

Company Project Report

FlyOUT or StayIN: A study about how 4-star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits



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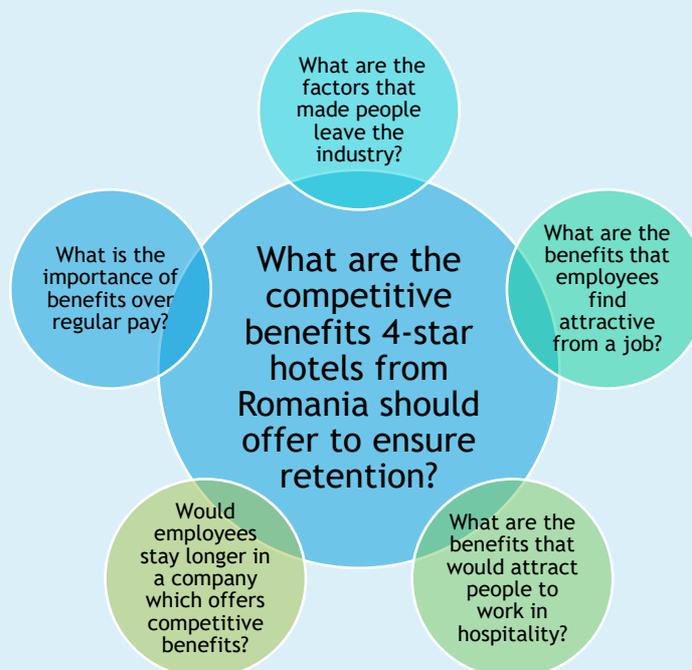
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Executive Summary

Hotel Transilvania is an individual 4-star hotel located in Alba Iulia owned by Florea Grup which rose from the history with a modern twist.

As the labor crisis keeps bringing stress among hospitality leaders making the subject of employee retention a key point on the agenda of every future-oriented business, the study comes as a support for Hotel Transilvania in designing a benefits scheme to ensure retention. Within the past year, the RD department of Hotel Transilvania faced high fluctuations which increased the workload of the employees who stayed.

Using the Design-Based-Research cycle, the context of labor shortages in the hospitality has been defined from which the first hint about the later identified problem was found. Many employees left the industry mainly due to job **Insecurity, poor working conditions, and low wages**. As HT is an individual hotel located in a small, yet rich culture, city in Romania, the challenge is to understand what are the attractive benefits that could be offered to improve the working conditions while ensuring flexibility and a good work-life to keep employees longer within the business. This can be done by providing **attractive benefits** for them and their families while ensuring **flexibility** and a **good work-life balance**. To be able to overcome the labor crisis, HT must succeed in engaging their employees and ensuring long-lasting employability by offering extra benefits next to the regular wage to combat the possibility of leaving. By doing so, the management team aims to reduce turnover, engage its employees, and differentiate from competitors while providing an attractive workplace. With the goal of the client in mind, the main research question has been designed and placed at the core of the research along with the 5 sub-questions that support the in-depth understanding of the problem.



Through the literature review, the context of the problem within the Romanian market has been clearly defined through an industry outlook. The outlook reflects the importance of recognition through financial and non-financial benefits to slowly combat the shortage. The importance of benefits above regular pay has been also analyzed as many agree with the statement "money cannot buy happiness" but through recognition,

employers can contribute to their employees' happiness. Studies have revealed the differences between two types of rewards, extrinsic and intrinsic, and the importance of a perfect blend between the two for better retention. As the needs of every generation are different, the attractiveness of the industry has been broken down into the 3 most important generations in the workforce: Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z. Based on the needs of these generations, and the identified needs of Hotel Transilvania employees, a trend analysis has been done in the appendix to highlight the most important criteria to consider when designing a benefit plan. After preliminary discussions with field experts and employees, the evidence gathered has highlighted the importance of offering compelling benefits to ensure retention and industry attractiveness.

To comprehend the issue and determine how HT could raise employee engagement levels and make the workplace more attractive, exploratory research was used to gather the primary qualitative data. Qualitative data examines and reflects the range of human emotions and perspectives, which is essential for subjects as engagement and professional fulfillment (Dudovski, 2016). The study encompassed field observations and a focus group alongside 12 semi-structured interviews as measuring instruments for comprehensive data gathering. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they provide comparable and reliable data while allowing for follow-up questions, providing detailed information about employee benefits and retention. The interviews took place either in person or digitally and the participants were employees from HT or alike hotels within Romania. To identify the root cause of employee turnover, 2 former employees were contacted to participate in a semi-structured interview however only 1 was possible due to personal circumstances. To ensure data validity and gather more in-depth field knowledge, 2 experts' interviews took place which highlighted the importance of benefits and appreciation as the hospitality industry is struggling to retain and attract talent. The focus group with the management team had the purpose to ensure the feasibility of the solution, as initially the management team seemed to be resistant to change due to the extra cost involved.

Based on the information gathered from the former employee, her main reasons were **intense schedule, no room for progression and poor working conditions**. According to her, companies within the hospitality should offer more **money-related benefits, vouchers, or discounts** for different services such as coffee, groceries or movie, gym discounts or subscription, a **career development plan, more free time, private insurance, and personal recognition** if they want to enhance industry attractiveness.

From the interviews with employees of HT, a difference of the benefits offered has been observed. Some mentioned that they received personal courtesies such as flowers for their birthday or paid extra hours, while others never had the same benefit from the company. This suggested that the company is making differences between departments or individuals, and they lack consistency in the offered benefits. Many interviewees stated the **importance of having benefits** besides the regular salary however most of the times, the benefit scheme is not tailored to their needs (FO Employee Rozmarin Hotel, 2023). Having a complex benefit scheme would encourage all the interviewees to stay longer in a company. **To ensure retention, 4-star hotels from Romania should include in their benefit scheme the following: financial benefits (bonuses, vouchers, discounts), health related benefits such as private medical insurance or therapist, lifestyle benefits including movie tickets and gym, but also more days off based on seniority, regular benefits at work such as meals and career development opportunities along with intrinsic rewards.**

When talking about the aspects that make employees stay, the GM of Rozmarin Hotel elaborated more on aspects related to the **open and fair behavior of the managers regarding how the employees are treated** while the GM of Aura Unirii highlighted the importance of bonuses and appreciation gestures, through tangible and intangible ways. Even though every hotel has its own internal policy, there are some benefits that are commonly met such as **meal tickets, discounts in the restaurant and hotel, uniforms** etc.

The HR experts highlighted the importance of both type of rewards as "employee motivation and rewards can benefit from both monetary and non-monetary incentives". According to them, the most attractive benefits employees are looking for are **bonuses** of any kind, **private health insurance, paid time off and wellness benefits**. Moreover, the experts shared valuable insights about the implementation process and monitoring of the benefit plan.

After discussing the two possible solutions to the identified problem in a **focus group** with the management team, the final solution has been approved: **A benefit guide under the form of a brochure along with a benefit platform on which employees can opt for certain benefits while having a set monthly budget offered by a 3-rd party, Sodexo.** The benefit guide will empower employees to make their own choices and choose the benefits that fit their needs. Through this, employees will feel more motivated and appreciated at work thus will be inclined to **stay longer** in the company **improving the retention rate.**



Measuring the success of a benefit plan might be hard to be determined however the perspective of the evaluation should be oriented towards the goals of the implementation rather on the ROI. A before & after employee benefit plan survey will be used to assess employee satisfaction with the current and the new benefit plan. This will highlight their satisfaction and the retention potential. According to the expert interviews, it is crucial to measure the success of the benefit plan through various methods, thus some KPIs have been selected. Some of the most important ones refer to the usage of a benefit, level of participation, employee retention and engagement. To have a clear overview of the solution success, a before & after employee benefits survey will be used to assess the differences over one year period.

Preface

Within the last part of the Hotelschool The Hague journey, students are stepping into the most significant milestone for launching their careers (LYCar). During LYCar, students are requested to deliver 3 written components, the LYCar Proposal, Company Project, and Career portfolio, and to complete an internship related to their future career plans. The company project is the full research based on the DBR cycle when a feasible solution is fully designed and ready for implementation based on the previous market research and analysis. This will serve the interest of the client and was finalized during the last block of LYCar.

During the minor “Future of Work” I discovered my passion for human resources as I have always been oriented towards people. As I always dreamt about coming back home and improve the tourism industry in Romania, I could not think about a better commissioner than my first internship company, Hotel Transilvania. The research topic links to my future career plans as it falls under the umbrella of employee retention with a focus on the hospitality industry. The report analyses what are the means in the form of competitive benefits which Hotel Transilvania and any other 4-star hotel from Romania could offer to their employees to ensure retention. There is no news about the challenging working conditions and poor wages in the industry, however, the report aims to highlight the importance of offering attractive benefits to ensure retention in the 24/7 industry with a smile.

As my goal was to provide a complex benefit scheme to not only increase retention but also work satisfaction, I decided to not only focus on Hotel Transilvania but to also analyze other alike hotels to try to contribute on a bigger scale as I wanted to inspire as many as possible to take care of their human resource.

I would like to thank my coach, Mr. Fagel for his unconditional support and guidance and for his open and entrepreneurial mindset which challenged me to find my answers and helped me to see the bigger picture.

