



Research Note

Job characteristics in hospitality occupations

Santiago Melián-González*

TIDES Institute of Tourism and Sustainable Development, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain



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Introduction

There is a wealth of research and proposals on how to improve hospitality businesses (e.g., service quality, customer satisfaction) by influencing employee behavior (Ladkin et al., 2023). Although this depends on the nature of the job, it is common to find research that does not take into account the specific jobs of the employees in their samples. For example, some researchers treat company employees as a whole (Mahmoud et al., 2021), group them into global categories such as service and administration (Chen, 2011), focus on one category of employees (e.g., front-line employees) without considering the different types of jobs they can perform (e.g., front-desk clerks and food servers) (Baradarani & Kilic, 2018), or consider only their education (e.g., Cimbajević et al., 2023). Other research draws conclusions regarding the effects of independent variables (e.g., organizational practices) on employees' behavior without first analyzing the extent to which their job characteristics (e.g., autonomy) allow the behavior (e.g., innovation) to emerge. Thus, Luu (2021) found that innovative work behavior was associated with front desk service, and marketing/sales hotel staff but not with housekeeping, and food and beverage workers.

The importance of job characteristics for firm activity is recognized in management models such as the service-profit chain model (Hogreve et al., 2022). Two important theories in this area are the job characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) and the demand-resources model (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011). The job characteristics theory includes five core job characteristics that can influence workers' attitudes, motivation, and effectiveness. Morgeson and Humphrey (2006) added two additional characteristics. The demand-resources model proposes that jobs can incorporate some resources that help workers deal with job demands while also having a positive effect on workers' motivation. Insufficient job resources can lead to job strain and other negative outcomes. Job resources can be located at different levels (e.g., organizational and task levels). At the task level, job characteristics proposed by the job characteristics theory are included. Table 1 collects information on job characteristics.

* TIDES Institute of Tourism and Sustainable Development, Campus Universitario de Tafira, 35017 Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain.
E-mail address: santiago.melian@ulpgc.es (S. Melián-González).

Table 1
Job characteristics.

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Skill variety | The degree to which a job involves different activities that require the use of different skills. |
| Task identity | The degree to which a job requires completing a whole and identifiable piece of work. |
| Task significance | The degree to which a job has an impact on the lives or work of others. |
| Autonomy | The degree to which a job provides substantial freedom to employees. |
| Job-based feedback | The degree to which carrying out the work provides the employee with performance information. |
| Job complexity | The extent to which the task or job is complex or difficult to perform. |
| Problem-solving | The extent to which the job requires the production of unique solutions. |
| Social characteristics | The extent to which the job involves relationships with others. |

Source: Morgeson and Humphrey (2006).

Research shows that the job characteristics listed in Table 1 have a direct impact on individual variables, such as job satisfaction, work motivation, organizational commitment, job involvement, stress, burnout, role conflict, and job performance (Humphrey et al., 2007).

Studies in the tourism and hospitality industry have shown that job characteristics influence workers' attitudes (Grobelna, 2019), fatigue (Reynolds et al., 2021), creativity (Tsaour et al., 2011), and innovative behaviors (Li & Hsu, 2016). Furthermore, there is evidence (Kuo et al., 2024) that job characteristics play a role in the relationship between different work conditions (e.g., emotional labor) and employee reactions (e.g., job stress).

Eurostat (2022) shows that four out of five individuals employed in the tourism industry work in hospitality. Data on the job characteristics of hospitality occupations are lacking. Therefore, this study attempts to show the extent to which these occupations vary with respect to those job characteristics that theory suggests are relevant to worker attitudes, motivation, and behavior. The behavior of employees in occupations characterized by lower levels of these characteristics may be more difficult to influence with organizational practices.

