

Guest editorial

Xi Yu Leung and Adele Ladkin

Tourism talent challenge post-pandemic and the way forward

The tourism and hospitality industry has long been known for its low wages, long hours and weekend work and emotional labor (Liu-Lastres *et al.*, 2023). As a result, the tourism industry grapples with a multifaceted talent challenge characterized by issues such as labor shortage, seasonal job instability, high turnover rates, skill gaps and a lack of clear career progression (WTTC, 2015). Therefore, talent management, or how to recruit, retain and develop an engaged workforce, has played a critical role in the tourism industry (Barron *et al.*, 2014). Researchers have demonstrated that successful talent management not only directly affects employees' job performance but also indirectly impacts organizational outcomes, especially financial outcomes (Capelleras *et al.*, 2021).

The current COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating effects on the global tourism and hospitality workforce, causing unprecedented challenges to tourism talent management (Girish *et al.*, 2022; Maggi and Vroegop, 2023). The COVID-19 crisis not only brought travel to a standstill, causing massive revenue losses, but also amplified disadvantages for working in the tourism industry. During the pandemic, the increasing job insecurity and vulnerability caused a large number of tourism workers to voluntarily and involuntarily leave the industry (Baum *et al.*, 2020). According to WTTC (2021a), 62 million tourism jobs were lost worldwide in 2020, accounting for almost 20% of the global tourism workforce.

As the global tourism industry is recovering from the pandemic, one of the most significant talent management challenges the tourism industry faces is severe labor shortages. In a recent report, WTTC (2021b) uncovered a prolonged tourism labor shortfall: around one in 13 positions would remain unfilled in 2022. The anxiety, confusion and enhanced risk perception caused by the pandemic lowered people's desire to pursue a job in the tourism industry (Liu-Lastres *et al.*, 2023). The challenge for tourism and hospitality businesses competing for talent extends beyond the tourism industry, as fierce competition from other service industry sectors is growing (King *et al.*, 2021). Thus, the tourism industry needs to find smart ways to attract and retain talent for sustainable development (Girish *et al.*, 2022; Maggi and Vroegop, 2023; Sun *et al.*, 2022).

In response to this call, we developed this special issue in the *Tourism Review*, dedicated to the global tourism talent challenge, human resources management (HRM) and organizational behavior in the tourism/hospitality industry. The special issue aims to support the global tourism and hospitality industry for a speedy, healthy and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This special issue has received great interest from scholars all over the world. After rounds of rigorous peer-review process, a total of 17 papers have been accepted for publication in this special issue. The papers collectively offer reflections on a range of existing themes and issues evident in tourism HRM research, including recruitment, career attractiveness, employee well-being, performance, retention and turnover, diversity and inclusion and the COVID-19 pandemic impacts. The papers apply both quantitative and qualitative methods in developing scales and models, discussing both theoretical and practical value of the research and finding solutions to many talent challenges in the sector. The papers also show a wide variety of tourism sector contexts, such as hotels, cruises, tour guides and travel agencies, and geographical contexts, including China, India, Egypt,

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Australia and Macau. Collectively, the papers build incremental knowledge and understanding of the global tourism talent challenge, whilst each individual piece has its own contribution.

As outlined previously, the hospitality sector has long struggled with retention, with known labor shortages worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. A number of papers reflect broadly on issues affecting recruitment and retention, questioning how we might better attract employees and the barriers and enablers to doing so.

In relation to attracting the workforce, one under-researched area is that of occupational stigma. The paper by Li, Peng and Xu explores this gap in “Internship and career adaptability: addressing occupational stigma and identity for hospitality management students.” Using a qualitative methodology interviewing Chinese hospitality students, the paper found that high career adaptability helps reduce interns’ perception of occupational stigma and strengthens their occupational identity. Students from academic and vocational schools display different levels of career adaptability in terms of job matching and career promotion. The long-term influence on occupational identity is more significant from professional development potential than job adaptation. The paper connects to the broader literature on careers and education in hospitality, with occupational perceptions being a key driver of occupational choice.

Another paper by Wang, Cheung and Zhai, “Career adaptability and career optimism: Applying career construction theory to understand tourism and hospitality career intention,” also examines career development among tourism and hospitality students. Drawn on data from Chinese students, the study findings indicate that career adaptability positively influences future career intention, directly and indirectly, through career optimism. The exploration of these relationships could assist educators in career counseling for students and employers to develop effective career management strategies for young talent in their organizations. Hotels and universities should collaborate to offer more professional development courses with opportunities for career exploration to improve students’ career optimism.