Also, I would like to thank Florea Grup SRL and the whole team from Hotel Transilvania for allowing me to research such a delicate subject of the industry for their hotel. Without their availability and openness, friendliness, and support, the research could not offer such a broad overview of the topic and the importance of the subject would have faded.

Another thank you goes to my placement coordinator, Ms. Apswoude, for her flexibility while assisting me with fast replies for signing the placement contract. Her genuine interest in helping students has helped me to secure the deal right before the Christmas holiday.

Furthermore, I would like to thank all the HR experts and all the hospitality valuable human resources who participated in my research for sharing valuable information from the field.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and my fiancée, who supported me through the whole journey and motivated me to stay curious and dive deeper into the subject.

The journey is yet to be continued.

Yours sincerely,
Bianca Popa

List of Abbreviations

CS	Competitors Set
ER	Employee Retention
F&B	Food & Beverage
FO	Front Office
GM	General Manager
HQ	Headquarters
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resources Management
HSK	Housekeeping
HT	Hotel Transilvania
IT	Information technology
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
L&D	Learning and Development
MGT	Management Team
MRQ	Main Research Question
PLO	Program Learning Outcome
PTO	Paid time off
RD	Rooms Division
ROI	Return on Investment
RON	Romanian currency
RQ	Research question

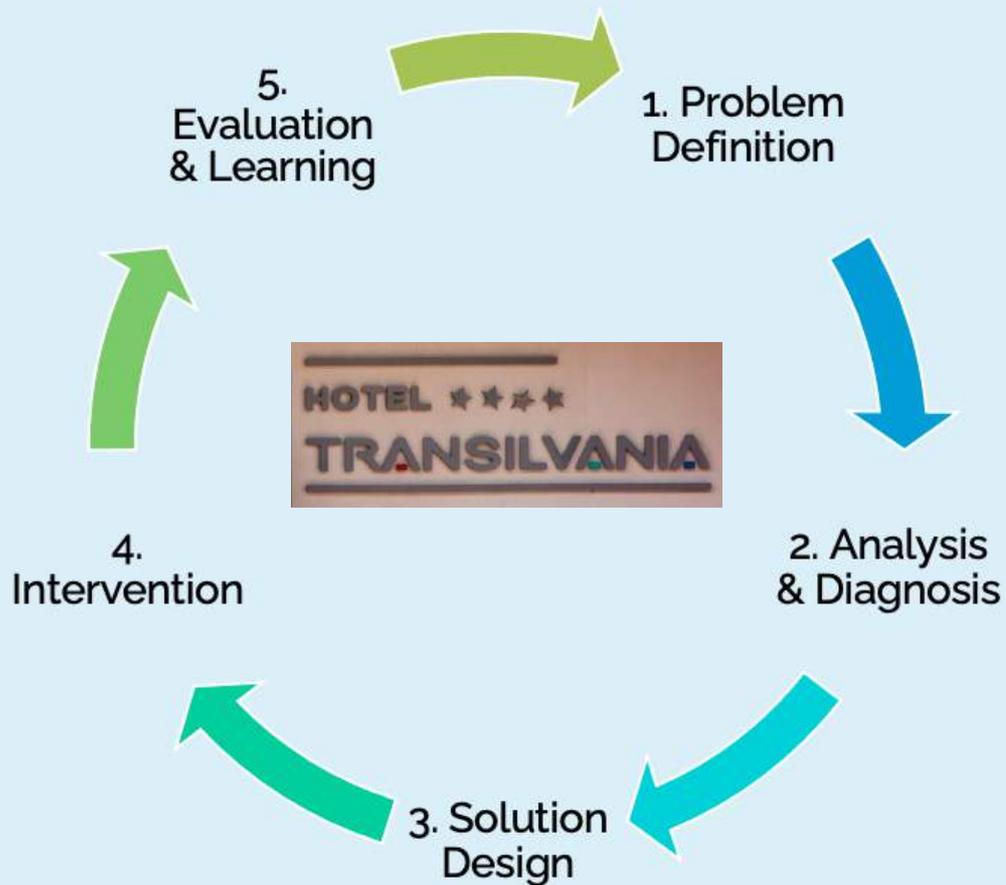
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For this research, the *Design-Based Research Cycle* has been used to properly define the context of the problem, analyze its root cause using the 4 types of sources which eventually are leading to the solution design. After a well underpinned solution, the implementation plan and evaluation will be discussed to overcome the current challenge that *Hotel Transilvania* is facing.



1 Problem definition

1.1 Company Introduction



Figure 1 - Hotel Transilvania(Hotel Transilvania, 2023)

Hotel Transilvania has been an essential part of the town's history since 1972 as it lived and grew through all the stories told by passers-by. In 2013, HT was acquired by Florea Grup SRL, a local business founded in 1996 by two brothers. The group has a large pool of expertise as it started in the oil industry and then expanded into public transportation through a taxi company, concrete, asphalt, and pavements production. Currently, the company owns two hotels located in Alba Iulia, Hotel Astoria, and HT. The old-style popularity of HT has been transformed into prestige and some old elements have been kept preserving the rich history of the location. Today, the new style establishment welcomes guests from all around the world to continue the storytelling (Hotel Transilvania, 2022).

As part of Florea Grup SRL, HT operates with a hierarchy structure, with managers at the top and other employees at the bottom. The administrative departments, such as HR and finance, are located at the HQ, while only operational managers and the GM are on-site at HT. (see app 8.1)

Through their excellent service and amiable staff, the company hopes to establish Alba Iulia as one of the top tourist attractions in Romania. The company began as a family-run enterprise, and because of the owners' conviction that success comes only through a combination of tenacity and hard work, it now employs over 500 people. The company's ideals are primarily driven by passion, and without solid relationships with its employees, today's success would not be possible (Aldea, 2022).

1.2 Context

It is generally accepted that hotels with the same star qualifications should have roughly the same standards. Even though each hotel is entitled to design its own internal rules and regulations, general guidelines exist to ensure consistency in the industry. HT is a 4-star hotel; thus, the researcher investigated the similarities of other 4-star hotels to establish some patterns. As the labor crisis and the poor working conditions are aspects that are generally impacting hotels globally, the researcher not only limits the study to HT but is extended to other similar hotels from Romania.

Covid-19 has affected the most the HI not only in Romania but worldwide. Many hotels have been forced to lay off some of their employees to reduce costs in their fight for survival. When the hotels slowly started to recover, a lot of employees that were on furlough reconsidered their domain of activity due to **job insecurity**, **poor working conditions**, and **low wages** (Pescaru, 2021). In 2020, there were approximately 212,000 workers in the HI in Romania (Statista Research Department, 2022) however, the pandemic forced the owners of hospitality businesses to postpone around 119,983 employment contracts (Statista, 2020) leaving roughly 167,480 workers in the field at the end of the pandemic. The industry's **challenging working hours**, including night shifts and working on weekends and holidays, and the increase in emotional labor, where employees are expected to provide "a service with a smile" regardless of their emotions, have contributed to the desire to leave the industry (Kogovsek and Kogovsek, 2023).



Figure 2 - (Inc, 2023)

Wages in HI are widely known to be among the lowest in the world. To ensure durable employability during the current labor crisis, hotels must compensate their workers with extra benefits (Werner and Balkin, 2021). The labor shortage in the industry is not solely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as the sector has been facing shortages for a longer period, operating at full capacity with fewer staff (Leadcontent, 2022). In an interview, Dragos Petrescu, a local entrepreneur and owner of the restaurant chain "City Grill," stated that many talented workers are leaving Romania for Western Europe, where they initially receive a better salary. However, in reality, the cost of living is higher, and the salary is nearly the same (WORKINGMARKETAGENCY, 2018).

Maslow has designed the pyramid of human needs. Based on that model, the consultant Dorin Bodea attempts to design the pyramid of the values of Romanian employees (Hauser, 2014). The last mentioned aims to highlight the importance of **financial remuneration** and **good working conditions** alongside **job security**, **freedom**, and occupational safety which are equivalent to the basic needs from the main pyramid. A

corporation can take a wide range of steps to ensure the basic needs of its employees by positioning **good working conditions** and **decent financial remuneration** at the base of the pyramid.



Figure 3 - Maslow's Pyramid

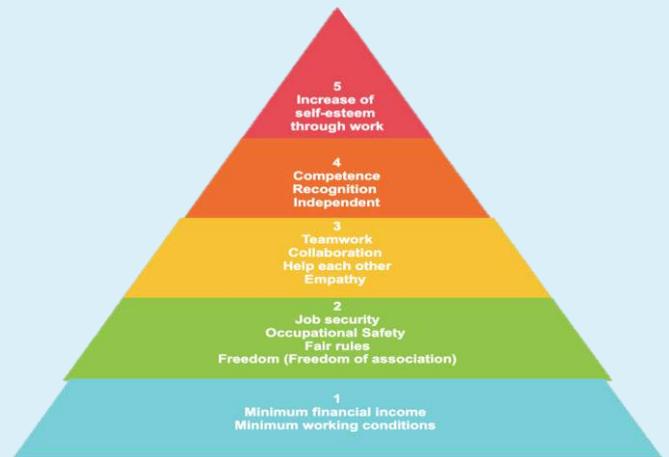


Figure 4 - Hierarchy of work needs

According to a study conducted for LHoA on the same subject, local employees are interested in perks including mental health, well-being, bike rental discounts, and travel discounts (Popa, 2022). Many people may assume that because the study was done in the same sector, Romanian employees would look for similar benefits. In contrast, Romanians place great importance on **recognition** and **personal growth** in addition to **financial rewards** (romaniainsider, 2010).

