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THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN SERVICE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT OF HOTEL BUSINESSES

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ABSTRACT

In order a hotel business to achieve a long-term quality performance, it should train, empower and actively involve the employees in the service process. Therefore, the involvement of Human Resourse Management (HRM) department is imperative. The purpose of this study is to explore the level that HRM basic approaches are applied by hotels, particularly those fundamental requirements that might enhance quality service provision. Furthermore, the paper is examining the individual and unique characteristics of the hotel units, such as size, categorization etc., in an effort to reveal possible diversions and correlations according to the HRM implemented philosophy. According to the research findings, the examined hotels adopt a range of agreed HR policies and practices that are more likely to create organizations aiming to compete on the basis of high-quality services. Moreover, the hotels that apply greater HRM principles are those of great capacity. This can be explained due to the large number of hotel employees; their number, along with the fact that hospitality is a labour-intensive industry, necessitates HRM practices to play an important role in service quality provision. One more interesting finding arising from this research is that the category of the hotel does not play an important role at the degree that a hotel applies HRM best practices.

KEYWORDS

Hospitality Industry; Human Resourse Management; Quality of Service; Best Practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Ali et al. (2020), one of the dynamic capabilities that are considered as the ground basis of the continuous improvement for the service provision, is the Human Resourse Management (HRM). This dynamic capability in the hospitality industry involves the "best practices" that are universally applied by organizations, based on their single resources and capabilities (Seo et al., 2021).

The greatest distinctive attribute of services is the significance of the human component contribution in the production process and the quality of the final product that customers experience. HRM has an imperative job to do in providing high standards of service quality and organizational performance (Voorde, Paauwe, & Veldhoven, 2012; Grönroos, 2000; Haynes & Fryer, 2000; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000) since continuous quality improvement can be achieved through staff training, empowerment and employees' active involvement in the production process (Gjelsvik, 2002; Trude, 2005; Erstad, 1997; Pastor, 1996; Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Amoah & Baum, 1997). Hospitality industry is labour and capital intensive alike (Pereira-Moliner et al., 2021; Choi, Woods, & Murrmann, 2000; Bayraktaroglu & Kutanis, 2003). Because of the fact that skill shortages in the industry are high (Jameson, 2000), it is vital that employees be constantly trained to provide service quality with the intention to develop and retain an employee that is customer-focused (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000; Christou, 2002).

In a highly competitive environment like the hotel and tourism sector (Enz & Siguaw, 2000; Terpstra, 1994), the role of humans is eminent in proportion to the hotel's physical assets (Haynes & Fryer, 2000). As a result, the better use of human capital is one of the elements to be considered as a competitive advantage for hospitality and tourism industry (Enz & Siguaw, 2000; Nankervis & Debrah, 1995; Pfeffer, 1994). Therefore, in the hospitality and tourism industry, the application of HRM basic

principles and practices may lead to the competitive advantage that all service-oriented businesses need for further development and progress (Enz & Siguaw, 2000).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The hospitality industry has become very competitive worldwide and was forced to find ways to sustain its competitiveness. One way to be competitive is to improve service quality by improving employee performance (Tsaur & Lin, 2004). There are some human resource strategies that should be adopted from the tourism and hospitality sector in an effort to strengthen employee performance levels. Tourism and hospitality businesses should attract, retain, and motivate its employees, particularly its front-line employees, in order to achieve service quality results. According to Zeithaml & Bitner (2000), there are four key sections serving a principal conceptual framework, which entail hiring the proper employees, developing people to provide service quality, offering the necessary support systems, and maintaining the best employees.

Due to the unique and seasonal nature of the sector it is of great importance that hotels should compete in order to hire the best employees (Wood, 1997). Furthermore, with the purpose of developing and maintaining personnel that is customer-oriented and focused on delivering quality, an organization is supposed to build up its employees to deliver qualitative service. In order for enterprises to be responsive to customer needs, frontline employees need to be empowered to satisfy customer needs and take responsibility for their own actions (Pastor, 1996; Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Schneider & Bowen, 1985; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988; Kelley & Hoffman, 1997; Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Winsted, 2000). Hospitality and tourism employees, in order to be efficient and effective in their jobs, require internal support systems that are aligned with their need to be guest focused (Morrison, 1996; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000). The importance of internal service quality measurement and the provision of supportive technology and equipment are imperative (Berry, Conant & Parasuraman, 1991; Hallowell, Schlesinger, & Zornitsky, 1996). Therefore, it is of great importance for the hotel organizations to hire, train, sustain and motivate employees (Nickson, 2012).

