their lack of training and experience. This resulted in the interviewee doing significantly more than others in the team. These feelings of stress were also accompanied by weight loss and anxiety. However, these levels of stress were not universal amongst crew. Employees from some departments, such as entertainment, and even some bar staff were less dissatisfied because the work was better than they could get back home.

The physical working of the ship structures and layout, as well as the movement of the vessel added difficulties for some crew, particularly for those working in the galley, bar and housekeeping areas.

Yeah, in that side the job is getting heavier. You know, when the ship is moving and there are a lot drop incidents (Interview 4, Housekeeping employee, India, male).

Several galley and bar employees stated that they felt that were treated like cleaning machines rather than people.

You can work like a machine. You can clean, you can wash, you can do that, you can whatever. They did not care (Interview 3, Galley employee, Nicaragua, male).

They put off the air conditions so the place becomes very, very hot and you still have to clean everything because otherwise you won't finish in time, and the operation stop. So that is very, very challenging because the heating is very, very hot. You are sweating, in one minute start to sweating and you still have to work (Interview 3, Galley employee, Nicaragua, male).

So split shift, it means that you are working four or six hours in the morning and four or six hours in the evening. So, the rest is not properly in that way, because you wake up in the morning, that is OK, but once you finish in the afternoon ... you want ... you have to go to rest. But your body is not feeling going to rest because you know it is like, eh ... afternoon time. So you have to find a way to try to sleep if you can and otherwise you are keeping wake up and have to come to the next shift and work another four or five hours so in the end you are very tired (Interview 3, Galley employee, Nicaragua, male).

For others, the working conditions were not considered to be a problem. The following employee was working in the housekeeping section and had been under contract for nine months but did not feel tired at all.

Does the amount of working hours and the amount of rest balance each other? Yeah, for me it is fair enough (Interview 4, Housekeeping employee, India, male).

Crew working in other departments reported having a little more work and non-work balance. For example those working on the front desk area, and in finance suggested they had more rest and did not report heavy working conditions.

Well, it is, eh, some days you are able to sleep more, some days you sleep less. But I mean that happens on days at sea or on land. So for me it is not an issue (Interview 1, Front office employee, Belize, female).

Ehm, I can say yes. Yes. Because there is nothing you can do here on board aside from work of course. Hahaha [laughing]. When you are not on duty all you have to do is take a rest (Interview 2, Finance employee, Philippines, male).

Salary was a major reason for working on cruise liners, and all interviewees registered this as a key reason for seeking jobs on board. Though the origins of most of the interviewees suggest that the perceptions of these wages has to be set against the potential income back home, and in some cases on the gender of the respondent.

Ehm, salary is utmost important to me because of course it is a motivation. You want to, you want to work hard and you want to make good money. You want to feel that you have a very stable life (Interview 1, Front office employee, Belize, female).

Salary for everybody is topmost priority, you know. When you work on the ship especially for months. For me, I am coming from India. I have to fly almost 20 hours is the distance. So, since you are getting a

better salary than what you get back home that is the reason everybody is over here because the salary is a bit higher (Interview 4, Housekeeping employee, India, male).

Very important. Because this is like ehh ... sacrificing the time with your family. You miss a lot of ... so the salary has to be like the ... the ... the ... contra part of the sacrificing (Interview 3, Galley employee, Nicaragua, male).

Most interviewees reported they were supporting their families in their home country. One employee supported her partner by financing her studies. Other employees gave financial support to their wife and children and another employee was just earning for himself, for living. The Indian employee was supporting his parents back home because they took care of him when he was a child. Most interviewees were aware of the sacrifice they were making in relation to the time spent away from families and friends.

I do have a loving partner enrolled in a very advanced educational program which I partially support. So she, apart from my immediate family, is one of the people that I would assist when it comes to financial matters (Interview 1, Front office employee, Belize, female).

Very important! hahaha [laughing]. I mean it is to take care of my family. So it is very important (Interview 5, Bar employee, St. Lucia, female).

By ... I already take family responsibility on my shoulders and I have to maintain duties. I cannot joke with my family because they are the one who take care of me when I was a kid (Interview 4, Housekeeping employee, India, male).

So it is very important to have a good salary for the time you spend here without seeing any family members and stay long time working 24 hours, 7 days a week (Interview 3, Galley employee, Nicaragua, male).

