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STAFFING CHALLENGES AND EMPLOYEE STABILITY IN HOTEL OPERATIONS

Purpose. This study explores staffing challenges in hotel operations and analyzes how workforce pressures affect employee stability and corporate social responsibility practices

Design/methodology/approach. A mixed-method design was used for the study. Quantitative data were collected through a survey of 56 hotel managers representing several hospitality markets, while qualitative interviews were conducted to provide additional managerial insights. The analysis focuses on workforce conditions in major operational departments, including housekeeping, kitchen, food and beverage service, and front office operations.

Findings. The results indicate that labor-intensive departments face the strongest staffing pressure. Burnout, lack of qualified employees, and wage-related concerns were identified as interconnected factors contributing to workforce instability. Hotels mainly respond through salary adjustments, migrant labor, and digital technologies, although these measures appear to provide mostly short-term operational support.

Originality. The study contributes to hospitality workforce research by showing that staffing instability develops through several interconnected organizational pressures rather than through a single labor-related problem. It also highlights the role of employee well-being and workforce sustainability within corporate social responsibility practices

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, Workforce management, Hospitality industry, Labor shortages, Employee well-being

Introduction

Hospitality businesses in many countries continue to experience difficulties in attracting and retaining operational employees. The problem is especially visible in hotel departments where employees work under intensive schedules, handle physically demanding tasks, and interact directly with guests on a daily basis. In recent years, labor shortages in hospitality have become more noticeable due to changing employee expectations, workforce mobility, and the long-term effects of the pandemic on service industries (Baum, 2015; Baum et al., 2020; Gursoy et al., 2023).

Corporate social responsibility discussions in hospitality now increasingly focus on internal organizational practices, including employee well-being and working conditions. Researchers have pointed out that socially responsible management is not limited to external initiatives but also involves employee well-being, fair compensation, and sustainable workforce policies (Baum, 2015; Davenport & Ronanki, 2018; Huang & Rust, 2021). For hotels, maintaining

workforce stability has therefore become both an operational challenge and an important management responsibility.

Several studies discussing hospitality employment point to burnout, skill shortages, wage competitiveness, and labor mobility as important sources of workforce instability (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; De Witte, 2005). High workload intensity and emotional labor are often associated with employee exhaustion and stronger turnover intentions in hospitality organizations (Gursoy et al., 2023). Such problems are particularly visible in housekeeping, kitchen operations, and food and beverage departments where workload intensity is usually higher.

The problem is particularly noticeable in emerging hospitality markets, where rapid industry expansion and limited training capacity place additional pressure on hotel workforce systems (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2020; Bessen, 2024). Hotels operating in such environments often experience several overlapping challenges at the same time, including staff shortages, retention difficulties, and increasing workload intensity. Many organizations have started using

digital technologies and operational automation to support everyday activities, although the long-term effect of these measures on workforce stability remains uncertain (Benbya et al., 2023; Davenport & Ronanki, 2018).

Although workforce challenges in hospitality have been widely discussed in previous studies, many researchers focus on individual factors separately rather than examining how different pressures interact within hotel operations (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; De Witte, 2005). As a result, there is still limited understanding of how workforce shortages develop across departments and how different operational pressures reinforce one another.

This paper therefore examines workforce pressure from a department-level perspective and focuses on how staffing challenges develop across core hotel operations. Using survey data collected from hotel managers and supported by qualitative insights, the study explores the interaction between burnout, staffing shortages, and skill-related constraints in hotel departments. The concept of workforce pressure complementarity is used to explain how several organizational pressures may intensify operational instability.

By connecting workforce management with corporate social responsibility, the study contributes to current discussions on sustainable management practices in hospitality organizations. The results may also be useful for hotel managers and policymakers working on employee retention and workforce sustainability in hospitality operations.