The recruitment challenge is further explored through a consideration of generational perspectives. The paper by [Raub et al. \(2023\)](#), “The cruise industry workforce crunch-generational change in work values of job seekers,” assesses the differences in work values between Generation X and millennials in the context of the cruise industry. Based on a ranking of work domains, the findings discover that “ego-driven” work values are significantly higher for millennials. These values – support, development, compensation, work–life balance and comfort – play to the value of fostering a supportive and rewarding working environment – can be a challenge in the hospitality sector. The millennials’ expectations of more feedback and support imply a need for fostering a more supportive leadership culture.

Continuing the generational investigation, the paper by [Zhong et al. \(2023\)](#), “Attracting Gen Z workforce: the effects of organizational social media policy,” offers intriguing insights into how an organization’s social media policy can best attract the Gen Z workforce. Findings reveal that when a company policy promoted social media usage, Gen Z job seekers reported higher attractiveness and pursuit intention in the distinct boundary condition. The work suggests that policymakers should understand the effects of various combinations of policy components in different business aspects so that they can make an informed evaluation of what will best serve the company. An “optimal” social media policy that attracts Gen Z talents would be a policy that promotes social media usage and limits organizational regulation to the professional domain.

Attracting the right talent is a recurring theme in recruitment challenges. The performance of new hires is under scrutiny in the paper “New hire performance: identifying critical traits for hospitality industry” by [Dutta et al. \(2023\)](#). Based on data collected from India’s largest hospitality chain, this paper identifies humility as a significant predictor of job performance,

wholly mediating the effect of interpersonal understanding, self-confidence and flexibility on new hires' performance. The work validates the importance of hiring practices and how better to understand performance in relation to these new recruits. Employers can improve new hires' performance and ultimately benefit their business's overall success by using structured interview techniques focusing on individuals who possess humility.

The five papers discussed above draw attention to recruitment challenges, and the following three papers deal with the issue of retention; in other words, what might be undertaken to reduce turnover. [Camilleri et al. \(2023\)](#), in their paper "Motivations and commitment to work in the hospitality industry: investigating employee psychology and responsible organizational behaviors," explores the importance of responsible HRM in both attracting and retaining employees. Their empirical study of hospitality employees confirms that responsible HRM, together with extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, are significant antecedents of organizational commitment. The study investigates hospitality employees' state of mind concerning their job, at a time when tourism is growing after the COVID-19 pandemic. Responsible HRM practices clearly have a role to play in fostering organizational commitment and, in turn, reducing labor turnover.

The psychological contract plays an important role in employee retention. This is considered in the paper "Hotel employees' intention to stay through psychological contract fulfilment and positive emotions in post-lockdown era" by Karani, Mall, Kothari and Deshpande. With a survey of hotel employees in India, this paper investigates hotel employees' intentions to stay in the hotel industry, with the mediating role of psychological contract fulfilment and the moderating role of positive emotions and position held (frontline employees vs managers) in the post-lockdown era. The paper points to the value and importance of the psychological contract in a healthy, positive working environment. Three creative strategies are provided in the study to help develop a positive work environment for the hoteliers in these challenging times: minimum promise – maximum delivery, health and welfare, and learning and orientation.

The hospitality workforce has long been the subject of scrutiny regarding precarious work, with job insecurity being one of the few issues that have detrimental effects on retention and well-being. The paper by [Bui Thi and Mai \(2023\)](#), "Work social support on hospitality employees' career optimism and turnover intention," finds that job insecurity positively affects turnover intention, while organizational commitment negatively influences turnover intention. Furthermore, both work-social support and career optimism are significant predictors of organizational commitment. One message we can draw from this study is that although job insecurity has negative impacts, a supportive working environment clearly has a role to play. Tourism companies should consider adopting effective leadership practices and employee-centric approaches in developing effective career management strategies.