Methodology

The European Working Conditions Survey of 2015, the European Database of Task Indices of 2021, and the Cedefop European Skills and Jobs Survey of 2014 provide work information based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08) and the Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community, respectively. Hospitality occupations were identified by the combination of occupations and the accommodation and food service economic activity (Fernández-Macías, Hurley, & Bisello, 2016). In this activity, for example, the occupation services and sales workers includes hospitality occupations such as waiters and cooks while the elementary occupations comprise room attendants and fast-food preparers. After examining all the items in these sources and considering their use in other studies (Fernández-Macías, Bisello, et al., 2016), the job characteristics that appear in Table 2 were identified. The data were standardized on a scale of 0 to 1, with 0 representing the lowest possible level of job characteristics and 1 representing the highest possible level. Significant differences were tested using ANOVA.

In order to put the results into context, the number of workers in the accommodation and food service activity was calculated according to the professional nine ISCO-08 major occupational groups based on Eurostat. In 2022, 74.06 % of workers in the accommodation and food service economic activity were service and sales workers (56.88 %) or held elementary occupations (17.18 %).

Results

Table 2 shows the position of the nine occupations on the job characteristics collected in the different datasets. There are significant differences between all of the occupations. Service and sales workers (e.g., waiters, cooks) are always below the overall mean in all job

Table 2
Ranking of occupational groups by job characteristics.

| Job characteristics | Skill variety | | Autonomy | | | Job complexity | | Problem-solving | | | Social characteristics | |
|---|---------------|------|----------|------|---------|----------------|---------|-----------------|------|------|------------------------|--|
| | EWCS | EWCS | CEDEFOP | EDTI | CEDEFOP | EWCS | CEDEFOP | EDTI | EWCS | EDTI | | |
| Managers | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | | |
| Professionals | 5 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 6 | | |
| Technicians and associate professionals | 1 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | | |
| Clerical support workers | 4 | 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 7 | | |
| Service and sales workers | 6 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 8 | 3 | 5 | | |
| Skilled agricultural, forestry, and fishery workers | 9 | 2 | 9 | 2 | 4 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 9 | 3 | | |
| Craft-related trade workers | 2 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 8 | 9 | | |
| Plant and machine operators and assemblers | 7 | 9 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 4 | 4 | 1 | | |
| Elementary occupations | 8 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 8 | | |

EWCS: European Working Conditions Survey 2015.

CEDEFOP: European Skills and Jobs Survey 2014.

EDTI: European Database of Task Indices 2021.

characteristics except for social relationships. In those job characteristics where this occupation is below the global mean, it ranks between six and eight out of nine positions. Elementary occupations (e.g., room attendants, fast food preparers) are always below the overall mean for all job characteristics and appear mostly in the last two positions.

Discussion

Proposals to improve the hospitality industry by changing worker behavior are common. Looking at all occupations, the data show that 74 % of hospitality workers are in occupations characterized by lower levels of most of the job characteristics that the literature suggests are important for worker attitudes and behavior. Thus, global behavior changes in hospitality organizations may not be as easily implemented as some studies suggest. For example, compared to other occupations, occupations such as waiters, room attendants, cooks, kitchen helpers, and fast-food preparers are among those with the lowest levels of autonomy. This job characteristic may be a necessary condition for those proposals that imply that workers behave differently as a result of companies' practices. This is the case for behaviors such as extra-role customer service (Assiouras et al., 2019) or innovative work behavior (Luu, 2021). Similarly, these occupations are also characterized by lower levels of job complexity, problem solving, and skill variety, which may affect worker attitudes such as work engagement and worker energy depletion (Tian et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Job characteristics that are relevant to worker attitudes and behavior vary significantly in hospitality occupations. Therefore, research attempting to influence the behavior and attitudes of hospitality workers should consider their specific occupations or job characteristics as moderator variables. Additionally, job quality is a concerning issue in the hospitality industry. This study provides new insights into the facet of job quality based on work characteristics. Future research could analyze the constraints firms face in improving job characteristics. For example, barriers to job redesign have not been studied in depth.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Santiago Melián-González: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2024.103792>.

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Santiago Melián-González is a Professor of Human Resources at the Institute of Sustainable Tourism and Economic Development (TIDES) of the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. His research focus includes: Automation, Human Resources, Information Technology and the interaction between these concepts. He is focused in the tourism sector.