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Redman and Matthews (1998) suggest a number of crucial practices and principles, in line to those proposed as best practices by Pfeffer (1998), that might ensure quality service provision. These principles and practices deal with recruiting and selecting the proper staff with all the appropriate qualifications to provide service in a qualitative manner, avoiding the development of a 'turnover culture' (Michael & Fotiadis, 2022), equipping operative level staff with emotional competences focused on service quality and high-level staff with a more facilitative and coaching approach managerial philosophy. Moreover, they suggest other appraisal approaches, far from the traditional ones, such as customer evaluation, team-based performance, peer review and the appraisal of managers by subordinates in addition to the need for a much more creative system of rewards for attaining quality goals. Furthermore, they notice the importance of job security and they recommend greater employee involvement that offers autonomy, creativity, cooperation and self-control in service quality provision. Training, employee motivation, performance evaluation and established rewarding systems generate this working environment that leads to the constant improvement of service quality provision (Bakotic & Rogosic, 2017; Tarí et al., 2019; Tang & Tang, 2012).

With the purpose of providing high quality service to guests it is imperative that all hotel units manage their people successfully. In reference to Lv and Xu (2018), HRM is playing an important role to the employment relationship in the organization level. Because of the significance of the service encounter, human resource management plays a key managerial role in service quality provision. Morrison (1996) suggests that there is a constructive relationship between HRM practices and service quality. According to Nickson (2012), organizations that adopt the best practice approach in HRM will see improved employee commitment that will successively lead to higher levels of service quality by the employees. As Amin et al. (2017) stated, satisfied hotel employees tend to deliver high-quality hospitality services. As a result, international literature suggests that HRM has a domineering role to play in high standards service quality provision (Grönroos, 2000; Haynes & Fryer, 2000; Morrison, 1996; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000), especially in a labour intensive and capital-intensive industry like hospitality (Bayraktaroglu & Kutanis, 2003; Choi, Woods & Murrmann, 2000). As a result, hotels depend mainly on employees to offer the required level of customer service (Doan et al., 2021; Bharwani & Butt, 2012).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to examine the level of the application of HRM fundamental principles and best practices by the hotels, to study whether the implemented HRM approach emphasizes the employee's involvement to quality services production process and the possible differences and correlations in the applied philosophy according to accommodation units' individual traits, three research questions were formulated.

1st Question (Q1): Are the examined hotels dealing with the implementation of the best HR practices and principles?

The following hypotheses were made:

- $H1_1$: The examined hotels are dealing with the implementation of the best HR practices and principles.

- $H1_0$: The examined hotels are not dealing with the implementation of the best HR practices and principles.

- A survey was conducted in order to ascertain if there were differences between the two groups. The first group would apply to some extent all the examined functions. The latter wouldn't even apply any of the aforementioned functions and factors that are taken into account in the implementation of HRM. Those functions and factors are considered important in enhancing employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, and ultimately their effective involvement in quality production.

2nd Question (Q2): Are there differences in the application of the basic principles and functions of HRM according to the size of the hotel units?

For the second question, the following hypotheses were made:

- $H2_1$: The basic principles and functions of HRM are applied to a greater extent in hotels with larger capacity.

- $H2_0$: Capacity does not affect the extent to which the basic principles and functions of HRM are applied.

The hotels were grouped into two categories: one that includes the hotels that are characterized as very small, small and medium, and the other with the hotels that have a large capacity. It was investigated whether, in order to accept the $H2_1$ hypothesis,

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there are differences between these groups in the extent to which they apply the principles and functions of HRM.

3rd Question (Q3): Are there differences in the application of the basic principles and functions of HRM according to the category (Stars) of the hotel units?

For the 3rd issue, the following assumptions were made:

- $H3_1$: The basic principles and functions of HRM are applied to a greater extent in hotels of higher categories.

- $H3_0$: The category of the hotel does not affect the extent to which the basic principles and functions of HRM are applied.

The hotels were re-grouped into three groups: a) 1-, 2- and 3-Stars hotels; b) 4-Stars hotels; c) 5-Stars hotels.
And a survey was performed to determine if there are statistically significant differences between these groups in their HRM application and acceptance of the $H3_1$ hypothesis.

3.1) DEFINITION OF POPULATION AND SAMPLING FRAMEWORK

The Tourist Guide of the Hellenic Chamber of Hotels was the sampling frame of the research due to the fact that this guide has the relative completeness and quality that the sampling frame is expected to have. The total number of hotels in the Attica Region in 2018 was 649, constituting the total population of the survey (Table 1).

Hotel Size	5*	4*	3*	2*	1*	Total
Very small, 1-20 rooms	2	24	46	86	68	226
Small, 21-50 rooms	4	33	48	122	36	243
Medium, 51-100 rooms	6	36	44	34	1	121
Large, ≥101 rooms	21	25	11	2	-	59

Table 1. Distribution of hotels based on their size, 2018. Source: Hellenic Chamber of Hotels (2019).

3.2) SAMPLING METHOD

After excluding the hotels units with no valid contact information and those that did not want to contribute in the study, the remaining 567 hotels received the questionnaire (Table 2).

	Initial Sample	Final Sample	%
5*	33	31	93.94
4*	118	118	100.00
3*	149	138	92.62
2*	244	203	83.20
1*	105	77	73.33
Total	649	567	87.37

Table 2. Final research sample.