The fact of lack of pay during between cruises times was a source of dissatisfaction to these interviewees.

When I am at home, ehm, about the job, well one thing that I don't like when I am on vacation is that I don't have salary (Interview 2, Finance employee, Philippines, male).

The crewmember working on the bar indicated that salary was dependent on sales. The bar staff did have a basic salary and this is topped up with a commission on sales. When the sales are low, only the basic is paid. Therefore, making more sales was important since it enabled the employees to increase their pay. The Spa personnel salaries are also dependent on commissions from sales. Whilst this appears to incentivise employee performance, it can add to job stress because crew are under pressure to produce extra sales, and these are dependent on customers.

Bar department is, if not the only position on the cruise where you (...), job where you basically make your own salary. So the more you sell the more money you make (Interview 5, Bar employee, St. Lucia, female).

All employees stated that time between cruises will be primarily spent with family and friends. Desire for travel during vacation time was not mentioned by anyone. Most crew reported that they try not to think about the job at all when they are at home, because they have been away from family for so long.

OK, when I am on rest time it's, ehh, completely, ehh, its I try not to think about work because that's the time that I may get to, to relax and to, to enjoy the time that I spend with my family and loved ones (Interview 5, Front office employee, Belize, female)

At home on vacation that is the most ehhh, ehhh, interesting part. You get a chance to be with your family for about a couple of months (Interview 2, Finance employee, Philippines, male).

No! When I go home I am not gonna think of it at all. Not one bit. I can promise you that (Interview 5, Bar employee, St. Lucia, female).

Apart from being away from family for so long, the bar and galley employees stated that they are not proud of their job, and one interviewee reported feeling ashamed of doing this kind of work.

It is like a shame work, because in my college and in my family my brothers they know what I do, my close friends and my family, my brothers. But the person, the professional persons that I know ... they do not know because that is something very shameful for me (Interview 3, Galley employee, Nicaragua, male).

Furthermore, the employee from Finance mentioned that he did not feel secure while being on vacation, since the company can always change the contracts, or decide not to re-employ the person. The participant observer also noted that employees did not know if they would have a next assignment after their break. Schedules were sometimes changed without the crewmember knowing.

So ehm we are just got our job for like you sign your contract, so you just got a job for six months and still depends if they are going to hire us again or not. So I don't know how, of course at the back of my mind I am still thinking at the end of my contract: what if this would be my last contract? (Interview 2, Finance employee, Philippines, male).

Workforce diversity

As a participant observer, the researcher noted a significant pattern of labour market segmentation. Crewmembers from the Philippines mostly occupied waiter/waitress, assistant waiter/waitress and hostess positions in the restaurant. There were few Philippine employees in management roles, however, and the exceptions were typically older staff with long service records with the company. The management positions were mostly personnel with a European (United Kingdom, Czech Republic) or American nationality. Comments from crew during informal conversations also reinforced the impression that nationality played a big role in getting a promotion, or recognition from the relevant manager. The observations revealed that some employees were waiting for a long time for promotion, although they were already trained for a more senior job. This impression of favouritism led to feelings

of dissatisfaction and demotivation amongst hotel services crew because it was felt that those who were from similar backgrounds to the manager were more likely to be promoted. That said, where promotions did take place, crew appeared to be more motivated and enthusiastic in their roles.

Apart from these job segmentation issues, working with a diverse workforce did present staff with both positive and negative experiences. Having an international workforce seemed to give opportunities to employees to learn about other cultures. The observer noted several cross-cultural friendships that seemed to be a benefit and comfort to the individuals working together, but evidence of these relationships being continued between cruises was a function of the diversity of origins. The international workforce was experienced as challenging sometimes by the bar employee, since 60% of the workforce were all from one nationality. She also mentioned that it was nice to have friendships and meet guests from different nationalities but that it was just extra, and that salary is the priority, rather than having international friendships as the key motive for working on cruise liners.