Literature Review

Workforce instability in hospitality operations

Hospitality organizations traditionally experience high employee turnover and ongoing retention difficulties, especially in operational positions that require intensive customer interaction and physically demanding work (Baum, 2015; Baum et al., 2020). Because hotels rely heavily on frontline employees, workforce stability plays a major role in maintaining service quality and operational continuity. Staffing shortages are particularly common in departments such as housekeeping, kitchen operations, and food and beverage service, where workload intensity is generally higher.

Researchers have linked workforce instability in hospitality to several factors, including wage competitiveness, working conditions, burnout, and limited opportunities for professional development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; De Witte, 2005). More recent studies also note that changing employee ex-

pectations, concerns about work-life balance, and job insecurity increasingly influence turnover intentions in service industries (Gursoy et al., 2023). However, workforce pressure does not affect all hotel departments equally. In practice, some operational units experience substantially higher staffing pressure than others, which makes department-level analysis particularly important.

Burnout and workforce pressure

Burnout is widely discussed in hospitality research as one of the major factors contributing to employee turnover and workforce instability (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Hotel employees often work under demanding conditions that involve irregular schedules, emotional labor, and continuous interaction with guests. Over time, these conditions may increase physical and emotional exhaustion, especially in departments with intensive operational workloads.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) framework explains that burnout tends to develop when job demands consistently exceed the resources available to employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In hotel operations, staffing shortages frequently increase workload pressure and reduce opportunities for recovery, which can negatively affect employee motivation and retention. Labor-intensive departments are particularly exposed to such conditions, making burnout an important factor in understanding workforce instability in hospitality organizations.

Previous studies also suggest that employees experiencing high levels of exhaustion are more likely to leave hospitality jobs or search for alternative employment opportunities (Gursoy et al., 2023). As a result, burnout not only affects employee well-being but may also create additional operational pressure for hotels already dealing with staffing shortages.

Interacting workforce pressures

In practice, workforce shortages in hospitality are usually caused by several overlapping problems rather than by one isolated factor. In many hotel operations, staffing difficulties are shaped by several interconnected pressures, including burnout, skill shortages, wage dissatisfaction, and employee turnover (De Witte, 2005; Bessen, 2024). These factors often reinforce one another and create additional strain within operational departments.

For example, understaffing usually increases workload intensity for existing employees. As workload pressure grows, employees may experience higher levels of exhaustion and job dissatisfaction, which can eventually lead to turnover. This process further deepens staffing shortages and increases op-

erational instability. Skill gaps may intensify these difficulties because inexperienced employees often require additional supervision and training, placing extra pressure on experienced staff members.

Such interaction effects suggest that workforce instability should not be viewed as an isolated organizational issue. Instead, staffing pressure develops through the combined influence of several operational and human resource challenges that affect one another over time (Bessen, 2024). This perspective helps explain why many hospitality organizations continue to experience workforce instability even when individual management measures are introduced.

Management responses and research gap

Hotels experiencing staffing shortages typically rely on several short-term management responses, including wage increases, recruitment campaigns, migrant labor, and the use of digital technologies to support operational activities (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2020; Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). These measures often help organizations maintain service continuity during periods of workforce pressure, although their long-term effectiveness remains uncertain.

Higher wages may temporarily improve employee retention, while migrant labor is frequently used to address immediate staffing gaps in labor-intensive departments. At the same time, hotels increasingly adopt digital tools and automation to reduce operational workload and improve efficiency. However, technology alone cannot fully replace the need for qualified employees in service-oriented environments (Benbya et al., 2023).

Despite the growing number of studies examining labor shortages in hospitality, much of the existing research focuses on separate workforce factors rather than their interaction within operational systems. Limited attention has been given to how staffing pressure develops simultaneously across hotel departments and how different workforce-related challenges reinforce one another. This creates a need for further research that combines department-level analysis with a broader understanding of interacting workforce pressures in hospitality organizations.

Research questions

To address the identified gap, the study focuses on the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** Which hotel departments experience the highest workforce shortage severity?
- **RQ2:** Which workforce pressures tend to co-occur in high-pressure departments?
- **RQ3:** How do managers respond to workforce pressure in hotel operations?

