

# Workers in the luxury hospitality industry and motivation – the influence of gender, age and departments<sup>1</sup>

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This research was conducted to find out whether demographics such as age, gender and working within different departments have an influence on the motivational factors of workers in the luxury hospitality industry. Questionnaires were filled out by 39 employees from the luxury five-star XYZ Hotel situated in an Italian city. In this questionnaire all the participants had to rank the motivational factors on a Likert scale. This study found, by using the ANOVA statistical test, that there was only a relation between age, the opportunity for advancement and sympathetic personal help. This study also found that appreciation for a job well done was the most important motivational factor, whereas the opportunity for advancement was ranked as least important. Moreover, each age group, gender and department is motivated by different factors. It was notable that previous research showed similarities with the current research. However, there were also various differences noticed. XYZ Hotel can use this research to get a better insight into the motivational factors from its workers, and better motivation strategies can be developed. Moreover, this research can be duplicated within other segments of the hospitality industry.

**Keywords:** demographics, motivation in the hospitality industry, luxury hotels, employee motivation

## Introduction

XYZ Hotel is a luxury five-star hotel with 58 rooms in the city centre. The XYZ Hotel is competitive, aims to be the best and wants to exceed the guests' expectations. Therefore, the employees in this hotel are highly important since they provide this five-star experience. Unfortunately, the hospitality industry is characterised by unfavourable environments like low pay and a labour intensive nature (Welman & Kruger, 2001). Especially within this industry, where the turnover is high and the labour intensive, understanding hotel worker motivation is becoming a more important issue (Chiang, Jang, Canter, & Price, 2008). It is very difficult for an employee who has low work satisfaction to give proper service (Üngüren, Cengiz & Algür, 2009). This is why motivating employees and keeping them satisfied are some of the ways that managers and/or organisations retain employees and provide excellent service (Costen & Salazar, 2011).

The workforce in the XYZ Hotel is diverse. The employees are not only from Italy itself, but from all over the world. In addition, there is a wide range of age groups. Each employee has their own personality and the employees work in different departments that might influence the motivational factors. All employees were asked to fill in a questionnaire asking if there were any similarities among the motivational factors within the same demographic group. These questionnaires were analysed and reviewed against previous research, which led to a good insight into the motivational factors of employees at the XYZ Hotel.

## Employee motivation

Honore (2009) asserted that employee motivation is important for organisations to research because it can help provide information to understand employee performance levels as well as turnover rates. In addition, if hotel managers can satisfy their employees by understanding their underlying motivations, it will help them to improve customer satisfaction in the long run (Tsaur & Lin, 2004).

There are two motivational factors that can affect employees, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. As stated by Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1959), the extrinsic factors come from outside the individual, such as money, rewards and working conditions. When these factors are unfavourable, job dissatisfaction will result. But when these factors are favourable, this cannot result in job satisfaction, but only reduces the dissatisfaction. On the other hand, the intrinsic factors are driven by the interest or enjoyment from the task itself, such as being part of a team, achievement and having a role in decision-making. These factors will lead to job satisfaction because it is satisfying the individual's need for self-actualisation (Maroudas, Kyriakidou & Vacharis, 2008). Furnham, Forde and Ferrari (2008) suggested that this theory led to the widespread enthusiasm in defining tasks in such a way as to build more opportunities for personal achievements such as recognition, challenge and individual growth. Honore (2009) agrees with this because empowerment and giving more responsibility will boost the employee's confidence. Besides, many of these intrinsically driven motivational forces provide the employees with a reason to work hard and to stay in the organisation.

The study by Kovach (2002) showed that employees ranked “a feeling of being in on things”, “interesting work” and “appreciation of a job well done” as the top three most motivational factors, while “good wages” were ranked as number five out of the ten factors. The study by Carter (2007) shares almost the same findings as Kovach’s research. In Carter’s study “being recognised”, “personal growth” and “being in on things” were the most important motivational factors. However, Breiter, Tesone, Van Leeuwen and Rue (2002) stated that “good wages”, “job security” and “good working conditions” are the most motivating factors for hotel workers.