A pilot test was performed on a limited number of people and the questionnaires were sent to the Human Resources Department or the General Manager of Hotels. The limitations of the research were firstly the workload, secondly the refusal of the administration, thirdly that some hotels were permanently closed, or closed due to renovation, and finally the change of ownership or seasonality, while some hotels, mainly from the 3-star category, now functioned as refugee centers who requested asylum in the country.

The units that responded more willingly and in very high percentages were those of 5 and 4 stars as well as the large size hotel units, while the representation of smaller size and category hotels in the survey was very low. An analysis was conducted and the Cronbach's Alpha index was tested. Successively, a descriptive statistical analysis of the survey data was performed to give an overview of the practices and methods that the participants stated that they apply, as well as some trends / intentions that can be distinguished. The existence of correlations between the various variables and their statistically significance were examined, in order to draw further reliable conclusions, by performing X2 tests, One-Way ANOVA and t-tests, and Correlations.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

After collecting 83 questionnaires in total, each one was checked for its completion validity. One questionnaire was rejected because the answers were outliers (ectopic values). The questionnaires were completed by the owners (32.53%), the hotel management (48.19%) and the human resources department (19.28%) (Table 3).

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Category	Frequency	%	Capacity	Frequency	%
5*	17	20.48	101 and more	23	27.71
4*	38	45.78	51-100	24	28.92
3*	18	21.69	21-50	25	30.12
2*	8	9.64	1-20	11	13.25
1*	2	2.41			
Total	83		Total	83	

Table 3. Participation rates per category and capacity.

The 56.63% of the hotels employ staff on a seasonal basis. In total, they employ 3,478 permanent and 1,353 seasonal workers (average), of whom 3,013 and 1,252 work in 5* and 4* Stars hotels. The average capacity, starting from 5-Stars hotels, is 194, 98, 68, 30 and 14 rooms, with an average number of employees of 106, 33, 23, 6 and 2 respectively. The majority of permanent employees have secondary education while the percentage of those with compulsory education is much higher in seasonal businesses. Most hotels respond that the training of permanent employees is "Often" related to tourism, while of those employed on a seasonal basis is "Sometimes" (Table 4).

	Never=1	Rarely=2	Sometimes=3	Often=4	Always=5
Permanent	2.4%	7.2%	30.1%	48.2%	12.0%
Seasonal	6.4%	8.5%	38.3%	36.2%	10.6%

Table 4. Correlation of employees' education with tourism.

Questions with more than one orderly variable resulted in 14 new scales for further analysis of the results. They were tested and found for all TA<1, oblique $<\pm2$, and curvature $<\pm2$. The reliability test between the new variables gave Cronbach's Alpha=.816.

4.1) 1ST QUESTION (Q1)

A number of the hotels surveyed stated that in addition to any methods they follow in selection / recruitment and remuneration / motivation of staff, they also provide education / training and evaluate employees' performance. It is observed that 57.83% (L1) either do not provide education / training, or do not evaluate performance, or do neither, while 42.15% (L2) apply both of these functions. Regarding L1, 31% (15

hotels) provide only education / training and 19% (9 hotels) only evaluation. The rest 24 do neither.

An X2 test was performed and it was found that there is a significant relationship regarding the existence of a process of preparation of employees for assuming managerial positions, with the L2 group having such a prediction more often than the L1 group (Table 5).

Variable			L1	L2	Total	Pearson X$_2$ Sig.
7) Is there a process that provides and prepares employees for managerial vacancies in the company?		No	33	13	46	8.185 (.004)
		Yes	15	22	37	
11) What do you think is the best option for filling a vacancy in your business?	By employees working already in the company		29	25	54	.299
	The recruitment of new employees		19	10	29	

Table 5. Dependency control (L1, L2) vs 7, 11.

The t-test found that the difference in the degree to which some practices are applied is statistically significant, except for the degree of filling vacancies by employees working already in the company and the importance given to motivating employees to achieve quality service (Table 6).

Variable		N	Average	SD	Typical Error Average	Levene's Test Sig.	T-Test t Sig.
6) Degree of filling the vacancies by employees working already in the company	L1	48	3.1615	.99666	.14385	.028	.109
	L2	35	3.4786	.68431	.11567		.090
8) Involvement of seasonal employees in the process of filling vacancies	L1	24	2.4896	1.00671	.20549	.022	.034
	L2	23	3.0326	.65411	.13639		-2.202 (.034)
10) Significance of various factors for the final selection of staff from the external environment	L1	48	3.0667	.87357	.12609	.491	2.667 (.009)
	L2	35	2.5257	.96416	.16297		.011
14) Significance of various factors in determining the amount of remuneration	L1	48	3.2386	.65492	.09453	.102	-2.512 (.014)
	L2	35	3.5714	.50355	.08511		.011

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18) Measuring employee satisfaction	L1	48	2.0069	1.02103	.14737	.175	-3.628 (.000)
	L2	35	2.8952	1.20395	.20350		.001
19) Significance of motivation of employees to achieve quality service	L1	48	3.9000	.81893	.11820	.528	.055
	L2	35	4.2286	.67063	.11336		.048
20) Significance of employee support for achieving quality service	L1	48	3.6500	.84602	.12211	.314	-2.541 (.013)
	L2	35	4.0857	.65491	.11070		.010

Table 6. Differentials check (average) (L1, L2) vs 6, 8, 10, 14, 18, 19, 20.