Methodology

This study uses a mixed-method approach to examine workforce pressures in hotel operations. Quantitative survey data were combined with qualitative interviews in order to obtain a broader understanding of workforce-related challenges in hospitality organizations. Combining both methods helped compare statistical patterns with practical managerial observations. (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Data collection involved hotel managers working in seven hospitality markets that experienced labor shortages during the post-pandemic period. The final sample included 56 respondents representing mid-scale and upscale hotels. Participants occupied managerial positions directly connected with staffing decisions and operational performance, including general managers, human resource specialists, and department supervisors. Similar respondent groups have frequently been used in hospitality workforce studies because of their practical involvement in operational management (Baum, 2015).

The survey examined workforce shortage severity across several operational hotel departments, including Front Office, Housekeeping, Food and Beverage, Kitchen, and Engineering. Respondents evaluated staffing pressure using a five-point Likert scale. Additional workforce-related factors such as burnout, skill shortages, wage competitiveness, migration, and seasonality were measured using the same scale format. Likert-based measurements are commonly applied in hospitality and organizational research to assess perceptions related to operational and employee-management issues (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Managerial responses to staffing shortages were also assessed in the survey. The analysis focused on several commonly used practices, including wage increases, the use of digital technologies, recruitment of migrant labor, and reduction of service scope. These measures reflect typical organizational responses to labor shortages previously identified in hospitality and service-sector research (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2020).

To support interpretation of the survey findings, six semi-structured interviews with senior hotel managers were conducted. The interviews helped clarify how managers experience workforce-related difficulties in everyday hotel operations.” Qualitative observations were used mainly to clarify recurring patterns identified in the quantitative analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

The data analysis relied primarily on descriptive statistics and comparison of department-level work-

force patterns. Interview materials were examined thematically and used to provide additional context for interpreting the survey results. This combination of methods allowed the study to examine workforce pressure from both operational and managerial perspectives.

Results

The analysis demonstrates noticeable differences in staffing pressure across hotel departments. Labor-intensive operational units reported higher shortage severity than technical functions. Housekeeping recorded the highest shortage level ($M = 3.67$), followed by Kitchen operations ($M = 3.33$). Food and Beverage service together with Front Office departments showed moderate staffing pressure ($M = 3.08$), while Engineering reported the lowest shortage severity ($M = 2.19$).

These patterns suggest that staffing difficulties are more common in departments characterized by intensive workloads and continuous guest interaction. The department-level comparison is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Workforce shortage severity by department

Department	Mean shortage severity	Standard deviation	Rank
Housekeeping	3.67	1.11	1
Kitchen	3.33	1.28	2
Food & Beverage Service	3.08	1.26	3
Front Office	3.08	1.10	3
Engineering	2.19	1.15	5

Note: Values represent mean scores on a five-point Likert scale (1 = no shortage, 5 = severe shortage). $n = 56$.

Workforce shortages in hotels appear to be influenced by several interconnected factors. Among the surveyed managers, skill shortages received the highest average evaluation ($M = 3.72$), followed by burnout-related pressure ($M = 3.44$). Wage competitiveness showed a moderate influence on staffing conditions ($M = 3.08$), while seasonality ($M = 2.94$) and outward labor migration ($M = 2.86$) were considered less influential.

The findings indicate that staffing pressure in hospitality operations develops through the interaction of multiple workforce-related challenges. In many cases, burnout, lack of qualified personnel, and retention difficulties occur simultaneously, creating additional operational pressure across departments. The main workforce shortage drivers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Drivers of workforce shortages

Driver	Mean influence	Standard deviation	Rank
Skill gaps	3.72	0.94	1
Burnout	3.44	1.11	2
Wage competitiveness	3.08	1.34	3
Seasonality	2.94	1.13	4
Outward migration	2.86	1.28	5

Note: Values represent mean scores on a five-point Likert scale (1 = low influence, 5 = high influence). $n = 56$.