The next group of papers examines employment conditions and employee performance and welfare. Three of them draw our attention to the need to understand negative feelings in the workplace and how they may affect both organizations and the employees. The paper by [Chen and Ye \(2023\)](#), "Is your working life good? Alienation in the nexus between job characteristics and organizational citizenship behavior of hospitality frontline employees," draws on data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic in Taiwan. Alienation, or a sense of detachment or isolation, is used in a mediating role between job characteristics and organizational citizenship behavior. The study reveals that hospitality frontline alienation presents powerlessness and self-estrangement, reflecting the negativity in a work environment that may have subsequent effects on employee health. Employee empowerment is suggested to be a key element in improving organizational outcomes.

Along with a similar theme to alienation, [Liu et al. \(2023\)](#) draw our attention to workplace ostracism; specifically, how feeling ostracized can invoke disruptive and negative behaviors (counterproductive work behavior). Their paper "Employees' self-esteem in psychological contract: Workplace ostracism and counterproductive behavior" collected data from hotel

employees in China. In addition to identifying that workplace ostracism increases employee counterproductive behavior, mediated by psychological contract violation, a significant outcome of the work is the unique context – Chinese workplace behaviors relating to “losing face (mianzi)” role in workplace behaviors. Thus, managers need to be aware of the dark side of self-esteem in the Chinese workplace context.

Similarly, the theme of ostracism continues in the paper by Singh, “Moderating role of intrinsic motivation in managing the consequences of workplace ostracism.” The work investigates the indirect effects of workplace ostracism on service performance and on employees’ procrastination behavior via job insecurity and the intention to sabotage. Drawing on a sample of hotel employees in metropolitan cities in India, the study adds to an understanding of the destructive phenomena of ostracism. The COVID-19 situation was found in this case, as in many others, to impact negatively on service performance. Tourism companies are suggested to offer them anger and crisis management support to help employees deal with negative emotions.

Attempts to reduce feelings of detachment and negativity can be a positive step toward improving workplace cultures and employee welfare. Leadership plays an important role in these attempts. A comprehensive exploration of servant leadership is offered by [Al-Azab and Al-Romeedy \(2023\)](#) in their paper “Servant leadership and tourism businesses’ outcomes: a multiple mediation model.” Drawing on a sample of Egyptian travel agencies, a multimediation model explores the relationships between servant leadership and person–job fit, work–life balance, work engagement, innovative work behavior and job crafting. This paper highlights the importance of leadership, demonstrated by the positive link between servant leadership and a range of work performance-related issues.

One way for leadership to be reflected is through mentoring and support at work. Mentoring, as a highly valued and effective human resource strategy for training new employees, assisting career development and embedding workplace skills, attitudes and behaviors has an important role in HRM ([Hezlett and Gibson, 2005](#)). Encouraging us to consider the value of mentoring, [Huang et al. \(2023\)](#), in their paper “Tour leaders and guides’ multiple mentoring functions: scale development and validation,” identify the multiple mentoring functions of tour leaders as career competency, reverse mentoring, career development and psychosocial support. Using a four-phase study approach, a multiple mentoring function scale for tour leaders was developed.

Career development, specifically career resilience, is under scrutiny in the paper by Zhou, Kong, Jiang, Baum Li and Yu, “Influence of artificial intelligence perception on career resilience and informal learning.” This is a timely paper given the increasing influence that artificial intelligence (AI) has on workers, the workplace and HRM. Based on data collected from Chinese hospitality employees, findings suggest that employees’ perception of AI positively contributes to career resilience and informal learning. The impact of AI perception resonates particularly with younger employees, whose careers and working lives are more likely to be impacted by new technologies than previous generations. Taking effective measures such as training and psychological assistance is important to improve employees’ positive attitudes toward AI technology and career resilience ability.

The last three papers dive into an important and timely topic in tourism employment: diversity and inclusion. Particularly, the three papers investigate a special group: migrant workers, who play a crucial role in addressing labor shortages in the tourism and, more specifically, the hospitality sector. The studies under this topic were inspired by UNSDG 8, which seeks to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic groups, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Improving the working lives of migrant workers in tourism and hospitality speaks to this agenda ([Buhalis et al., 2023](#)).

Pfarr, Suwanto and Volgger, in their paper “Front-desk workforce cultural diversity and its implications for service quality in the accommodation sector: a case from Australia,”

highlights the value of understanding workforce cultural diversity. Based on an in-depth qualitative case study from Western Australia, the study observes that the cultural background of the migrant employees influences how front desk staff provides quality services, including communication skills, attitudes and work style, knowledge, experience and their understanding of host destinations and other cultures. Having both native and migrant employees at the front desk provides a hotel with a competitive advantage.