As Hofstede determined the needs and behaviors of individual countries, he describes Romanians as a society where the quality of life is a sign of success and incentives such as **free time** and **flexibility** are highly valued (Hofstede, 2022). In a culture with high uncertainty avoidance, there is an emotional need for rules, time signifies money, people have an inner urge to be busy and work hard while **security** is an important element for individual motivation (ibid). Job security has been hardly affected by Covid-19, especially within the hospitality sector and flexibility was rarely accepted which determined a lot of workers to rethink their career path.

1.3 Urgency of research

As HT is an individual hotel located in a small, yet rich culture, city in Romania, the current challenge is to manage to keep the employees longer within the business. This can be done by providing **attractive benefits** for them and their families while ensuring **flexibility** and a **good work-life balance**. To be able to overcome the labor crisis, HT must succeed in engaging their employees and ensuring long-lasting employability by offering extra benefits next to the regular wage to combat the possibility of leaving.

Last year, the RD department at HT experienced high turnover, with all receptionists and over half of the housekeeping team leaving their jobs, according to the FO Manager (Tat, 2022). An informal conversation with the former FO Manager, currently on maternity leave, revealed that some employees left their jobs because their manager was also leaving, or for better-paid jobs as this employment was seen more as a mid-way position rather than their dream job. Current benefits at HT include breakfast for early shift, employees' parties for Christmas/Easter, payment for extra hours, movie nights (occasionally during weekends), and scheduling flexibility (Tat, 2022). To attract a wider pool of talent, the HI must provide good working conditions and benefits, as many employees are currently considering better paid and more convenient job opportunities.

In the following, two scenarios are presented. The first scenario is an outlook of how the situation will look if there is no change in the approach of 4-star hotels in Romania. The second scenario oversees the desired situation if the strategy is adjusted, and the needs of the employees are addressed.

Current outlook if the strategy is not changed



Figure 5

Desired outlook



Figure 6

1.4 Research question

Considering the factors, the following preliminary research question has been formulated: **How 4-star hotels from Romania can ensure employee retention through competitive benefits?**

This aspect is indispensable for the hotel business because many employees are leaving due to challenging **working hours** and **low wages** (see current outlook) as benefits are not extremely attractive and adapted to their needs. This is because many hotels have a list of general benefits, but employees are not fully aware of to what extent those benefits are accessible or are not attractive for a certain age group (Council, 2018; Renz, 2019). Additionally, other competitive industries such as retail are offering more attractive benefits and higher salaries with a more flexible schedule which determines employees within the HI to switch their jobs (Bhattarai and Penman, 2023). HT aspires to be a top employer by fostering a pleasant workplace that enhances productivity. By emphasizing a sense of belonging, they seek to make every employee feel at home even at work, and boost retention.

Since extra information has been discovered during informal discussions with the employees and acquaintances, the main RQ has been adjusted to narrow its focus on one of the main interests of the employees in the Romanian market, the benefits offered by an employer.



Figure 7 - Final MRQ

To determine what are the most attractive benefits for all generations and how 4-star hotels from Romania can change their job offers, the following sub-questions have emerged:

Sub-questions:

1. What are the **factors that made people leave the industry?**
2. What are the **benefits that employees find attractive** from a job?
3. What are the **benefits that would attract people to work in hospitality?**
4. Would employees **stay longer** in a company that **offers competitive benefits?**
5. What is the **importance of benefits over regular pay?**

These sub-questions arose during discussions with the staff of the hotel and with soon-to-be graduates with an interest in following a career in the HI. Furthermore, when doing due diligence on the subject, the sub-topic of employee benefits and the importance of understanding individual needs were identified in most articles. As HT has employees from all generations, the study was focused on finding the middle point of all their needs.

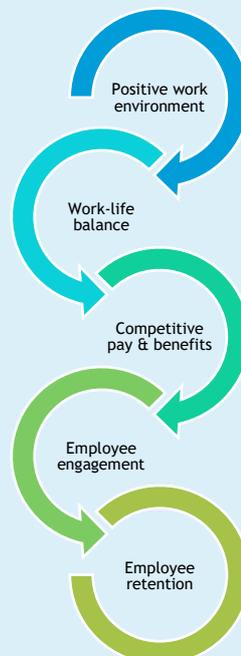
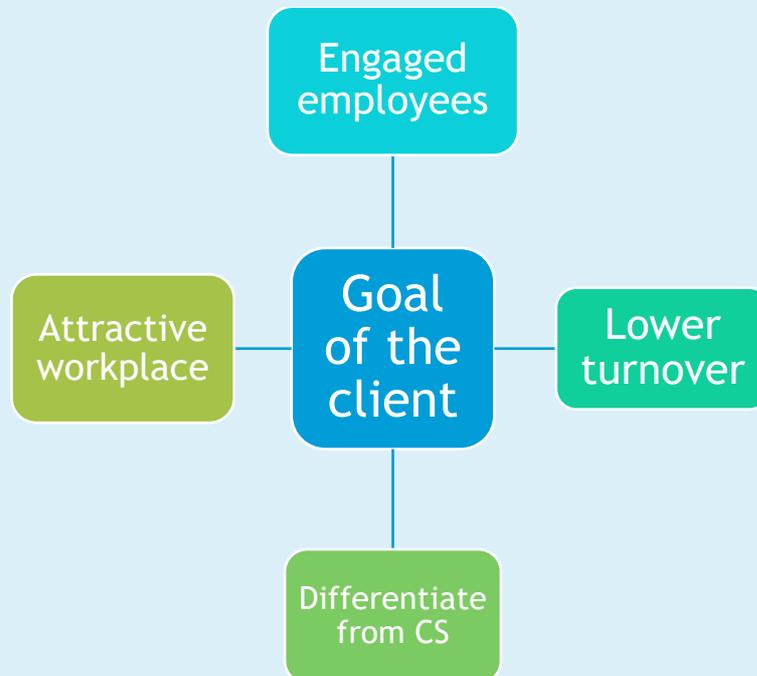


Figure 8 - Conceptual framework

1.5 The goal of the research



The report aims to find a solution that will help HT and other 4-star hotels from Romania to keep their employees longer and to make the HI more attractive for workers through employee benefits.

The scope is to gain a holistic view of the employment market in the HI in Romania and to determine the motivating factors for employees, divided by generations. This will support the overall goal of making the workplace attractive and it will cater the needs of individual employees, instead of the mass.

1.6 Link to PLO

The report has been written within the framework of **PLO 6 - Strategic Hospitality Management & Change**, where the trends inside and outside the HI are identified and analyzed to be later transformed into a strategy or related policies that are aligned with the vision of the organization (Hotelschool The Hague, 2022).

As secondary guidance, **PLO 8 - Leadership & People** has been followed as the HRM policies of HT have been analyzed in terms of benefits and working conditions while having the final goal to improve an individual's work environment (ibid).

2 Analysis and diagnosis

The researched topic falls under the umbrella of ER as the end goal is to understand to what extent competitive employee benefits can ensure retention. To understand the importance of retention, an industry outlook has been analyzed in terms of the current labor crisis within the industry, the importance of benefits over regular pay, and the hospitality market attractiveness. Preliminary discussions have revealed several tendencies related to the benefits, which are then defined with relevant articles. (See app 8.3). To fully understand the faced challenge, a broader analysis of the topic of ER is done. The outcomes of the preliminary interviews are briefly described followed by a conclusion of the findings.



2.1 Literature review

2.1.1 Industry Outlook

Labor crisis in hospitality

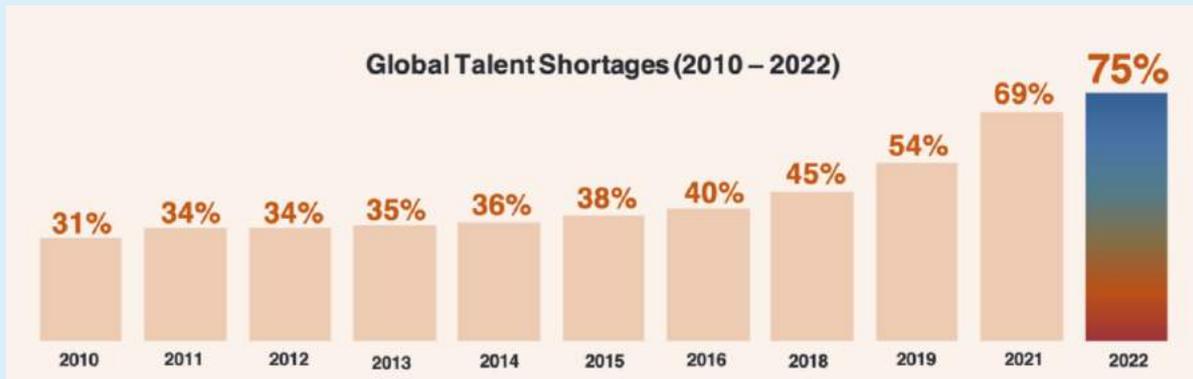


Figure 9- Global Talent Shortages reach 16-year-high(ManpowerGroup, 2022)

Addressing the issue of **low salaries** and **poor working conditions** is crucial to retaining employees and attracting new talent to the hospitality industry in Romania (Ghani et al., 2022). Without a change in approach, the labor shortages in the sector are likely to persist and even worsen over time (Hotrec, 2022). Offering competitive salaries, flexible working hours, and opportunities for career advancement are all measures that can be taken to improve employee satisfaction and retention (El-Said and Aziz, 2022). Additionally, providing non-financial benefits such as employee training programs, health and wellness programs, and recognition and rewards programs can also contribute to a positive workplace culture and improve employee morale (Workhuman editorial team, 2023). By prioritizing the needs of their employees, hospitality businesses in Romania can become more attractive employers and build a sustainable workforce for the future.