Managers used several approaches to deal with staffing shortages in hotel operations. Wage increases were mentioned most frequently ($M = 3.50$), while digital tools and automation were also used relatively often ($M = 3.08$). The use of migrant labor showed a moderate level ($M = 2.69$). Reduction of service scope was reported less frequently compared to other management responses ($M = 2.42$).

These results show that hotels generally rely on a combination of short-term operational measures to maintain service continuity during periods of staffing pressure. The main management responses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Management responses to workforce shortages

Management response	Mean frequency	Standard deviation	Rank
Wage increases	3.50	1.00	1
Automation / digital tools	3.08	1.18	2
Hiring migrant labor	2.69	1.21	3
Reduction of service scope	2.42	1.00	4

Note: Values represent mean scores on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never used, 5 = very frequently used). $n = 56$.

Discussion

The findings indicate that workforce pressure in hospitality operations is distributed unevenly across hotel departments. Labor-intensive units such as housekeeping, kitchen operations, and food and beverage service experience noticeably higher staffing strain compared to technical departments (Baum, 2015; Baum et al., 2020). These operational areas are usually associated with heavier workloads, direct guest interaction, and physically demanding tasks, all of which may contribute to higher turnover and retention difficulties.

The study also shows that workforce-related challenges are closely connected with employee well-being and working conditions. Burnout, workload intensity, and staffing shortages affect not only operational performance but also the sustainability of workforce management practices within hospitality organizations. Previous studies similarly report that emotional labor and excessive workload often increase employee stress and turnover intentions in service environments (Koc & Boz, 2019).

Another important observation is that workforce pressures rarely develop independently from

one another. Staffing shortages increase workload pressure for existing employees, while burnout and turnover further deepen operational instability. Skill shortages may intensify these difficulties because experienced staff members often spend additional time supervising and training less experienced employees (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Similar relationships between burnout and employee turnover have been discussed in earlier hospitality research (Karatepe, 2013).

Overall, workforce instability in hospitality appears to be a broader organizational problem rather than the result of one specific factor. From a managerial perspective, addressing only wages or recruitment is unlikely to ensure long-term workforce stability. Earlier studies on hospitality employment have also emphasized the structural nature of employee turnover and retention difficulties within the industry (Iverson & Deery, 1997).

The interaction between these workforce pressures is illustrated in Figure 1.

To further illustrate how workforce pressures differ across hotel departments, Table 4 presents a comparative overview of key operational characteristics and their relationship with workforce strain.