*Well, I actually enjoy it because, eh, working with a diverse nationality, diverse cultures, you learn a lot (Interview 1, Front office employee, Belize, female)
On a cruise ship it is a different, different life, you know, it is an international life. Working with ... different nationalities. You get the option to learn a different culture, different people wherever you come across (Interview 4, Housekeeping Employee, India, Male).*

I mean sometimes it is overwhelming because sixty per cent is from the same nationality. But it is OK. In any organisation you meet those that you can't get along with and it is a good thing actually and I have learned quite a lot from people from different countries; things that I wouldn't have known (Interview 5, Bar employee, St. Lucia, female).

Observations showed that some employees were interested in learning other languages and were planning to visit people in their home country. Besides, the company also prepared food from different countries for crewmembers to try and give them an idea about the food. One employee admitted that he was feeling threatened by being with so many different nationalities. He preferred to hang out with people from his own nationality due to language and similar behaviours.

And then you got the chance to get to know them and of course at first I was afraid, really, because back home I also got the chance to work with many nationalities but not that many as you have on board (Interview 2, Finance employee, Philippines, male).

Multi-national workforce, as I said, is always you get different ideas (Interview 4, Housekeeping employee, India, male).

Having many nationalities was also seen as something useful, since different people bring up different ideas. Also, different ways of greeting, behaviours, language and impressions were seen to be interesting to employees working on board a cruise ship. However, crew members seemed to be acting more sensitively to others, to find out what approach is expected from others in order to gain mutual respect.

Especially when you have different cultures you really have to be attentive and you really have to be more sensitive enough to know or to get on well with that person (Interview 2, Finance employee, Philippines, male).

Observations indicated that employees did not feel offended if a crewmember approached them in a way that was not expected in their culture. The employee from Ukraine clearly confirmed that a multi-national workforce had taught her to be more respectful to other nationalities or races, something that she was not exposed to in her home country.

Ah multi-national, I love it! Absolutely! Yeah because it is, ahhh.. it is such a great opportunity to learn to understand other people. And to learn to respect also. Because I came from a society Ukrainian unfortunately we are very racist, racism is very common (Interview 6, Musician, Ukraine, female).

Having a multi-national workforce can cause language difficulties. Although English was the main language, employees did report that it was sometimes hard to understand the different tongues, or accents, and misunderstandings took place. This could result in crew not working according to management instructions, or tense working relationships.

Communication with the management is OK but communication with my team ...oooh... there I have some challenges, because I have different nationalities. Some takes a long time even for them. It is a barrier in language (Interview 4, Housekeeping employee, India, male).

I have last year I had Peru guys, Indonesian guys, like I am not criticising, but it is their own nature. Because they are not familiarised with English, so when they come on board and when you tell them something, some tasks, sometimes they don't catch up with it. So, every time when you say something you have to say and show the things, so you waste a lot of time showing the guys the jobs what they are going to do and in the mean time you are losing the tracks (Interview 4, Housekeeping employee, India, male).

Crew speaking in their native language in front of other crew from different countries could cause suspicion and discomfort. English was deemed to be the official language on board the liner and crew were expected to speak in English in both public and crew areas. The observer noted several instances of disciplinary action being taken when not speaking English.

I had an issue about speaking Russian in a crew zone. Some crewmembers came to me and said that it is not nice to speak Russian in the crew area. Because we do not speak Russian and we feel like you speak about us (Interview 6, Musician, Ukraine, female).

Crewmembers reported experiencing racism or discrimination while working on board the ship. This was said to be experienced in the way people treat each other. This was noticed as well during observations in the workplace.

Yeah you could see it sometimes. They try not to make it look too obvious because obviously it is wrong and it is against company policy (Interview 5, Bar employee, St. Lucia, female).

Discrimination was experienced in the way people dress. Certain nationalities were said to have more privileges than others. Besides discrimination between nationalities, discrimination was also experienced between departments.

Departments with a large group of similar nationalities did not seem to cooperate with other departments with a different group of nationalities. The Galley employee experienced this.

But, I sometimes see some people depending on the position that you have or the race of the working, or the department where you are working. They have more consideration than others. They not take care of keeping the things clean, the areas. So, it is like no corporation between departments.(...) Because if they see for example most of the utility Galley are Caribbeans. So, but, if they see one Philippines in the area they take care more about him. But if it is Caribbeans they just don't care about that (Interview 3, Galley employee, Nicaragua, male).