In a competitive economy, there is a constant emphasis on creating and maintaining a high performance work team (Nguyen, Dang & Nguyen, 2014). It should be understood how to create such a high performance work team in the first place. In discussions on organisational success, managers often say that employees’ morale is one of the crucial factors for success (Bakotić, 2013). High job performance is what managers aim for. Motivation definitely has a certain impact on employee performance (Nguyen, Dang & Nguyen, 2014). Ryan and Deci (2000) agree with this and add that motivation is a key element of employee performance and productivity. Honore (2009) agrees as well and elaborates by saying that researching employee motivation can help understand employee performance levels.

One of the biggest challenges for the human resource professional is to retain employees. Employee turnover has grown in complexity (Arekar, Jain, Desphande & Sherin, 2016). Motivation is closely connected to employee turnover. To continue, employees are more likely to stay in the job when job satisfaction outweighs dissatisfaction. As stated by Cho and Lewis (2012), turnover creates serious consequences for all. It will have a negative effect on the morale of the remaining employees and performance often decreases. Individuals with low job satisfaction typically lack motivation to perform at their best and this lack of motivation can lead to increased employee turnover.

The numbers of different age groups within the workforce are increasing. Since motivational factors can differ per age group, it is thus very important to understand what is motivating every specific employee. In this section, literature about age and motivation will be analysed. According to Simons and Enz (2007), both old and young hospitality workers placed “wages” as the most important motivational factor. However, the older workers also placed “job security” and “favourable working conditions” as important motivational factors. On the other hand, the younger workers want to have more opportunities to develop themselves and, importantly, that the work be interesting. This shows that it might be beneficial for managers to select a specific motivational approach per age group. Different age groups have different values that motivate them. Moreover, the study of Gladwell, Dorwart, Stone and Hammond (2010) showed that the older workers valued retirement insurance, while the younger workers ranked parental leave as important. However, there were differences between the rankings of these age groups: professional development was important for all the age groups. Elijah-Mensah (2009) suggests that there is no relationship between age and motivational factors. This study stated that

the differences in motivational factors from the other studies appeared because of historical experiences.

Kukanja (2013) states that “money” and “fun” are more important to women than men. Moreover, according to the study of DiPietro, Kline and Nierop (2014), women will be more motivated by “interesting work” and “appreciation for a job well done” than men. Furthermore, Maroudas, Kyriakidou and Vacharis (2008) stated that men place more emphasis than women on the participation in events organised by their respective companies, and on the best employee of the month. Males have a more competitive stance toward their employment relationships. Moreover, as stated by Wiese and Coetzee (2013), males are more motivated by opportunities for advancement than females. On the other hand, there are also studies which do not show any real differences in the motivational profiles generated by male and female hotel workers (Simons & Enz, 2007).

Simons and Enz (2007) state that different motivational factors apply in different departments. The top three motivational factors for food and beverage servers were good wages, developmental opportunities and job security. The workers in the front office department gave similar emphases to wages and opportunities, but placed appreciation in their top three instead of job security. According to the housekeeping workers, job security was ranked as the most motivational factor, followed by wages and working conditions. The workers from the housekeeping department are not motivated by developmental opportunities as noted by this study. Moreover, the room attendants and stewards might view promotion as highly unlikely, which is why they focus on having a well-paying, pleasant and secure job.

It is important to know that employee motivation might affect customer satisfaction. Employees who understand the expectations of their employers and are motivated to perform their job functions well have a positive impact on customers. Employees who are motivated to be effective company representatives take time to ensure customer satisfaction. This can help a company attract and retain a customer base (Daniel, 2017). Ganesh (2016) agrees with this and elaborates that ultimately winning the trust of the customers has to be done by employees. Thus, it is necessary to analyse the extent to which employees are motivated and also to understand the relationship between employee motivation and customer retention.

## Research approach

This study aims to find out if demographics such as age, gender and departments are influencing motivational factors. In order to answer this problem statement, several research questions were created. Each research question was specifically focused on one demographic group.

### Research aim

What is the influence of the different demographics of the workers in the luxury hospitality industry on motivational factors?