Figure 1

Workforce pressure complementarity in hospitality operations

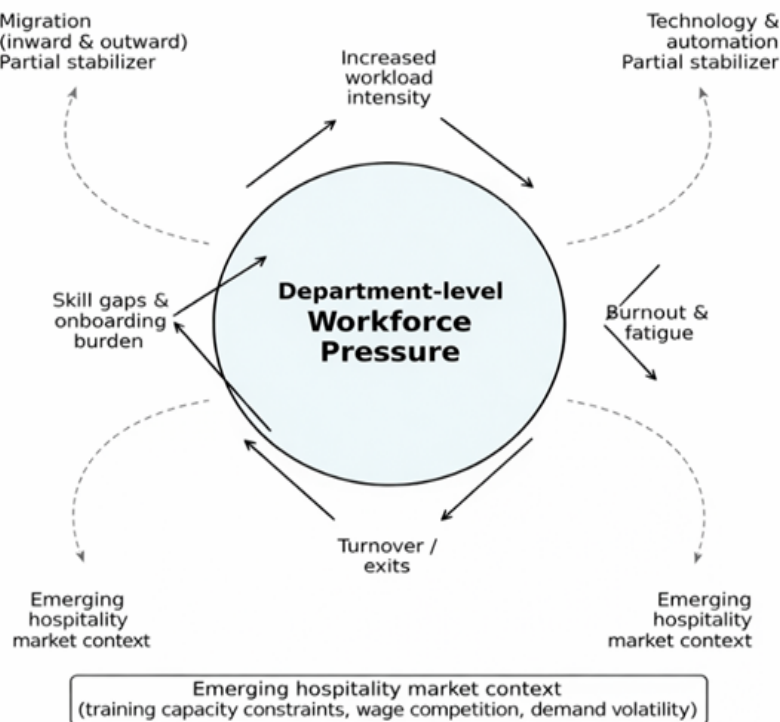


Table 4*Department-level characteristics and workforce pressure*

Department	Workload intensity	Skill level	Burnout risk	Shortage severity
Housekeeping	High	Low–Medium	High	Very high
Kitchen	High	High	High	High
Food & Beverage	Medium–High	Medium	Medium–High	Medium–High
Front Office	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium
Engineering	Low	High	Low	Low

Note: The table presents a conceptual comparison of department-level characteristics based on survey findings and qualitative insights.

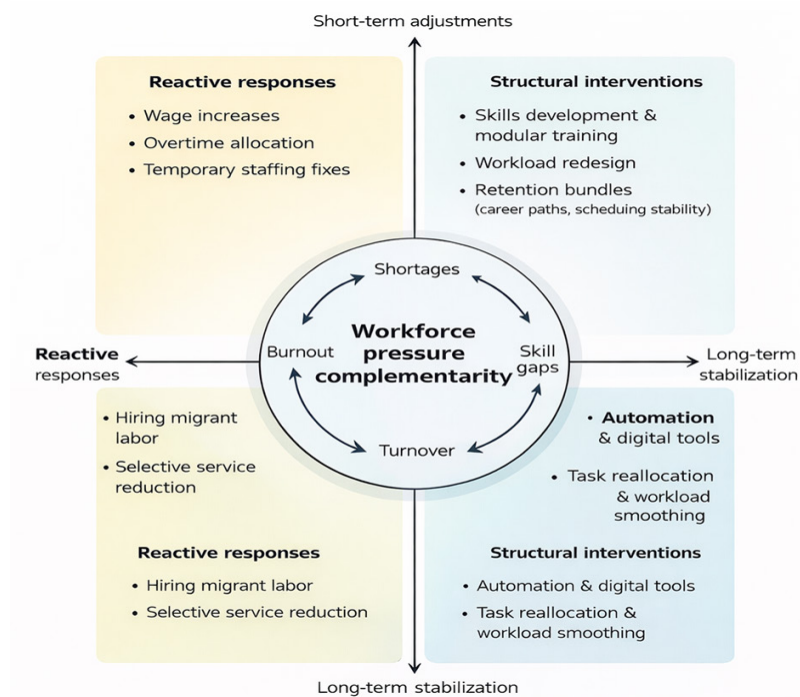
Hotels usually respond to staffing shortages through a combination of operational and managerial measures, including wage increases, recruitment of migrant workers, and the use of digital technologies (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2020; Davenport & Ronanki, 2018). These strategies may help organizations maintain day-to-day operations during periods of workforce pressure, although their long-term impact appears limited.

Migrant labor often provides temporary support in labor-intensive departments, while automation and digital tools can reduce part of the operational workload. At the same time, hospitality organizations still depend heavily on human interaction and qualified employees, which limits the ability of technology to

fully replace labor in service environments (Benbya et al., 2023). Questions related to working conditions, employee expectations, and career attractiveness therefore remain important challenges for the hospitality sector (Richardson & Butler, 2012).

From a corporate social responsibility perspective, workforce sustainability is closely connected with employee well-being and working conditions. Reducing burnout, improving workload distribution, and supporting employee development may contribute not only to better retention but also to more stable hotel operations over time.

Managerial responses to workforce pressure are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2*Managerial responses to workforce pressure*

Note: The figure summarizes key managerial responses identified through survey and interview data.