Moreover, two employees reported different opportunities for growth based upon nationality and/or being friends with managers. Although one of the interviewees claimed there were improvements, he did experience discrimination during the beginning of his cruise ship career. Observations also showed that being friends with management gave opportunities for growth more easily than in cases crew members who were working competently but did not have the same personal relationship with managers.

Living conditions

The physical living space was an issue that gave cruise liner employment a dimension that overlaps with working in live-in land-based hotels, however, the nature of the sea bound context gives this an added intensity. Working and living together constrains the ability to escape work colleagues and the work environment in all live-in settings but the cruiser at sea allows no opportunities for disengagement, and compounds the feeling of being in a totally controlled environment.

But when I came in, when I came on board early ehm, I was still surprised because it is really small. And I really couldn't imagine that this is the place where I am going to live for six months (Interview 2, Finance employee, Philippines).

My first cruise I get two different rooms, and both of them are very small. You no cannot walk and in my first room was for two person in the room and the second one was three people. And both of that room one person have to work at a time because two people is too small actually we can't fit together because I am big sized and my room person is big size too so we cannot walk at the same time. We had a connecting bathroom. But in fact the space is very small (Interview 3, Galley employee, Nicaragua, male).

I think I have a closet at home that is bigger than my cabin. Hahahaha [Laughing] (Interview 5, Bar Employee, St. Lucia, Female)

Observations showed that employees were not just considering the size of the cabin but also the cleanliness. One employee mentioned that she would like to see more developed technological equipment for pleasure inside the cabin. Also, Galley and Finance interviewees mentioned that they were able to play their own video games, watch movies and so on in their free time. Interviews and observations

confirmed that the ability to keep in touch with family and friends back home was very important to crew.

I call like my parents at least twice a week. Yeah. And ehh I speak with my sister in Skype. And to my fiancé I call every day at least like one hour. So I spend most of my money on that". (Interview 6, Musician, Ukraine, Female)

That would be via, via email facebook ehh of course ehm and even snail mails like the old fashioned receiving mails that would take three to four weeks. I think it means more than just sending quick message for like a minute or so. (...) Ehmm anyway from one to four hours per day". (Interview 1, Front Office Employee, Belize, Female)

The confined living space and accommodation sharing restricted privacy for crew. Those sharing cabins with others were sensitive to the lack of a personal area that they could call their own, into which they could withdraw when working conditions and relationships demanded it.

There is no privacy on board! Not even in your room because you are not there by yourself. There is no privacy on board (Interview 5, Bar employee, St. Lucia, female).

One of the interviewees was married, and she and her husband were working on board the same ship. The living conditions were seen to be very difficult when being married and living on the ship. There was no accommodation for the couple, compounded by differences in working schedules and vacations. They were not able to regularly spend time together.

To be honest it is not easy being married and living like that. It is not. I was even telling my husband that it makes you feel like you are not even married (Interview 5, Bar employee, St. Lucia, female).

Conclusion

Whilst cruise liner hotel services share many similarities with land-based hotel services, the ship design and the seabound context intensifies the working experiences for frontline crew. Hotel services staff have to cook and clean; serve food and drinks; service rooms and provide guest leisure and entertainment service under physically difficult working conditions. The pitching and rolling of the vessel during bad weather present particular difficulties, but the ship design often prioritises front of house space and minimises areas devoted to crew working, living and leisure time.

This paper reports on a study of hotel service crew working on a cruise ship. The research explored three themes. The first explored how working conditions and the physical structures, as well work scheduling could cause difficulties, particularly where management practices intensified work hours and the work environment. Recruitment practices resulted in job status segmentation, where low status job roles were recruited from less developed economies. As a result, pay rates, although low by developed economy standards, were often deemed adequate when compared to the crew's home-base pay rates. The second theme explored the experience of working with a diverse work force. Whilst this was seen by some as a benefit, as it provided an opportunity to meet people from other backgrounds; for others it caused difficulties because

of language and cultural differences. Finally, crew living conditions were restricted and cramped. There were limited opportunities to relax in a personal space that crew could call their own.

Above all, the findings reported upon here, whilst typical of the findings from other research, also suggests that the work experiences reported here are not an inevitable feature of cruise ship working life. They are by-products of company recruitment policies and procedures at a corporate level; and of shipboard management sensitivity to crew stresses and strains.

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