Importance of benefits above the regular pay

As “money cannot buy happiness”, from a business perspective, money alone cannot ensure long-lasting employee engagement. As seen in the above pyramid of needs, **recognition** is a human being basic need. Employees need work appreciation. Consequently, their level of productivity and engagement rise as these aspects are interdependent (Wickham, 2022). There are two types of rewards, **extrinsic**, referring to those external rewards such as **pay raises, bonuses, and benefits** and **intrinsic**, pending internal rewards such as **autonomy, social interaction, and personal development**. According to many employees from HT, the balance is more inclined to intrinsic rewards as they are encouraged to take initiative and colleagues are seen more like friends. This suggests the **need of more attractive extrinsic benefits** to appreciate the qualitative services provided by employees. A new law adopted on January 2023 implies salary raises for the minimum wage within all industries, creating a sense of urgency for hotels to offer compelling benefits to differentiate from CS in the talent war (Guvernul Romaniei, 2022).



Figure 10 - Source: Instagram Business Fact

Hospitality labor market attractiveness

The ability to attract, motivate and retain employees is crucial for businesses to survive in today's competitive market (Turban and Greening, 1997), especially for industries with high customer interaction and labor-intensive service sectors such as the HI which rely on its employees to provide outstanding and unforgettable experiences (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2015). The **low wages, challenging working hours, and job insecurity** are the main factors that make the field unattractive for employees of all ages (LO and Lamm, 2005). Generational differences can play a significant role in how employees perceive their work and what they seek from their jobs. For example, **Gen Z** workers, who are currently entering the workforce, tend to prioritize **work-life balance, flexibility, and meaningful work** (Kapuściński et al., 2022). **Millennials**, on the other hand, tend to prioritize **job security, opportunities for professional growth, and a healthy work-life balance** (McKay, 2017). An overview of the wants of the generations currently in the workplace has been displayed below. For the scope of the research, Baby Boomers have not been considered as the majority are slowly retiring.

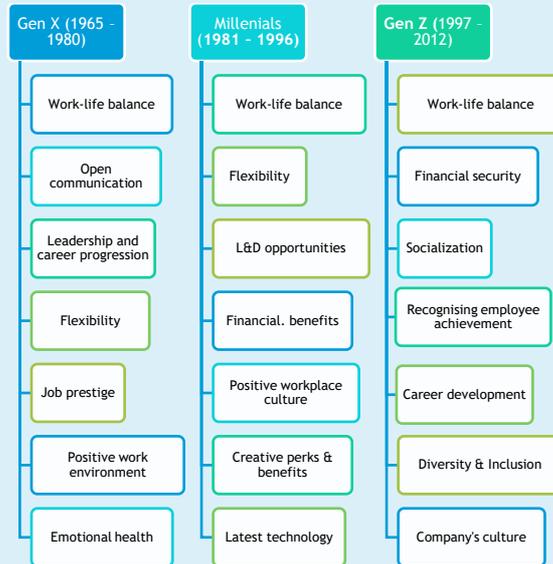


Figure 11 - Generation's workplace wants (PhD Brower, 2022; Mearian, 2022; The World of HR, 2022; CPRW, 2022; Kapuściński et al., 2022)

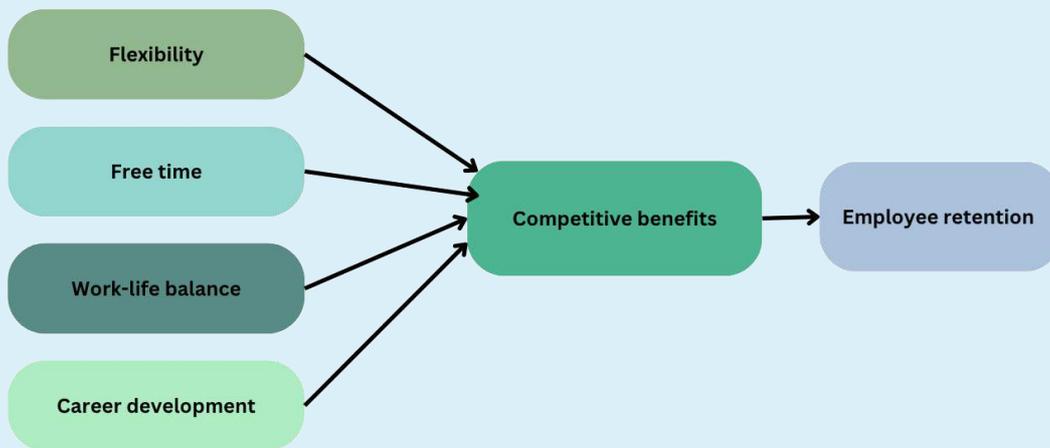


Figure 12 - 2nd Conceptual Framework based on the trend analysis from App 8.3

2.1.2 Main challenge

Based on the literature analysis and discussions with HR specialists, besides the challenge of finding the necessary talent, the hospitality industry struggles to keep its workforce to move to other industries.

The main challenge of HT will be to find the success recipe to retain its employees longer. For a favorable outcome, the recipe needs to find the middle point between the needs of all generations to ensure satisfaction and retention.



Figure 13 - General turnover rates(Hansen, 2023)

2.1.3 Employee Retention

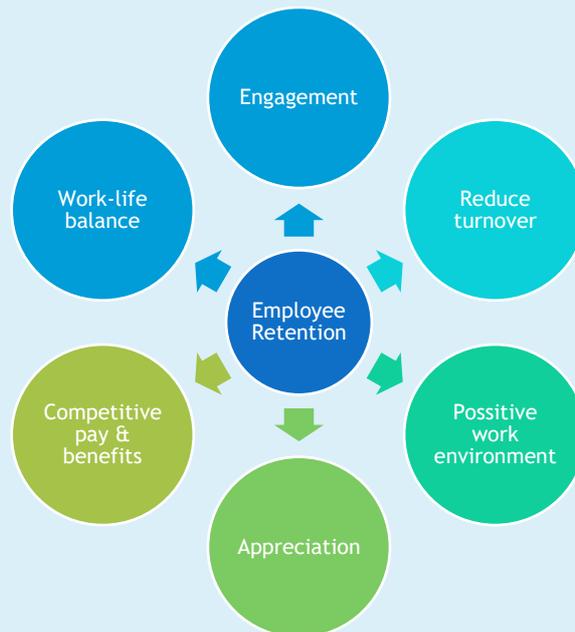


Figure 14 - Employee retention framework

One of the key themes for 2023 is ER and engagement (Frohwein, 2022). According to McKeown, each manager's definition of staff retention may vary depending on the organization's culture, owners' perspectives, or both (2021; Campbell, 2022). While a student from the University of Wisconsin and Kaur define ER as the degree to which employees are kept within an organization, CFI defines retention as the actions taken by an employer to foster a positive work environment while meeting their employees' needs to retain the talented and productive employees. (2022; Panoch, 2001; 2017). ER has the aim to satisfy both stakeholders, the employees and the employer fostering good working conditions which will contribute to the overall profit of the organization. A study on the impact of compensation on ER has proven that there is a significant relationship between the two, suggesting that the more compensated the employees are, the longer they will stay in an organization (Michael et al., 2016)

2.1.4 Outcome of preliminary discussions and field observations

During the 1st meeting with the client, some key information about the hotel has been gathered. To get an insight of the employee’s feelings during working hours, the method of field observations has been used. As all the employees were familiar with the research, some interaction took place during the observations. For a full transcript of the observations, refer to App 8.5.



Summary of observations 9th of December 2022 Early shift 09:00 - 12:00

Table 1 - Summary of observations

Keep on doing	Improve
Positive team atmosphere	Only 1 meal during Early shift -> late shift no meal
Friendly & polite guest interactions	Many extra hours -> Long shifts
2-way feedback: manager<->employee	Career Development
Payment for extra hours	Flexible schedule
Christmas/Easter employees party	Financial benefits
Departmental recognition	Autonomy & Recognition

On the 16th of January 2023 during the early shift, another meeting took place with the FO Manager. The vibe of the reception was not as positive as before and the employees seemed stressed as they had a lot of extra tasks even though the hotel seemed quiet.



A summary of the most relevant similarities between Spain and Romania, following the online interview with Dori Rueda, HR Manager, Le Meridien, Spain is presented below. The full analysis of the interview is analyzed in Chapter 2.3.