To complement the quantitative findings, interviews with hotel managers provided additional insight into how staffing pressure affects everyday hotel operations. Managers frequently referred to workload intensity, employee exhaustion, and difficulties in retaining qualified staff as recurring operational con-

cerns. Several respondents also noted that short-term solutions often help maintain operations but do not fully resolve underlying workforce problems.

Selected managerial observations illustrating these workforce-related challenges are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Managerial insights on workforce pressures in hotel operations

Workforce issue	Manager insight (illustrative)	Operational implication
Staff shortages	"We constantly operate with fewer employees than needed."	Increased workload and service pressure
Burnout	"Employees get exhausted quickly and leave after short periods."	High turnover and instability
Skill gaps	"New staff require significant training and supervision."	Reduced efficiency and higher supervision load
Wage competitiveness	"Higher wages help, but do not solve retention problems."	Temporary stabilization without long-term effect
Migration reliance	"Migrant workers fill gaps, but turnover remains high."	Short-term staffing support
Technology adoption	"Digital tools help, but cannot replace human labor."	Partial reduction of workload

Note: The table summarizes key insights derived from qualitative interviews with hotel managers.

Overall, this study demonstrates that workforce shortages in hospitality are shaped by interacting pressures that require coordinated managerial responses. A focus on employee well-being and sustainable workforce practices can contribute to more effective and responsible management in hospitality organizations.

Conclusion and Implications

The study examined workforce-related pressures in hotel operations and showed that staffing difficulties are shaped by several interconnected organizational challenges rather than a single isolated problem. Labor-intensive departments, particularly housekeeping and kitchen operations, reported the highest levels of staffing strain and employee pressure. These difficulties influence not only operational continuity but also employee well-being and service quality within hospitality organizations.

Burnout, skill shortages, and retention problems often develop at the same time and strengthen workforce pressure over time. In many hotels, staffing shortages increase workload intensity, while employee turnover creates additional operational pressure

for remaining staff members. This makes workforce instability a broader organizational issue that may affect multiple departments at the same time.

The analysis also indicates that commonly used management responses – including wage increases, migrant labor recruitment, and digital technologies – mainly provide short-term operational support. Although these measures may reduce immediate staffing pressure, they do not fully address long-term workforce sustainability or employee retention challenges.

From a managerial perspective, the results highlight the importance of improving working conditions, supporting employee development, and reducing excessive workload in labor-intensive departments. Workforce stability should therefore be considered not only an operational priority but also an important component of corporate social responsibility in hospitality management.

The study highlights the importance of employee well-being and stable staffing practices in hotel operations. The results suggest that long-term workforce stability in hospitality depends not only on recruitment efforts but also on working conditions, workload management, and employee retention.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of the study should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is based mainly on managerial perceptions, which may reflect subjective evaluations of workforce conditions and operational challenges. Second, the study applies a cross-sectional design and therefore captures workforce-related issues at a specific period rather than over a longer timeframe. Changes in labor market conditions and organizational practices may influence workforce dynamics differently over time.

Another limitation is related to the sample structure. The research focuses primarily on emerging hospitality markets, which may limit the broader applicability of the findings to hotels operating in different institutional or economic environments. In addition, the study relies mostly on perceptual data rather than objective operational indicators such as turnover rates, absenteeism, or productivity measures.

Future research could expand this analysis by using longitudinal data to examine how workforce pres-

ures evolve over time in hospitality organizations. Comparative studies involving different countries and hotel categories may also provide a broader understanding of workforce instability across hospitality markets. Further research integrating operational performance indicators with employee-related data could help clarify the relationship between staffing pressure, employee well-being, and organizational sustainability in hotel operations.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.T. and A.M.; Methodology, A.T. and A.M.; Software, M.P.; Validation, A.M.; Formal Analysis, A.T. and M.P.; Investigation, A.T.; Data Curation, A.T.; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, A.T.; Writing – Review & Editing, A.M. and M.P.; Visualization, M.P.; Supervision, A.M. and M.P.; Project Administration, M.P.

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