### Research questions

1. What is the influence of the age of workers in the luxury hospitality industry on motivational factors?

2. What is the influence of the gender of workers in the luxury hospitality industry on motivational factors?
3. What is the influence of working in a specific department in the luxury hospitality industry on motivational factors?

For this study, the type of research was defined as descriptive, since the influences of different demographics on motivation were researched. In order to conduct this research, quantitative data was collected.

A questionnaire was used since this type of instrument gives numerical responses that cannot be misinterpreted. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. In the first part, questions to gather information about the employee were asked. These questions were focused on the gender, hierarchical level in the organisation, cultural background, age, department and the years of being active in this hotel.

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of questions related to motivators. Participants were asked to rank ten factors in order of what motivates them to work. These ten factors were ranked on a Likert scale.

The questionnaire was completed by employees of the XYZ Hotel. This hotel is quite small and there are only 150 employees. When setting the confidence level at 95% and the confidence interval at 15, the sample size needed to be set at 33. Which means that the aim was to get 33 completed questionnaires back. Moreover, the questionnaire was translated into Italian to give all the employees the opportunity to participate. The sample method of this research was determined randomly. The participants that were working during the week that this questionnaire was handed out all had the opportunity to participate and were part of the sample size.

In March 2017, the questionnaires were handed out in the different departments of the XYZ Hotel. All the employees had one week to fill in the questionnaire. The employees who filled in the questionnaire will stay anonymous, since this subject is quite sensitive.

### Findings

Thirty-nine fully completed and useable questionnaires were received. All these questionnaires were handed out and filled in by the employees working during week 10, from 6 to 12 March. Table 1 presents all the background characteristics of the participants. The respondents were 54% male and 46% female, most respondents were of Italian nationality and the most responses came from the youngest age category. Moreover, the operational workers, the workers active between zero and one year and over ten years responded in high volumes. Furthermore, the workers from the kitchen and housekeeping department filled in the most questionnaires.

Forty-one per cent of the total respondents were aged between 18 and 25 years old. This group had the highest participation. Between the three age categories, in the middle there is a difference of one person in responses. 21% of the total respondents were aged between 25 and 30 years old, 18% aged between 30 and 40 years old and 20% were over 40 years of age.

The workers of the hotel were asked to rate the importance of ten factors using a Likert scale, where 1 = not at all important and 5 = extremely important. Table 2 shows with which average rate each factor is rated.

**Table 1:** Demographic profile of the respondents

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%	
Gender	Male	21	54
	Female	18	46
Nationality	Italian	17	44
	Romanian	4	10
	Philippine	6	15
	Ecuadorean	1	3
	Sri Lankan	5	13
	Other	6	15
Age category	18–25	16	41
	25–30	8	21
	30–40	7	18
	40–50	6	15
	50–60	2	5
	>60	0	0
	Department	Housekeeping	11
Food & beverages		6	15
Kitchen		13	33
Guest services		5	13
Other		4	10
Level	Manager	2	5
	Supervisor	14	36
	Operational	23	59
Years active	0–1	14	36
	1–2	3	8
	2–4	7	18
	4–10	5	13
	>10	10	26

It can easily be seen what is the most important for that specific age group. Starting with the youngest group, the group between 18 and 25 years old, we can see that the “appreciation for a job well done” is the most important factor ( $M = 5.00$ ). This factor is followed by “sympathetic personal help” ( $M = 4.88$ ). The factor “feeling of being in on things” ( $M = 4.75$ ) and “good working conditions” ( $M = 4.75$ ) got the same grades and are also very important. “Good wages” ( $M = 4.38$ ) are the least important for this group.

When looking at the age group between 25 and 30 years, it can be seen that good working conditions ( $M = 4.88$ ) is the most important factor. Followed by the opportunity for advancement ( $M = 4.75$ ), and then the loyalty to employees ( $M = 4.50$ ) and interesting work ( $M = 4.50$ ) were the highest rated. Tactful discipline ( $M = 3.75$ ) is the least important for this group.