Table 2 - Key takeaways HR specialist interview

What are the factors which made people leave the industry?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor conditions • Tough schedules • Low wages
How to make the HI more attractive?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer good working conditions • Recognition (money benefits) • Promote internally • Flexible schedules
What are the benefits that would attract people to work in hospitality?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money benefits (incentives or 13th salary) • Career Development Plan • Discounts (Family & Friends for hotel stays & restaurants) • Free time • Social benefits (ex: team building, language classes, fitness)

2.1.5 Conclusions

As the academic literature and the information gathered from practitioners and stakeholders has revealed the importance of competitive benefits on top of the regular wages, this represents an opportunity for HT and other alike 4-star hotels from Romania to improve its current benefit scheme to differentiate from the CS while ensuring retention. The broad topic of retention has many branches that must be considered when designing the perfect benefit scheme as everything is interrelated and cannot succeed without all the required ingredients. Being in the HI might impose a weakness on its own, as flexibility is not one of its strong points, however, if efforts are made, a closer to reality offer can be shown as a sign to appreciation for the employees.

2.2 Methodology

Desired outcome: Design a solution that will help Hotel Transilvania and potentially other 4-star hotels to ensure long lasting employment and good working conditions while differentiating the business from the CS.

To comprehend the issue and determine how HT could raise employee engagement levels and make the workplace more attractive, exploratory research was used to gather the primary qualitative data collection. Qualitative data examines and reflects the range of human emotions and perspectives, which is essential for subjects as engagement and professional fulfillment (Dudovskiy, 2016). Participants can respond freely using qualitative techniques in exploratory research, which frequently results in insightful, unexpected, and detailed responses (Makri and Neely, 2021).

The focus of the research was to find out the underlying reasons that make people leave the HI and what are the most attractive benefits that would make the field more attractive. The information about the most attractive benefits was later utilized to design a solution which helps HT and potentially other 4-star hotels to increase ER.

For the study, a qualitative data collection method was selected with semi-structured interviews as main measuring instrument over the quantitative methods of survey. This approach is more suitable for identifying human needs in exploratory research compared to quantitative methods, which rely on numerical data and larger sample sizes. (Hammarberg et al., 2016). The study also employed field observations and focus groups alongside semi-structured interviews as measuring instruments for comprehensive data gathering. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they provide comparable and reliable data while allowing for follow-up questions, providing detailed information about employee benefits and retention.

To protect the confidentiality of HT's 30 employees, their names were kept confidential throughout the study. To ensure accuracy and reliability, key takeaways from interviews and field observations were systematically summarized and analyzed, and then discussed with employees at different times to ensure consistency. Interviews with employees from similar 4-star hotels in Romania were conducted to validate the study's reliability and possible implementation for the entire population. The study was further validated through interviews with HR industry experts, who shared stories about best practices in the field. Finally, a focus group session was held to present the findings and analyze potential solutions based on the gathered information.

2.2.1 Population & Sampling Methods

Table 3 - Sampling methods

Population	Sample size	Sampling method	Participants	Goal
Employees of HT Field observations & information obtained during informal conversations	5	Convenience sampling	The employees that were on shift during the observation's timeframe	To collect general data about the work environment, team collaboration, and employee engagement.
Employees of HT (Or similar hotels nearby if not possible) Semi-structured interviews	9	Convenience sampling	FO employees FO Manager Hotel Managers F&B employees	To gain insights about the work environment, the offered benefits, and the desired benefits
Former employees of HT Semi-structured interview	1	Purposive sampling	Former FO employee	To understand why people are leaving the hotel and what elements could attract them back to the industry
HR Directors Expert interview	2	Convenience sampling	Dori Rueda + HR Manager Radisson Blue	To validate the data gathered from the observations and the discussion with the employees from HT
Employees of HT Focus group	3	Purposive sampling	MGT	To gather ideas for the design of the most suitable and feasible solutions

2.2.2 Data Collection & Analysis

To present the process of data collection, a timeline with the main aspects has been exposed below.

For the analysis of the data, for most interviews related to the benefits offered in the industry and the ideal situation, the color-code method has been used to divide the benefits into categories for a better overview of what should be included in the solution. As the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, some categories have been defined in the table to capture a broader analysis.

In some interviews, such as the experts' ones, the process of color coding has been more difficult as the information does not fit the patterns and it was more related to the general practices of HR, however the key aspects that are supporting the sub-questions of the research and MRQ are analyzed in the results chapter.

Gathering of preliminary data
17th of November
till 13th of
January

As part of this research, the two meetings with the client provided preliminary information. The researcher also conducted field observations to collect general data about the work environment and validate notes with the Front Office manager. In addition, a first interview with a former employee was conducted to understand the reasons for leaving. However, a second interview with another former employee was not possible due to schedule incompatibility and personal circumstances.

The first interview with the HR Manager from Le Meridien, Spain (App 8.8) validated the literature review.

An interview guide (app. 8.7) was prepared in advance to ensure professionalism.

Interviews 15th of
January till 28th
of March

Interviews within Hotel Transilvania

To fully understand the needs of HT employees, 6 interviews took place internally on the premises which were recorded on the spot along with taking notes. The interviews were conducted in Romanian as the employees felt more comfortable and then it was directly transcribed in English by using the recordings. (App. 8.9 to 8.14) Each employee shared their personal needs and they have been grouped into age groups to establish patterns.

Interviews with employees from 2 other hotels in different cities

To enhance the reliability of the study, employees from similar hotels in Bucharest and Predeal were interviewed to gather multiple perspectives and understand the differences in operations. The study included three interviews, two with employees in operational roles such as FO and F&B, and one with a hotel manager (refer to App 8.16 to 8.18). While all interviews followed the same guide, each was personalized based on the conversation flow.

Interview with Manager from Aura Unirii (4-star hotel in the same area)

An in-person interview was conducted with the hotel and restaurant manager of another 4-star hotel in the same city to compare working conditions locally and assess the relevance of the data. The new hotel was considered a relevant competitor of HT. The manager's perspective was sought to understand the importance of employee retention and identify best practices to enhance it. (App. 8.15.)

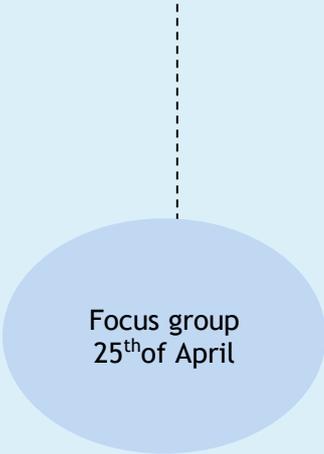
HR Expert - HR Manager Radisson Blu

After all the interviews with the hotel personnel were done, a final interview with an HR specialist took place to validate the gathered information. By occupying an HR managing position in a recently opened hotel, the HR Manager from Radisson Blu provided valuable insights for the research (App. 8.19)

Desk research and
data analysis
29th of March till
15th of April

Desk research and analysis of data was then conducted to compare the data from the interviews with the literature. This was done to comprehend the identify problem thoroughly and identify possible solutions.

Research has been done to define ways of analyzing qualitative data in quantitative ways to identify patterns.



Focus group
25th of April

After the analysis of the data through color coding, graphs and definition of patterns, a meeting with the Management team of Hotel Transilvania was scheduled to present the results, get feedback, and improve the possible solution. Due to location differences, the meeting took place on zoom (App 8.20).

2.2.3 Ethical Data Management Considerations

The interviews were held voluntarily, and the interviewees were entitled to withdraw at any time. The identity of the interviewees will be kept confidential to not expose or harm their position, while the identity of the specialists will either be public or confidential, depending on their requests. Before the interviews, the context of the research was explained to clarify the scope of the participation. Prior to data collection, to ensure all the privacy criteria, a data management form was uploaded, and all the participants were asked to sign the ethics & informed consent form. All interview transcriptions were uploaded as a separate document on Intranet.

2.2.4 Limitations

The convenience sample may not fully represent the population due to age variations and a small sample size. To ensure representativeness, at least one person from each of the two age groups of interest was interviewed. However, since some interviewees are familiar with the researcher, results may be biased due to confirmation bias. The 12 interviews were time-consuming and results are difficult to verify for the entire population, so an HR expert was consulted for validation.

2.2.5 Feasibility

As most information was obtained from employees in entry-level or middle-level positions within 4-star hotels, the interviews with industry experts and hotel managers regarding the needs of the employees highlighted the feasibility of implementation of the identified benefits. By using a semi-structured interview approach, the gathered information was cross-checked with practitioners to also ensure its validity.

2.3 Results

2.3.1 Results obtained through observations, informal conversations, and client meetings

During field observations, intrinsic rewards such as a diploma with the most smiling department has been observed at the FO. The vibe at work seemed to be casual and friendly which supports the statement of the interviewees. Even though the new FO Manager has obtained free breakfast for the early shift, things have not changed much in the past 2 years. The informal conversations with the employees on shift revealed the differences between F&B and FO. While FO employees are paid for extra hours, the F&B staff, who usually has over 60h, claims that they are not paid. During the first meeting with the client, an intro about the offered

benefits have been offered and a table with those is displayed below along with the attractive benefits mentioned during observations and other discussions.