Regarding the selection of candidates, the X2 test revealed three statistically significant dependencies: posting jobs on the hotel website, online candidate platforms, and educational institutions for tourism professions (Table 7). For the first one, no team does this to a large extent, but it is true that the L1 team does not make this choice to a greater extent. As for the other two differences, the vast majority of the L2 team is looking for staff through the available specialized online platforms and tourism education institutions.

		L1	L2	Total	Pearson X^2 Sig.
Recommendations (friends, acquaintances, hotel staff)	No	9	7	16	.887
	Yes	39	28	67	
Posting ads in the press	No	15	12	27	.771
	Yes	33	23	56	
Posting ads on the business website	No	39	20	59	5.723 (.017)
	Yes	9	15	24	
Online platforms for finding employees (e.g., innjobs.net, kariera.gr, etc.)	No	23	5	28	10.241 (.001)
	Yes	25	30	55	
Employment agencies / OAED	No	40	31	71	.503
	Yes	8	4	12	
AEI / TEI students of any specialty	No	37	26	63	.769
	Yes	11	9	20	
Students of tourism professions	No	28	7	35	12.196 (.000)
	Yes	20	28	48	

Table 7. Dependency control (L1, L2) vs 9.

Regarding the additional benefits, the X2 test revealed many important dependencies (Table 8).

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		Pearson X² Sig
Bonus	All the variables	from .000 to .043
Presents	i. 1st line staff ii. Support staff iii. Seasonal staff	i. .028 ii. .008 iii. .019
Travel expenses	With the exception of support staff, the distinct difference is statistically significant for all other variables	from .000 to .015
Shares	No dependence	
Participation in profits	No dependence	
Health / Retirement Program	With the exception of seasonal staff, the difference in tactics is statistically significant for all other variables	from .027 to .028
Free meals	With the exception of seasonal staff, the difference in tactics is statistically significant for all other variables	from .000 to .004

Table 8. Additional benefits.

The L2 team offers much more than the expected in almost all of its staff, and this differentiation from the L1 team is statistically significant for most of the tactics followed. A similar test was performed on other incentives that can be used to increase employees' motivation and efficiency (Table 9).

		Pearson X² Sig
Holidays/ Days off	With the exception of seasonal staff, the difference in tactics is statistically significant for all other variables	from .004 to .031
Reward	Statistically significant difference for i. 1st line staff group ii. In case this tactic is not used	i. .035 ii. .034
More discretion	Tactics of exceptional importance for the middle level executives	.000
Development opportunities	The significance of dependencies for all variables range	from .000 to .026
Possibility to submit proposals	No statistically significant dependence	
Participation in decision making	Statistically significant difference for i. Middle level executives ii. Senior executives iii. In case this possibility is not given to the employees	i. .024 ii. .021 iii. .006
Work enrichment	Statistically significant difference for i. Middle level executives	i. .001 ii. .043

	ii. Senior executives iii. In case this possibility is not given to the employees	iii. .006
Permanent status / Contract renewal	With the exception of senior executive staff, the difference in tactics is statistically significant for all other variables	from .003 to .049

Table 9. Motivation methods.

Again, the L2 team provides much more in this area, offering more opportunities for growth and development to employees, rewarding and empowering, enriching work, but also the possibility of lasting in partnerships. Of the 12 dimensions of the issue examined in total, 3 led to the rejection of the $H1_1$ hypothesis, and 9 confirmed it. Therefore, it could be accepted that the applied HRM philosophy of the examined hotels is dealing with the implementation of the basic best HR practices and principles, which are the fundamental requirements for the employees' involvement in the production of quality services.

4.2) 2ND QUESTION (Q2)

Capacity was defined as the independent variable and grouped into two groups: a) R1=up to 100 rooms, b) R2=101 and more (Table 10).

		Frequency	%	Valid %
Valid	R1	60	72.3	72.3
	R2	23	27.7	27.7
	Total	83	100.0	100.0

Table 10. Grouping hotels based on capacity.

An X2 test was performed between categorical variables and a statistically significant correlation was found between capacity and the examined factors (Table 11).

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Variable		Capacity			Pearson X² Sig.
		R1	R2	Total	
7) Is there a process that provides and prepares employees for managerial vacancies in the company?	No	39	7	46	8.040 (.005)
	Yes	21	16	37	
11) What do you think is the best option for filling a vacancy in your business?	By employees working already in the company	34	20	54	6.711 (.010)
	The recruitment of new employees	26	3	29	
12) Is there provision for education / training?	No	30	3	33	9.481 (.002)
	Yes	30	20	50	
13) Does the company use methods of evaluating employee performance?	No	33	6	39	5.580 (.018)
	Yes	27	17	44	

Table 11. Statistical significance of capacity VS 7, 11, 12, 13.