Drawn from migrant workers in Macau's tourism industry, [Agyeiwaah et al. \(2023\)](#), in their paper "The impact of migrant workers' inclusion on subjective well-being, organizational identification, and organizational citizenship behavior," tests that workforce inclusion makes a positive impact of migrant workers' subjective well-being and identification, which in turn positive affects organizational citizenship behavior. The findings imply that migrant workers' inclusion could serve as a talent management strategy that promotes their well-being. Migrant workers would be engaged in positive behaviors if provided with well-being interventions that allow them to feel satisfied with both their life and work at the organization.

The special issue concludes with a perspective paper by [Janta and Ladkin \(2023\)](#), "The labour consequences of Covid-19: migrant workers in tourism & hospitality." This paper discusses the consequences of COVID-19 for the migrants and the tourism industry following the emergence of new business models, such as migrant gig jobs, and operational practices. The authors conclude, somewhat pessimistically, that despite growing attention toward promoting sustainable, just and decent employment, global trends and changing industrial relations in the sector have led to heightened levels of precariousness and uncertainty in migrants' work. Policymakers worldwide face the urgent task of regulating platform work to ensure migrant workers' benefits and well-being.

As the world gradually emerges from the crisis, the tourism sector faces the daunting task of rebuilding and adapting to a new normal. Central to this transformation is the effective management of tourism talent. Underpinning issues existing in tourism talent management, all papers in the collection build evidence to suggest that there is a need for change if the tourism industry is to better withstand future labor market shocks and turmoil. Derived from studies included in this special issue, several suggestions are provided for the tourism industry to move forward post-pandemic. As shown in [Figure 1](#), the tourism industry should focus on talent recruitment, retention, diversity and inclusion to solve talent challenges that deteriorated during the pandemic.

First, the tourism industry is one of the economy sectors that has the biggest shortage of workers post-pandemic ([Janta and Ladkin, 2023](#)). To attract a quality workforce in this challenging landscape, the tourism industry should start with college students. A strong collaboration between the industry and universities helps form positive occupational perceptions and occupational identities, and foster career adaptability and career optimism among students, thereby increasing their intentions to work in the tourism industry after graduation. Social media marketing, as it is naturally attractive to the Gen Z workforce, should be designed with a perfect combination of company policy to increase its effectiveness. The tourism industry is suggested to examine applicants' humility and use it as a significant predictor of finding the right talent.

Second, on top of attracting a qualified workforce, the retention of talented employees also presents another foremost challenge of our time ([Liu-Lastres et al., 2023](#)). Lessons from the pandemic indicate that support and optimism are key to retaining talent in the tourism industry. Tourism organizations need to provide workplace support, such as mentoring, to reduce employees' negative feelings in the workplace, such as alienation and workplace ostracism. Leaders in the tourism industry need to realize that different types of leadership styles have different influences on improving employees' performance and well-being. Servant leadership is recommended, as it fits in with the nature of the tourism industry. As the tourism industry is embracing more and more technology applications, organizations are encouraged to take measures to help employees work effectively with new technology, such as artificial intelligence, while at the same time minimizing the negative effects.

Figure 1 Tourism talent challenges and solutions



Third, as a globalized industry, the tourism industry features diversity because of its multicultural nature. The tourism industry has long been known for a diverse workforce where employees are trained to appreciate and accommodate people from diverse backgrounds around the world (Madera *et al.*, 2023). Advancing diversity and inclusion in the tourism industry brings new ideas, perspectives and open-mindedness to the forefront. Employees from different cultural background, after receiving necessary training and empowerment, may improve service quality and provide a competitive advantage to tourism companies. On the contrary, inclusive policies and diversity management should be properly implemented to ensure migrant workers' performance and welfare. The new business model in the tourism industry, the "gig economy," is especially attractive to migrant workers with its flexibility and low entry requirements. Policies need to be created at the government level to protect migrant gig workers' benefits and wellness.

To thrive in this new landscape, the tourism industry must prioritize the development and adaptation of its workforce. Effective talent management will be the cornerstone of a resilient and thriving post-pandemic tourism sector. This special issue sets the ground for future research in these directions to refine our understanding of the evolving dynamics in tourism talent management.

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