Offered benefits	Free breakfast
	Employee’s party
	Paid extra hours (for FO)
	Flexible schedule
	Small gifts for Christmas this year
	Free pool access
	Discount in restaurant for family&friends
Attractive benefits	Flexibility
	Career development
	Work-life balance
	Free time / PTO
	13 th salary or any financial benefits
	Private health insurance
	Discounts at partner organizations

Table 4 - preliminary results

2.3.2 Results obtained during interview with former employee of HT

Due to personal circumstances, only one interview with a formal employee took place. She used to work in **reception** at HT for about 4 months and **decided to leave mainly due to schedule** as her personal plans were not considered and the **work hours were very intense**. The secondary reasons for leaving were related to **career development** as there was **no room for progression** and the **poor working conditions** as no meals were assured and working 24h shifts was too much for her. This type of schedule made it very difficult for her to enjoy her **free time**. Even though she mentioned that the vibe with the colleagues was great and from time to time they were receiving **verbal appreciation** such as “good job” but they were not weighting that much anymore. She felt unappreciated because the words became common and no bonuses were given regardless of the amount of effort put in, to make her stay longer, or at least considering staying, the company should provide a **better schedule**, a meal per shift, **incentives for holidays** and **more time off**. According to her, companies within HI should offer more **money-related benefits, vouchers, or discounts** for different services such as coffee, groceries or movie, gym discounts or subscription, a **career development plan, more free time, private insurance, and personal recognition**. By offering these types of benefits, HI would be a more attractive industry to work in.

2.3.3 Results obtained during interviews with 4-star hotels employees

Table 5 - Interview results

Questions asked during interviews	Key answers
To start, could you please state your age?	Millennials (27 - 42 years): 6 interviewees Gen Z (10- 26 years): 6 interviewees
Is the company offering you any benefits? If yes, could you please state what are those?	→ Small things from time to time and only to certain employees → Once they offered a dinner with employees, night stay in the hotel and citadel tour for the hotel’s anniversary (in 2017/2018)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Employees parties (8 March, Waiter’s New Year once, Halloween party once, Christmas) → Free bike rental → Free pool access for employees only → Discounts in the hotel’s restaurant for family & friends → Flexible schedule (12h shift with 48h off / 24h on with 72h off) → Over hours paid (only FO at HT) → Meal tickets → Free breakfast (only for day shifts at HT) → Accommodation discounts → Paid extra hours (only in some cases) → Transpiration costs (only to 1 employee when came in for extra hours because she asked for it) → Taxi transportation for kitchen staff who commutes. → Verbal appreciation → Housing and utilities (Rozmarin Hotel only) → Meals on shift (Rozmarin Hotel, Aura Unirii & Phoenicia) → Free coffee → Uniform (Rozmarin Hotel + Aura Unirii) → Possibility to bring the dog at work (Rozmarin) → Cab partially payment for late night shifts (Phoenicia only) → Bonuses for Easter and Christmas (Phoenicia & Rozmarin) → Performance bonus (Phoenicia)
<p>How satisfied are you with those benefits?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → 5 mentioned 7/10 → 5 mentioned not really satisfied. → 2 mentioned 8/10
<p>According to you, what should the company do to make you more satisfied with your job?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Holiday bonuses → Performance bonus, employee of the month or percentage out of the sales done. → Monthly meetings to discuss pros and cons. → Discounts for food at the restaurant during the shift for a warm meal or an employee menu → A security guard who would also help with luggage etc or bellboy (mentioned by 4 people) → Salary increase → Uniform → 8h shifts instead of 12h shifts → Transportation cash back → Small gestures of appreciation more often (going out for a dinner, or receive a bottle of wine)
<p>What type of benefits should the company/HL offer to make it more attractive?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Higher salary → Reimbursement of transportation costs → Holiday bonuses → Extra day off based seniority → Meals on shift → A gift for child’s day → Vouchers or discounts for gym subscriptions → Gifts for women’s day → Holiday vouchers → Private medical insurance → Discounts at other hotels (partnership)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Restaurant discounts (on site and to other locations) → Movie / Theater tickets or discounts → To care about the employees and show them appreciation. → Proper guidance through management → Vouchers to a shop → Free coffee → Counselor to talk about personal issues → Accommodation if needed → Work during night, or on legal holidays to be paid extra or have extra time off → Career development plan → Verbal appreciation → 13th salary → Sales percentage → Paid extra hours → Discounts for taxi or gas
How important are for you the benefits over the regular pay?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Quite important x 6, but there are some crucial ones (meals on shift, discounts at restaurant, reimbursement of transportation costs) → Highly important x 4 but sometimes what is offered might not be what you need. → Welcomed anytime x 2.
Would you stay longer to work for a company which offers a complex benefit scheme?	All interviewees would stay longer for a company which offers a complex benefit scheme and would prefer a job with a complex benefit scheme and a little bit less money.
In the past 2 years, have you ever thought about leaving / changing your job? If yes, why?	<p>All interviewees have thought about it due to several reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Stressful work atmosphere and the behavior of a manager → No place for career development → Intense schedule because short staffed, tiredness → Management's style → Job insecurity during the pandemic
What are usually the reasons why people are leaving the industry?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Low salary → Intense work environment → Not being able to handle guests → Schedule (on shifts, night work) → High standards for service → Emotional state is not considered, always must smile and be polite. → Studies → Not feeling integrated with the team → Working in the weekend → Mental / physical burnout → Management style → Not being appreciated for your work → Progress in career
What are the reasons that make you stay with the company?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Team vibe / Work atmosphere → Colleagues → Schedule → Flexibility with breaks → Social factor, guest interaction → Possibility to bring the dog at work → Fear of change

According to the information displayed above, to ensure retention, 4-star hotels from Romania should include in their benefit scheme the following: **financial benefits (bonuses, vouchers, discounts)**, **health related benefits such as private medical insurance or therapist**, **lifestyle benefits including movie tickets and gym but also more days off based on seniority**, **regular benefits at work such as meals and career development opportunities** along with **intrinsic rewards**, uniforms, for instance which can improve self-esteem and positively impact self-efficacy. Furthermore, the benefit scheme should be applied to all employees equally as in some current cases at HT, only FO is paid for the extra hours (F&B Employee HT, 2023). All interviewees stated that the reason **why people leave the industry** is mainly related to the **low salary** and the **intense working environment**.

3 out of 12 interviewees stressed the importance of having somebody to talk to as many also leave due to stress or burnout (FO Employee HT, 2023; FO Employee Rozmarin Hotel, 2023; F&B Employee HT, 2023). Based on the information gathered from all interviews, the most attractive benefit is the financial one, related to bonuses or vouchers.

Many interviewees stated the **importance of having benefits** besides the regular salary however most of the times, the benefit scheme is not tailored to their needs (FO Employee Rozmarin Hotel, 2023). Having a complex benefit scheme would encourage all the interviewees to stay longer in a company.

2.3.4 Results obtained during interviews with hotel managers

For the interviews with hotel managers, a mix between the employee and the HR expert interview guide was used to comprehend 2 perspectives, the employee, and the managerial perspective. In App 8. 23 the key take-aways of the 2 interviews can be found.

According to both GMs interviewed, employees within HI are keen to switch positions mainly due to **low salaries**. The pandemic was also a contributing factor as people started to fear for their jobs and were looking for **stability**. Another factor mentioned was the **busy schedule** as in hospitality people are working around the clock and in some cases, there is barely any room for **career development**, referring to non-chain hotels. Furthermore, the **leadership style** can also have implications into the desire of leaving. Both managers stated that retention is a problem in the HI and young talent is the hardest to be retained. When talking about the aspects that make employees stay, the GM of Rozmarin Hotel elaborated more on aspects related to the **open and fair behavior of the managers regarding how the employees are treated** while the GM of Aura Unirii highlighted the importance of bonuses and appreciation gestures, through tangible and intangible ways. Both managers revealed the importance of benefits in relation to ER as this way employees will be more motivated and will feel appreciated for their work however, if they are decided to leave, no benefits will hold them back as they cannot be kept for life. As every hotel has its own policy, the two hotels offer different benefits, but the common ones are **meal tickets, uniforms, paid extra hours, and discounts in restaurant and hotel for family & friends (if requested)**. Regarding bonuses, the 2 managers have different definitions, The GM of Rozmarin Hotel is giving **private medical insurance, bonuses for holidays and employee's birthdays**, and at FO, they also receive **night and weekend bonus**. On the other hand, the GM of Aura Unirii is referring to bonuses as small gifts given to the employees such as paying for their food one day, or giving them a coffee or a pack of cigarettes, so more **work benefits** but also to the financial ones related to sales, for example if they had huge sales in one night to give an amount to the employees working that night but there is not a standard. The Rozmarin Hotel is also offering **free gym access** per request while Aura Unirii is offering **qualification courses, free pool access and 50% discount at any item of the menu for a warm meal**. According to both managers, the most appreciated benefit is the financial one, anything related to bonuses. Even though some may argue that financial benefits are more important, the GM from Aura Unirii agrees that the financial reward overcome the verbal appreciation however the GM of Rozmarin Hotel believes that any financial benefit without any other way of appreciation will not be that relevant and will not enhance productivity. Based on the conversation with the two GMs, the most attractive benefits that employees are looking for are **financial bonuses to reward the employees, meal tickets, private medical insurance, and performance bonus**.

These benefits might sound ideal however none of the two have yet in place ways to check if those benefits are appreciated by the employees.