A t-test was performed for the dependent continuous variables. It was found that the difference between the averages is statistically significant for the participation of seasonal employees in filling vacancies (N=47 hotels), which is clearly higher in the larger capacity hotels (Table 12).

Variable		N	Average	SD	Typical error Average	Levene's Test Sig.	T-Test t Sig.
6) Degree of filling the vacancies by employees working already in the company	R1	60	3.2083	.97334	.12566	.013	.151
	R2	23	3.5217	.56866	.11857		.074
8) Involvement of seasonal employees in the process of filling vacancies	R1	30	2.4833	.79311	.14480	.880	3.031 (.004)
	R2	17	3.2353	.85910	.20836		.006
10) Significance of various factors for the final selection of staff from the external environment	R1	60	2.8600	.87860	.11343	.058	.741
	R2	23	2.7826	1.12317	.23420		.768
14) Significance of various factors in determining the amount of remuneration	R1	60	3.3379	.65536	.08461	.149	.329
	R2	23	3.4862	.49156	.10250		.270
18) Measuring employee satisfaction	R1	60	2.2833	1.05378	.13604	.001	.223
	R2	23	2.6377	1.45614	.30363		.295
	R1	60	4.0300	.76075	.09821	.251	.872

19) Significance of motivation of employees to achieve quality service	R2	23	4.0609	.82116	.17122		.877
20) Significance of employee support for achieving quality service	R1	60	3.7433	.81269	.10492	.692	.095
	R2	23	4.0696	.71759	.14963		.081

Table 12. Statistical significance of capacity VS 6, 8, 10, 14, 18, 19, 20.

Regarding the dependent continuous variables 12.2 to 12.6 (N=50 hotels that provide training), the only statistically significant difference in the average concerns the evaluation of the effectiveness of training programs, where again it appears increased in group R2 (Table 13). The same is observed in the other variables but these differences are not statistically significant.

Variable		N	Average	SD	Typiccal Error Average	Levene's Test Sig.	T-Test t Sig.
12.2) Planned education / training programs	R1	30	3.9875	.46348	.08462	.493	.662
	R2	20	4.0438	.41014	.09171		.654
12.3) Procedures for identifying education / training needs	R1	30	3.8333	.77682	.14183	.087	.213
	R2	20	4.0833	.51725	.11566		.178
12.4) Evaluate the effectiveness of education / training programs	R1	30	3.6222	.87421	.15961	.662	2.603 (.012)
	R2	20	4.2333	.71000	.15876		.009
12.5) Objectives of the applied education / training methods	R1	30	4.1444	.63688	.11628	.002	.429
	R2	20	4.2667	.30301	.06775		.369
12.6) Importance of training employees to achieve quality service	R1	30	3.7667	.86954	.15875	.910	.362
	R2	20	3.9900	.79598	.17799		.354

Table 13. Statistical significance of capacity VS 12.2 to 12.6.

As far as the continuous dependent variables 13.4 and 13.5 (N=44 hotels that evaluate the staff performance), there is a statistically significant variance in the average only in terms of the reasons for the evaluation, where the group R2 attaching more weight (Table 14).

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Variable		N	Average	SD	Typical Error Average	Levene's Test Sig.	T-Test t Sig.
13.4) Objectives of evaluating employee performance	R1	27	3.2407	.62418	.12012	.316	2.895 (.006)
	R2	17	3.7647	.51390	.12464		.004
13.5) Importance of evaluating the performance of employees to achieve quality service	R1	27	4.1481	.57804	.11124	.785	.866
	R2	17	4.1176	.57905	.14044		.866

Table 14. Statistical significance of capacity VS 13.4, 13.5.

As for the recruitment of candidates from the external environment of the company, the X2 test showed statistically significant dependencies on the three following areas. Those were the company's websites, the online candidate platforms, and various educational and non-professional educational institutions (Table 15).

Variable		Capacity			Pearson X² Sig.
		R1	R2	Total	
Recommendations (friends, acquaintances, hotel staff)	No	12	4	16	.787
	Yes	48	19	67	
Posting ads in the press	No	22	5	27	.194
	Yes	38	18	56	
Posting ads on the business website	No	52	7	59	25.578 (.000)
	Yes	8	16	24	
Online platforms for finding employees (e.g., innjobs.net, kariera.gr, etc.)	No	26	2	28	8.923 (.003)
	Yes	34	21	55	
Employment agencies / OAED	No	50	21	71	.355
	Yes	10	2	12	
AEI / TEI students of any specialty	No	49	14	63	3.932 (.047)
	Yes	11	9	20	
Students of tourism professions	No	30	5	35	5.445 (.020)
	Yes	30	18	48	

Table 15. Statistical significance of capacity VS 9.