The age group in the middle, the workers between 30 and 40 years old, showed that there are two factors which are the most important for this group: loyalty to employees ( $M = 4.86$ ) and the job security ( $M = 4.86$ ). Followed by four other factors that are also very important for this age group and all got the same grade ( $M = 4.71$ ): the appreciation for a job well done, interesting work, tactful discipline and sympathetic personal help. The opportunity for advancement ( $M = 3.14$ ) is the least important factor for this age group.

The group between 40 and 50 years old graded five factors as most important ( $M = 5.00$ ). These factors are good wages, interesting work, job security, sympathetic personal help and loyalty to employees. The opportunity for advancement

**Table 2:** Job factor ranking by age group

Age	Appreciation for a job well done	Good wages	Good working conditions	Feeling of being in on things	Opportunity for advancement	Interesting work	Job security	Tactful discipline	Sympathetic personal help	Loyalty to employees
18–25	5.00	4.38	4.75	4.75	4.69	4.63	4.63	4.50	4.88	4.56
25–30	4.38	3.88	4.88	4.25	4.75	4.50	4.38	3.75	4.25	4.50
30–40	4.71	4.14	4.29	4.14	3.14	4.71	4.86	4.71	4.71	4.86
40–50	4.83	5.00	4.83	4.50	3.67	5.00	5.00	4.67	5.00	5.00
50–60	4.50	4.50	4.50	3.50	3.50	4.50	4.50	4.00	4.50	4.50
Total	4.77	4.33	4.69	4.44	4.21	4.67	4.67	4.38	4.72	4.67

( $M = 3.67$ ) is the least important factor for this age group. The group between 50 and 60 years old had seven factors rated with the highest grade. The lowest rated factors are tactful discipline ( $M = 4.00$ ), feeling of being in on things ( $M = 3.50$ ) and the opportunity for advancement ( $M = 3.50$ ).

When looking at the total average grades of all groups per factor, it can be seen that the appreciation for a job well done ( $M = 4.77$ ) and sympathetic personal help ( $M = 4.72$ ) are the most important factors.

#### **The influence of gender on motivation factors**

In order to find an answer to this research question, the link between gender and the ranking of motivational factors was researched. Twenty-one participants out of the 39 participants were male and there were 18 female participants.

For the female participants, it can be seen that the most important factor is the appreciation for a job well done ( $M = 4.94$ ). This factor is followed by good working conditions ( $M = 4.78$ ) and sympathetic personal help ( $M = 4.78$ ), all of which are also important to the female respondents. The opportunity for advancement was the least important to the female respondents ( $M = 4.22$ ). Two factors were the most important for the male participants: the work should be interesting ( $M = 4.67$ ) and sympathetic personal help ( $M = 4.67$ ). These factors were closely followed by two other factors. According to the males, it is also important that there

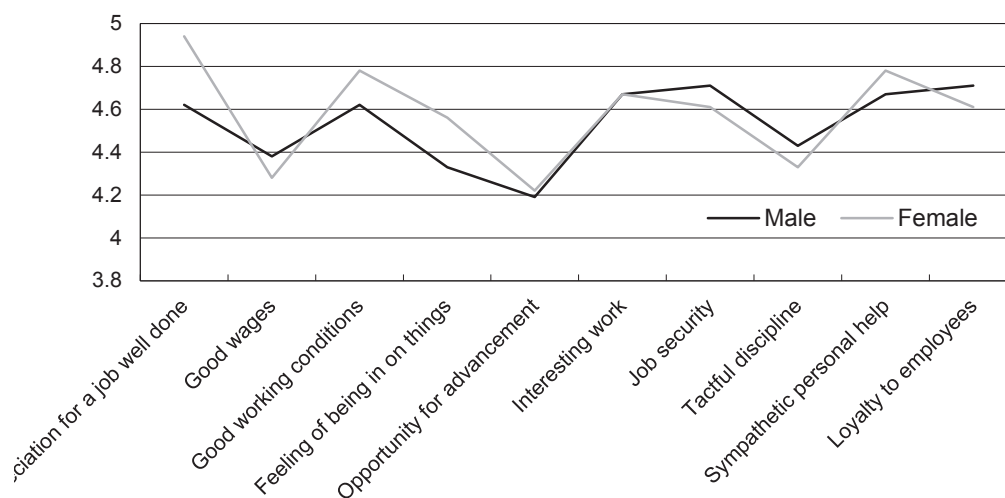
are good working conditions ( $M = 4.62$ ) and that appreciation for a job well done is expressed ( $M = 4.62$ ). Similarly to the woman, the opportunity for advancement was rated as lowest and thus also the least important to the male respondents ( $M = 4.19$ ) (Figure 1).