2.3.5 Results obtained from expert interviews

Table 6 - Interview results

Questions asked / Topics	Key answers
Why are employees in the hotel industry keen to switch positions so quickly?	Poor working conditions Intense schedules Low salaries
What is your opinion on ER in HI? Why do/don't you think it is an issue?	it's an issue and we need to offer good conditions to retain talent, because if not, talent will go, will move to other sectors.
As an HR specialist, what do you consider that are the key elements that contribute to ER?	Financial bonuses Recognition Promotion internally to support career development. Balance work life with personal life Flexible schedule
Why are employee benefits important?	To show them appreciation. You need to recognize them with a plan and recognize their work and the effort they are doing. To enhance motivation To retain them and make them loyal for your company. To attract employees
What types of benefits do you offer to employees, and what is the rationale behind these benefits?	Young people prefer to have free time instead of security or stability. Millennials and young need the social benefits Bonuses for holidays Meal tickets Meal on shifts Private medical insurance Trainings for skills development Career opportunities Discounts in all chain locations and restaurants Wellness program like gym Employee assistance program in case they need somebody to talk to. PTO Retirement plan.
How do you manage the cost of employee benefits, and what strategies do you use to keep costs under control?	Negotiate the best prices with partners "It as a long-term investment because if we are investing in the well-being of our employees, we will encourage a healthy behavior which can reduce health costs over time. " "We are also monitoring the usage of a certain benefit because if one benefit is not used, what is the purpose of having it? So, then we are looking for a more cost-effective alternative."
How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your employee benefits program, and what metrics do you use to measure success?	Employee survey Monitor the level of participation in the offered programs. "Track return on investment of the benefits program by calculating the cost of the program against the benefits it provides, such as increased productivity, reduced healthcare costs, and improved employee engagement."

How do you promote wellness and healthy behaviors among employees, and what role do benefits play in this effort?	“By offering wellness benefits, such as gym memberships, mental health support, such as the employee assistance program, to help employees manage stress and improve their overall well-being. “
What are the most attractive benefits that employees are looking for?	Bonuses, of any kind Private health insurance PTO Wellness benefits such as gym subscriptions but also socializing such as team buildings, discounts etc
Do you think monetary or non-monetary incentives are more important? Can you please elaborate why?	“They are equally important. Employee motivation and rewards can benefit from both monetary and non-monetary incentives. Employees can be strongly motivated by monetary incentives since they offer concrete financial incentives for good performance, such as bonuses or salary raises but might also be highly motivated by non-cash rewards including professional development opportunities, flexible work schedules, and recognition programs. These rewards can encourage a healthy work atmosphere and demonstrate to employees the importance of their contributions, which will enhance their motivation and job satisfaction. So ideally is to offer both. One doesn’t go well without the other.”

2.3.6 Results obtained through desk research and focus group

Since the researcher concluded that employee benefits have a great impact on ER and has validated the aspects that should be included in the benefit scheme with the experts in the field, it is now the time to request the MGT opinion on possible implementation. Besides the highlighted importance of financial benefits stressed out by the employees, researchers also support the importance of bonuses alongside flexibility of work hours (Earnipay, 2022).

The researcher presented findings via PPT and MGT advised on feasible aspects for a benefit scheme. Two options related the benefit scheme were presented, the visualization of a website where hotels and restaurants are making a partnership to offer their employees discounts and the option of a standard benefit scheme offered in partnership with 3rd parties. The MGT team opted for the latter one due to its easy implementation. To make a complex, yet flexible benefit scheme, the MGT understood the need of equality when offering benefits and suggested that the top priority are the financial benefits. It was up to the researcher to conclude what to include in those.

Based on success recipe of other alike hotels but also other companies, financial bonuses should refer to any incentive payment from which the employee is rewarded besides their salary with money or similar substitutes (Martocchio, 2015). This could include bonuses related to performance, seniority, health, holidays and more.

2.3.7 Conclusion

Based on all interviews, the researcher realized that employees within HI in Romania do not have the concept of employee benefits well defined as for many, everything is about money. After explaining what benefits refer to and how these could have a positive impact, people are starting to understand that those benefits would be a great plus for a company.

To increase retention, HT and other 4-star hotels from Romania need to ensure good working conditions and offer attractive benefits by designing a complex and flexible benefit scheme which will satisfy the majority. Through flexibility the workers will have the power to choose and will enhance their sense of belonging (Carr et al., 2019).

The current benefit scheme of any hotel interviewed is not complete, let alone HT. For HT, some of the assumed benefits are not even official as they are offered from time to time on a preferential notice. This suggests a lack of consistency. Moreover, all hotels mentioned that if managers are asked about a specific benefit, an exception is possible. This should not be an exception and should become a standard in the HI. If all hotels would learn something from each other practices, their knowledge and policies together would be able to design a competitive benefit scheme.

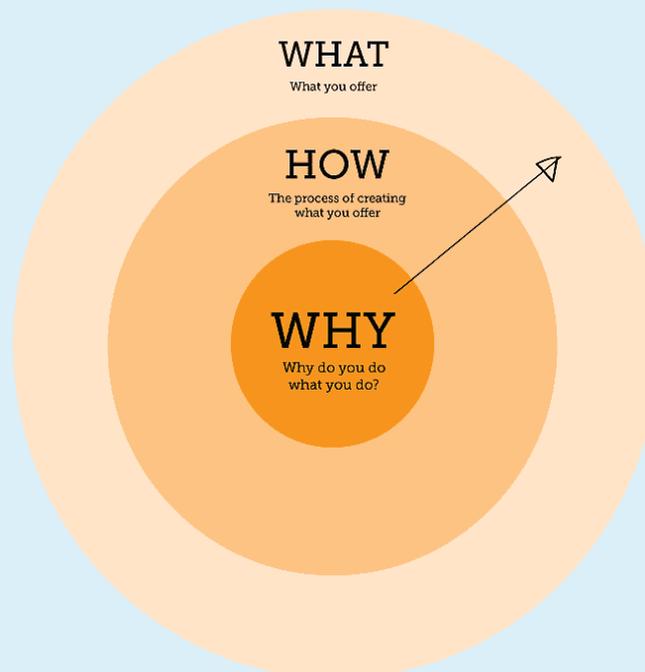


Figure 15 - General statistics (CEBS, 2019; Labitoria, 2021)

3 Solution design

According to Emerson, many change management strategies fail and it's crucial to adapt to stay competitive in a continuous changing environment (2022). Usually, failure is led by the lack of effective communication or by focusing more on the **WHAT & WHY** and ignore the **HOW** (ibid). To minimize the risk of failure, the Golden Circle's theory of Simon Sinek will be used alongside Lewin's Change Model and for communication, the Lasswell's Model.

To clearly explain the solution, firstly the focus is to understand why the solution is necessary and what is it about. The focus on how it will be implemented is described in chapter 4.



3.1 The purpose (= THE WHY)

As the research shows, many employees would stay longer in a company if they would have a complex benefit scheme. Romanian employees do not really understand the meaning of benefits and they believe it is more financially related, thus a proper benefit scheme with clear explanation would stress the compensation available through those benefits. The current benefit scheme offered by HT and other 4-star hotels do not contain many benefits desired by workers in the industry. Even if some might include partially the desired benefits, they are not tailored to the employee's needs. By not having a complex benefit scheme which fosters the possibility of choosing the convenient perks, employees will be inclined to leave their job for the smallest salary difference and this way, retention will not be improved.

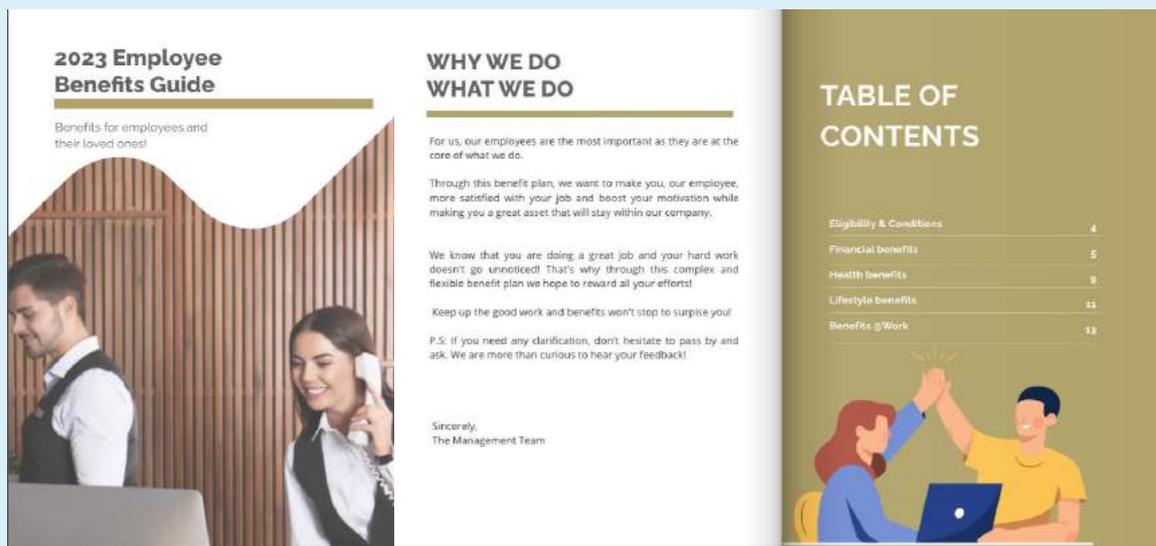
3.2 The product (= THE WHAT)

To meet the requirements for every generation, an employee benefits guide, based on the information collected, was designed under the form of a brochure. The guide is allowing individuals to opt for different benefits according to their needs. As the literature review revealed the importance of different benefits to enhance the attractiveness of the industry, the guide aims to solve the need for flexibility, work-life balance, and career development identified in trends. Similarly, throughout the interviews, the importance of financial benefits was highlighted the most along social benefits which are the key aspects of the guide. The benefit scheme was designed as an HRM policy under the form of a brochure and could be provided with the help of a 3rd party, a benefits platform called Sodexo.