The relative control of 6 variables of the applied education / training methods showed a statistically significant dependence regarding the provision of lectures /seminars (X2=8.556, p=.003), which is used by the vast majority of hotels with larger capacity (90%), in contrast to those of smaller capacity where only 50% use it. Regarding the evaluation methods there is a noteworthy relationship concerning the use of a specific rating scale in the middle executives (X2=3.866, p=.049) where 85% of the smaller hotels do not use it, and in the support staff (X2=4.381, p=.036) where

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the respective percentage is 78%. The corresponding percentages for high-capacity hotels are ±50%. As for the evaluation sources, a statistically significant dependence is observed in three variables:

i.   In the evaluation of senior executives by themselves (X2=6.201, p=.013).

ii.   The internal control department (X2=4.082, p=.043), where R2 group uses these methods to a much greater extent than group R1.

iii. In the comments made by customers on various social networks about 1st line staff (X2=4,476, p=.034), which 94% of group R2 counts against 67% of group R1.

		Pearson X² Sig
Bonus	With the exception of seasonal staff and 1st line staff i. Middle level executives ii. Senior executives iii. Support staff Equally statistically significant is the non-implementation of such a measure	i. .035 ii. .001 iii. .003
Presents	No statistically significant dependence	
Travel expenses	i. Senior executives ii. In the case the travel expenses are not covered for anyone	i. .009 ii. .033
Shares	No dependence	
Participation in profits	No dependence	
Health / Retirement Program	With the exception of seasonal staff, the difference in tactics is statistically significant for all other variables	from .001 to .017
Free meals	i. Middle level executives ii. Senior executives iii. In the case they are not offered	i. .005 ii. .003 iii. .011

Table 16. Additional benefits.

Regarding the additional benefits provided, the X2 control showed the following results (Table 16). The respective results of the X2 test for other motivation methods used are as follows (Table 17).

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		Pearson X² Sig
Holidays/Days off	No statistically significant dependence	
Reward	Statistically significant difference for i. 1st line staff ii. Support staff iii. Seasonal staff iv. In the case where no reward method is used	i. .006 ii. .001 iii. .004 iv. .001
More discretion	It is important to 1st line staff	.039
Development opportunities	Statistically significant difference for i. Middle level executives ii. Senior executives	i..028 ii..013
Possibility to submit proposals	Statistically significant difference for i. 1st line staff ii. Support staff	i. .008 ii. .027
Participation in decision making	No statistically significant dependence	
Work enrichment	Statistically significant for seasonal staff	.041
Permanent status / Contract renewal	No statistically significant dependence	

Table 17. Motivation methods.

Of the 24 dimensions tested in relation to hotel capacity, 11 led to the rejection of the Null $H2_0$ hypothesis, and 13 were found to confirm the $H2_1$. Therefore, it could be accepted that larger hotels apply to a greater extent the basic principles and functions of HRM.

4.3) 3RD QUESTION (Q3)

Due to the small participation of hotels of lower categories in the survey (1 and 2 Stars), a new grouping took place, where A1-3=1–3-star hotels, A4= 4-star hotels and A5=5-star hotels (Table 18).

		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	A1-3	28	33.7	33.7	33.7
	A4	38	45.8	45.8	79.5
	A5	17	20.5	20.5	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

Table 18. Grouping of hotels into three categories.

An X2 test was performed to determine if there was any dependence between the categorical variables. It was found that the different treatment adopted by the groups for the examined factors is statistically significant (Table 19).

Variable		Category			Total	Pearson X^2 Sig
		A1-3	A4	A5		
7) Is there a process that provides and prepares employees for managerial vacancies in the company?	No	23	18	5	46	13.745 (.001)
	Yes	5	20	12	37	
11) What do you think is the best option for filling a vacancy in your business?	By employees working already in the company	13	26	15	54	8.481 (.014)
	The recruitment of new employees	15	12	2	29	
12) Is there provision for education / training?	No	18	15	0	33	18.254 (.000)
	Yes	10	23	17	50	
13) Does the company use methods of evaluating employee performance?	No	19	16	4	39	9.015 (.011)
	Yes	9	22	13	44	

Table 19. Statistical significance of category VS 7, 11, 12, 13.

The One-Way Anova analysis of the effect of hotel class on dependent continuous variables showed that any existing differences do not have any statistical significance for the following:

- The degree of filling vacancies by permanent employees.
- The individual functions related to education.
- The individual functions related to evaluation.
- The significance of various factors in determining the amount of remuneration.
- The importance of employee support.

On the contrary, it showed statistically significant differences. For example, in 4-Stars hotels the participation of seasonal employees in filling vacancies of the company is greater than the respective participation in hotels of lower categories (difference Average=-.710), while the weight attached in various factors for the final selection of staff is also greater, and the behavior of the variation is considered interesting (.041) in 5-Stars hotels compared to lower-class hotels (Table 20).