#### **The influence of departments on motivation factors**

In the housekeeping department, the two most important factors are the appreciation for a job well done ( $M = 4.73$ ) and sympathetic personal help ( $M = 4.73$ ). After these two factors, the factor job security ( $M = 4.55$ ) is important. The least important factor is the opportunity for advancement ( $M = 3.73$ ). The participants from the housekeeping department were not extremely motivated by this factor on average.

The food and beverages department is very motivated by the interesting work factor ( $M = 5.00$ ). Five other factors follow with the same average grade, namely appreciation for a job well done ( $M = 4.83$ ), good working conditions ( $M = 4.83$ ), tactful discipline ( $M = 4.83$ ), sympathetic personal help ( $M = 4.83$ ) and loyalty to employees ( $M = 4.83$ ). The factor of having the feeling of being in on things ( $M = 4.00$ ) received the lowest grade.

Continuing with the kitchen department, job security is the most important motivational factor ( $M = 4.85$ ). After this factor, there are three other factors which are very important for the employees of the kitchen department, namely good

**Figure 1:** The effects of gender on responses

working conditions ( $M = 4.77$ ), sympathetic personal help ( $M = 4.77$ ) and the loyalty towards employees ( $M = 4.77$ ). The kitchen department is the least motivated by good wages, which factor received the lowest grade ( $M = 4.31$ ).

In the guest services department, all the participants agreed that appreciation for a job well done ( $M = 5.00$ ), good working conditions ( $M = 5.00$ ) and the feeling of being in on things ( $M = 5.00$ ) were the most motivating factors. Moreover, the loyalty to employees ( $M = 4.60$ ) is important and the work should be interesting ( $M = 4.60$ ). In the opinion of the guest services department, the opportunity for advancement ( $M = 4.20$ ) and good wages ( $M = 4.20$ ) are the least important.

Lastly, the other departments, in this case the spa and maintenance department, selected eight factors as the most important. Two factors were the least important, namely the feeling of being in on things ( $M = 4.50$ ) and the opportunity for advancement ( $M = 4.50$ ).

When looking at the total average grades of all departments per factor, it can be seen that the appreciation for the job well done ( $M = 4.77$ ) and sympathetic personal help ( $M = 4.72$ ) are the most important factors.

The objective of this research was to give insight into the motivational factors of workers in the luxury hospitality industry and how different demographics such as age, gender and departments influence this. The findings indicate that there is only a significant relation between age and the opportunity for advancement and between age and sympathetic personal help. According to the statistical tests, there is no relation between gender or department and motivational factors.

However, all the findings of this research can be contrasted with previous literature. In order to discuss the research's findings in relation to previous findings, each research question will be separately reviewed below.

It is stated by Simons and Enz (2007) that both old and young hospitality workers place "wages" as the most important motivational factor. However, according to our research, good wages is the least important motivational factor for young hospitality workers. On the other hand, the older workers of this research agree, good wages is the most important motivation factor (Simons & Enz, 2007). In addition, the older workers of this research rated the job security and good working conditions as important factors. Thus, the older workers of this research agree with the statement of Simons and Enz (2007) that older workers placed "job security" and "favourable working conditions" as an important motivational factor.

Again, Simons and Enz (2007) stated that younger workers want to have more opportunities to develop themselves, and that interesting work is also important. This corresponds with our research. As can be seen in the results, the younger workers between the age of 25 and 30 years rate this as an important factor, whereas, this is the least important motivational factor for the older workers. However, this research did not have any similarities with the study of Gladwell, Dorwart, Stone and Hammond (2010). Gladwell et al. stated that the opportunity for advancement was important for all age groups, while the research reported on here showed that this opportunity was the least important for three out of the five age groups. Our research shows that all the different age groups have different values that motivate them.