Variable	(I) Category	(J) Category	(I-J) Average Differences	Typical Error	Sig.
8) Involvement of seasonal employees in the process of filling vacancies	A1-3	A4	**-.710**	0.290	.055
		A5	**-.667**	0.367	.229
	A4	A1-3	**.710**	0.290	.055
		A5	.043	0.329	1.00
	A5	A1-3	**.667**	0.367	.229
		A4	-.043	0.329	1.00
10) Significance of various factors for the final selection of staff from the external environment	A1-3	A4	.097	0.229	1.00
		A5	**.711**[*]	0.282	.041
	A4	A1-3	-.097	0.229	1.00
		A5	**.614**	0.268	.074
	A5	A1-3	**-.711**[*]	0.282	.041
		A4	**-.614**	0.268	.074
18) Measuring employee satisfaction	A1-3	A4	**-.627**	0.285	.091
		A5	**-.868**[*]	0.351	.047
	A4	A1-3	**.627**	0.285	.091
		A5	-.240	0.333	1.00
	A5	A1-3	**.868**[*]	0.351	.047
		A4	.240	0.333	1.00
19) Significance of motivation of employees to achieve quality service	A1-3	A4	-.447	0.187	.059
		A5	-.445	0.231	.173
	A4	A1-3	.447	0.187	.059
		A5	.001	0.220	1.00
	A5	A1-3	.445	0.231	.173
		A4	-.001	0.220	1.00

Table 20. Statistical significance of categories VS 8, 10, 18, 19.

Regarding the sources of attracting candidates from the external environment, the category is related to the posting of ads on the company's website, where groups A1-3 and A4 answer that they do not take such an action, and the pumping of candidates from educational institutions, where in the majority the groups A4 and A5 answer that they are addressed, in contrast to the group A1-3 (Table 21).

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| | | **Category** | | | | **Pearson** |
		A1-3	**A4**	**A5**	**Total**	**X² Sig**
Recommendations (friends, acquaintances, hotel staff)	No	7	6	3	16	.633
	Yes	21	32	14	67	
Posting ads in the press	No	8	11	8	27	.358
	Yes	20	27	9	56	
Posting ads on the business website	No	24	27	8	59	7.690
	Yes	4	11	9	24	(.021)
Online platforms for finding employees (e.g., innjobs.net, kariera.gr, etc.)	No	14	11	3	28	.059
	Yes	14	27	14	55	
Employment agencies / OAED	No	24	33	14	71	.908
	Yes	4	5	3	12	
AEI / TEI students of any specialty	No	25	26	12	63	.124
	Yes	3	12	5	20	
Students of tourism professions	No	20	11	4	35	14.976
	Yes	8	27	13	48	(.001)

Table 21. Statistical significance of category VS 9.

The X2 test for the applied training methods did not show any statistically significant dependence on the hotel category, nor any dependence on the assessment methods and resources. Regarding the additional benefits that may be provided, the corresponding X2 test showed the following results (Table 22).

		Pearson X² Sig
Bonus	Dependence is statistically significant for all variables except seasonal staff	from .001 to .007
Presents	Only for 1st line staff there is a significant dependency	.044
Travel expenses	Dependence is statistically significant for all variables except middle managers	from.002 to .040
Shares	No dependence	
Participation in profits	No dependence	
Health / Retirement Program	Dependence is statistically significant for all variables except seasonal staff	from .000 to .001
Free meals	No statistically significant dependence	

Table 22. Training and educational methods.

The respective results of the X2 test for other motivation methods that may be applied are as follows (Table 23).

		Pearson X² Sig
Holidays/ Days off	No statistically significant dependence	
Reward	i. Support group ii. In case no reward method is used	i. .022 ii. .024
More discretion	Dependence is important in middle level executives	.038
Development opportunities	There is significant dependence on i. Senior executives, ii. Support staff iii. In case there are no such opportunities	i. .016 ii. .009 iii. .024
Possibility to submit proposals	No statistically significant dependence	
Participation in decision making	It has statistical significance only for seasonal staff	.016
Work enrichment	The non-application of this motivation method is of great statistical importance	.005
Permanent status / Contract renewal	i. Support staff ii. Seasonal staff dependence is important	i. .027 ii. .051

Table 23. Motivation methods.

Of the 24 dimensions tested in relation to the hotel category, 13 led to the rejection of the $H3_1$ hypothesis and the confirmation of the Null hypothesis, and 11 were found to confirm it. Therefore, it could be accepted that the category does not affect the extent to which HRM best practices are applied.

5. DISCUSSION

The Best Practice is the universal approach to HRM where any organization that entails a range of agreed HR policies and practices, is more likely to create this working environment to achieve high quality and productivity (Nickson, 2012). With the completion of the analysis of the research data it could be accepted that the examined hotels that are giving emphasis in their human assets are addressing most of the basic best HR practices (Seo et al., 2021), which are the fundamental requirements that might ensure quality service provision (Redman & Matthews, 1998). The hotels, which adopt as many basic principles and functions of HRM as possible, will then reinforce the involvement of their employees to deliver better services, since the aforementioned result corresponded with many researchers (Haynes & Fryer, 2000; Stylos et al., 2021;

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Tsaur & Lin, 2004; Morrison, 1996; Schneider & Bowen, 1985; Tornow & Wiley, 1991; Gilbert, 1991; Hoque, 2000).

For a hotel to apply the basic HRM principles, it means that as an organization it is paying attention to its people in real terms. According to the theory of Internal Marketing, when an organization is looking for quality in service provision it has to treat its employees like its guests, that is like their internal customers (Akroush et al., 2013). Moreover, when following the basic HRM theories, an organization is considering humans as assets to invest in and compete for them rather than as a cost to be reduced (Hales 1996; Wood, 1997). The companies which invest in people they have realized the importance of the intangible assets in achieving a competitive advantage and high-quality service standards.

Some important issues that arise from the research findings have to do with some practices that are not favored by those businesses. In order to strongly relate their human resources with the service quality improvement, they need to create those structures so as:

- staffing to be based on a long-term personnel management plan,
- the 'key' employees to be growing within the business and the local community, and
- the seasonal or part-time staff to be integrated into training programs and development-promotion systems (Baum, 1995).

The above practices will have as a result the improvement of the level of filling the vacancies with employees working already in the company. Moreover, emphasis should be given to the motivation of employees achieving quality services, particularly through full commitment to service quality from the entire hierarchy (Baum, 1995). In fact, something that was commented by a representative of a 4* hotel, is the special importance that must be given to the education and training of the staff, so that the business remains healthy and can have growth and development.

An interesting result from the research findings is that the majority of the above best HR practice hotels are the biggest hotels. However, it should perhaps be noted that, with the exception of senior executives, in terms of the ability to submit proposals and initiatives to the company, the percentages of lower capacity hotels say they use this method to motivate their employees and increase efficiency in a much higher percentage than the corresponding of larger hotels. The question that arises from this

finding is whether this practice can work in terms of quality, firstly when it is not combined with the relevant education and training of staff; secondly when the corresponding responsibility of senior management does not seem to have correspondingly higher percentages than those of other working groups. As a conclusion, the biggest hotels choose to use more of the available HRM tools, in order to create a work environment in which employees will be and feel valuable factors in the growth and success of the business.

At the same time, the category of the hotel seems to be irrelevant to the extent to which the basic HRM practices are applied, there is a great variety in the application of the functions, in relation to the hotels of the lower categories, precisely because of their capacity. The finding reinforces Hoque's (2002) assessment that in the end, the application of the HRM principles may be reduced for the industry as a whole, but it is not so far from the theory when it comes to larger hotels.

The size of the company is a feature that leads to the most complete employment of HRM practices due to the fact that the capacity is equivalent to a similar number of employees. In contrast, in smaller hotels with fewer employees, the use of the corresponding tools is clearly reduced, especially in small businesses where the majority of employees are family members. Consequently, the gap between theory and reality seems to apply to smaller hospitality companies (Armstrong, 2006).

6. CONCLUSIONS

These outcomes reflect the necessity to introduce an HRM philosophy in running such large organizations, particularly those organizations in hotel industry where human is the core basis in production chain and is playing the most important role at any stage of the service production. For a hotel to be competitive and a high-quality service provider, it is necessary to cope with employees' priorities regardless of the size or the tangible aspects of the hotel.

The greater the variety of practices a firm applies, the more satisfied employees are (Schneider & Bowen, 1985; Mishra, 2010), and the more determined to provide better services they are (Alonso-Almeida, Rodriguez-Anton, & Rubio-Andrada, 2012; Nield & Kozak, 1999; Walker & Salameh, 1996; Zerbe, Dobni, & Harel, 1998, Nickson,

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2012). Wang et al. (2020) noted that HR practices are used to achieve organizational objectives by developing desired employees.

The hospitality and tourism industry is a labour-intensive service industry (Pereira-Moliner et al., 2021) and the interaction between the tourist and hotel employees is a fundamental part of the total tourist experience (Amoah & Baum, 1997). The application of best HRM practices and employee oriented HRM philosophy make the employees to believe that they are valuable parts of the success of the organization. As a result, the continuous improvement of service quality is ultimately related with the business success and this is a very valuable tool in the hands of management.

In reference to the above sampling limitations and the chosen techniques, issues such as larger sample of employees with wider scale of hospitality professions and departments, male and female differentiations, job positions, years of experience in hospitality, levels of education, etc. need to be studied. Because the research was conducted before the COVID pandemic, it would be of great importance to examine the fundamental principles and the best practices of each hotel again when the COVID implications end (Del Chiappa, Bregoli, & Fotiadis, 2021).

Additionally, the differences that may exist depending on the form of operation of the company (independent company, franchise, management contract, etc.), is an additional dimension that could be investigated and analyzed as to whether it affects or not the applied philosophy of HRM. Moreover, further fundamental HRM practices related to service quality, size and category of the hotel are of great importance for future study. In addition, the nature of relationships among the variables of HRM practices and star quality rating or size are some interesting issues to be studied in a future research. Finally, an interesting issue would be to examine the adapted hotels' HRM philosophy in real working practice, the impacts on employees' willingness to transfer that philosophy in working terms and the real service quality improvement of that performance.

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