For Elijah-Mensah (2009), there is no relationship between age and motivational factors. Differences in motivational

factors appear because of historical influences and experiences in lives. As our research shows, there are two motivational factors that show a relationship with age. However, not all motivational factors have this relationship. Moreover, in the findings section it can be seen that all age groups responded very differently to what motivated them the most.

As several researchers show, the most important motivational factors differ per gender, which can also be seen in our research. As concluded by Kukanja (2013), good wages are more important for female workers than for male workers. However, this research showed the opposite: good wages were more important for our research's male participants than its female participants.

Our research agrees with the statement by DiPietro, Kline and Nierop (2014): female participants are more motivated by the appreciation for a job well done than the male participants. However, in contrast with the statement by DiPietro, Kline and Nierop (2014) that interesting work is also more important for females than men, our research found that both genders rated this with the same grade. Next to this, as stated by Wiese and Coetzee (2013), males are motivated by opportunities for advancement than females. On the other hand, our research found that the female participants are more motivated by the opportunity for advancement than the male participants.

Moreover, the study by Simons and Enz (2007) stated that there are also studies which do not show any real differences in the motivational profiles generated by male and female hotel workers. When reviewing our research, it can be said that there are no really big differences between the motivational factors of the males and females. Both lines in the chart run quite similarly. Furthermore, the ANOVA test results did not show any significant relationship between the motivational factors and gender.

It is stated by Simons and Enz (2007) that people working in different departments are motivated by different motivational factors. When looking at our research, the different departments were indeed motivated by different motivational factors. However, after the ANOVA test, there was no significant relationship between the motivational factors and departments. When looking at the most important motivational factors for the food and beverage department of our research, this does not correspond with the study by Simons and Enz (2007), who stated that good wages, developmental opportunities and job security are the most important factors. Our research showed that interesting work was the most important factor. Moreover, according to our research, good wages, opportunity for advancement and job security belonged in the least motivational factor groups in the food and beverage department.

Simons and Enz (2007) stated that the front office department gave similar emphasis to wages and opportunities, but placed appreciation in their top three instead of job security. When reviewing our findings, it can be seen that this partly overlaps. The participants from the guest services department ranked appreciation for a job well done as the most important factor. However, good wages and the opportunity for advancement were rated as least important.

According to the housekeeping workers, job security was ranked as the most motivational factor followed by wages and working conditions. The workers from the housekeeping department are not motivated by developmental opportunities,

as noted by Simons and Enz (2007). Again, our study partly agrees with this statement. When reviewing this study, it can be seen that the participants in the housekeeping department are the least motivated by the opportunity for advancement. This was the lowest score in comparison with the other departments. However, the participants from housekeeping were most motivated by the appreciation for a job well done and sympathetic personal help rather than job security, good wages and working conditions. However, there was no previous literature that specifically focused on the workers in the kitchen, maintenance and spa departments. The findings of this research may contribute to new research to include these departments.

## Conclusion

The Marriott observation that it “Takes Happy Workers to Make Happy Customers” is a truth that is rarely practised in the way employees are managed. This research provides insights into the job factors that are most important to employees in different age, gender and department groupings. Hotel management needs to understand the differences between staff and their responses to employment factors. The importance of work type and departmental type seemed to be a factor where there were some interesting differences.

The XYZ Hotel is a luxury property and these findings are likely to be shaped by the staffing levels, employment conditions as well as the training and development opportunities on this property. These findings have to be seen as specific to the setting of this property and they cannot be generalised across the hotel sector. Indeed, where some of the findings are in contradiction to prior research, the nature of the luxury property may be a key factor in explaining these variations.

## Note

1 This paper is informed by research undertaken by Ambra Hekman for her management project submitted in support of her Bachelor of Business Administration (Hotel Management) at Stenden University of Applied Science.

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