Visualization of the brochure

Disclaimer: This is only a prototype and should be seen accordingly. All partners are fictive to provide an example.

Link to video: <https://vidmails.com/v/SZ2PxIXbs>



Eligibility & Conditions

Who is Eligible?

All full-time employees employed as of the date of publication will be eligible for the following benefits. The benefits will be offered to all employees who are employed on a full-time basis at the time of publication.

Part-time employees who are employed on a full-time basis at the time of publication will be eligible for the following benefits. The benefits will be offered to all employees who are employed on a full-time basis at the time of publication.

Financial Benefits

Holiday Bonus

At the end of each year, all full-time employees will receive a holiday bonus. The bonus will be calculated based on the employee's length of service and will be paid in cash.

Performance Bonus

At the end of each year, all full-time employees who have achieved a performance rating of "excellent" will receive a performance bonus. The bonus will be calculated based on the employee's performance and will be paid in cash.

Bonus

At the end of each year, all full-time employees who have achieved a performance rating of "excellent" will receive a bonus. The bonus will be calculated based on the employee's performance and will be paid in cash.

Health Insurance Plan

Category	Plan	Yearly Premium	Monthly Premium	Annual Deductible	Out-of-Pocket Maximum
Individual	Basic	€1,200	€100	€1,000	€5,000
	Enhanced	€1,500	€125	€1,000	€5,000
Family	Basic	€2,400	€200	€1,000	€5,000
	Enhanced	€2,700	€225	€1,000	€5,000

Restaurant Discount for family & friends

All employees who are employed as of the date of publication will receive a 20% discount on meals for family and friends at all participating restaurants. The discount will be valid for the duration of the employee's employment.

Accommodation Discount for family & friends

All employees who are employed as of the date of publication will receive a 20% discount on accommodation for family and friends at all participating hotels. The discount will be valid for the duration of the employee's employment.

Partners

Health Benefits

Private medical insurance

All full-time employees will be covered by private medical insurance. The insurance will cover the cost of medical treatment, hospitalization, and surgery.

Mental Health Support

All full-time employees will have access to mental health support services. The services will include counseling, therapy, and crisis support.

Lifestyle Benefits

Gym memberships

All full-time employees will receive a gym membership. The membership will be valid for the duration of the employee's employment.

Wellness facilities

All full-time employees will have access to wellness facilities. The facilities will include a spa, sauna, and pool.

Paid Vacation Time

PAID VACATION DAYS

The number of paid vacation days is determined by the employee's length of service. The number of days is as follows:

- 0-1 year of service: 10 paid vacation days
- 1-2 years of service: 12 paid vacation days
- 2-3 years of service: 14 paid vacation days
- 3-4 years of service: 16 paid vacation days
- 4-5 years of service: 18 paid vacation days
- 5-6 years of service: 20 paid vacation days
- 6-7 years of service: 22 paid vacation days
- 7-8 years of service: 24 paid vacation days
- 8-9 years of service: 26 paid vacation days
- 9-10 years of service: 28 paid vacation days
- 10+ years of service: 30 paid vacation days

Benefits @Work

Flexible work schedule

All full-time employees will have access to a flexible work schedule. The schedule will allow employees to work flexible hours to accommodate their personal and professional needs.

Health & safety at work

All full-time employees will have access to health and safety training. The training will cover topics such as fire safety, first aid, and workplace safety.

Team Buildings & Career Development

Team Buildings

All full-time employees will have access to team building activities. The activities will include workshops, seminars, and group exercises.

Career Development

All full-time employees will have access to career development opportunities. The opportunities will include training, mentoring, and professional development courses.

Employee's parties

As the benefits presented above will be used through a benefit platform called Sodexo, a cost analysis must be done to ensure the feasibility of the solution. According to a study done by Benefit, the average budget allocated in Q1 2022 for employee benefits was around 660 RON (approx. €130). The top industries offering this, or similar amounts are service providers industries, IT & software, and retail, the main labor competitors of the HI. To be at least on the same level as the competitors, HT and other 4-star hotels from Romania should allocate a budget of €130/ per employee/ month (€ 1.633 yearly) for extra benefits to ensure retention according to the labor law.

Table 7 - Cost overview

Cost breakdown per employee		
Holiday bonus	400-500 RON / twice a year	
Holiday vouchers	700 - 1000 RON / year	
Birthday Bonus	300 RON / year	
Medical insurance	2000 RON / year	*Deductible expense
Cultural Pass	200 RON / month	*Deductible expense
7Card	100 RON / month	
TOTAL	Approx. 620 RON / month ⇒ 7400 RON / year	

*The discounts and percentage benefits are not included in the calculation as every individual has a different salary and some bonuses such as night shift bonus or paid leave are mandatory by law.

Added value

The benefit guide will empower employees to make their own choices and choose the benefits that fit their needs. Through this, employees will feel more motivated and appreciated at work thus will be inclined to stay longer in the company improving the retention rate.

3.3 Goals

The satisfaction of the employees within HI along with retention is the core topic of the research thus increasing their work satisfaction and increasing the retention rate will be the ultimate goal.

3.4 Resistance to change

As in all cases, the solution is in the best interest of one part, the employees, while the owners, can be resistant to change. The reasons can be cost related, as a more complex benefit plan requires a higher budget allocation, effort related, as the implementation might seem easy, however keeping track of the success of the implementation is crucial, or habit related, as most companies function by a standard and any shift might imply resistance.

To minimize the resistance to change from the management side and to foster a success story, the model of Kotter has been used to demonstrate the process.

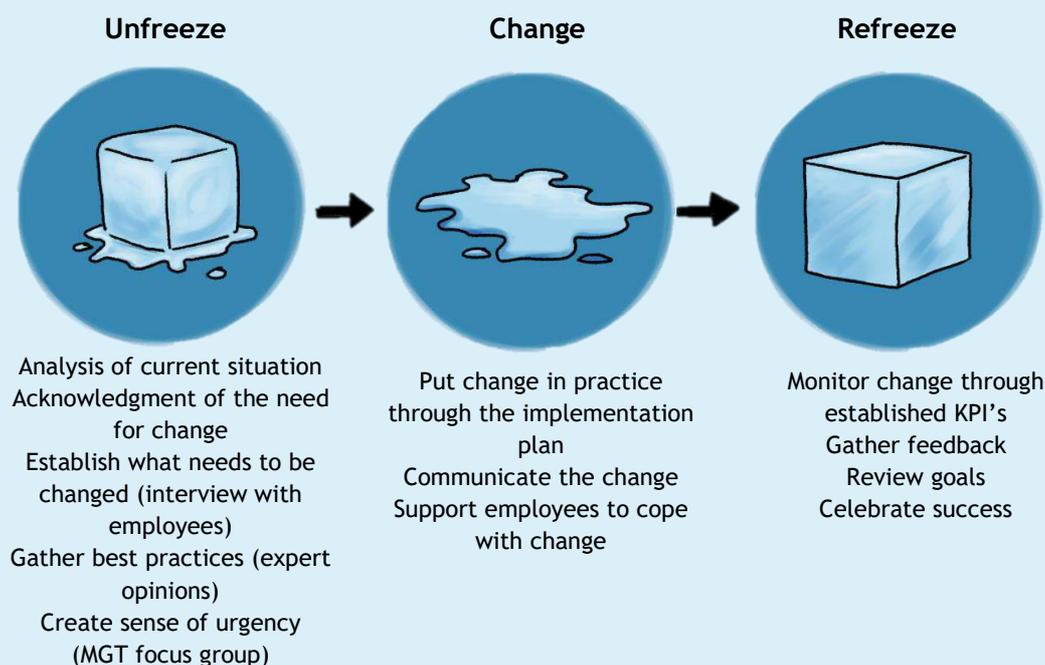


Figure 16 - Kotter's model

4 Intervention

4.1 Implementation plan (= THE HOW)

To enhance employee retention through a flexible benefit plan, the company should establish a collaboration with Sodexo. After a preliminary meeting with Sodexo to decide upon the desired benefits, a demo version should be provided to visualize the benefit platform. Through mybenefits platform the employer decides upon the budget allocated per employee and the employee can choose the benefits that fit their needs. After the demo presentation and accept of the MGT, the project is ready for implementation. All possible benefits will be presented under the form of a brochure and employees will receive a personal account to log on mybenefits platform. The idea of collaborating with mybenefits platform emerged from the focus group and expert opinions. The focus of the process has been based on smooth implementation, cost efficiency and employee engagement. To ensure its success, the Lewin's change model has been integrated in practice.



4.2 Responsibilities & Timeline

After the presentation of the founding’s and possible solutions, the GM assigned responsibilities for implanting the most feasible option. The researcher was in charge to design an attractive benefit plan under the form of a brochure. As cost efficiency was one of the focus points of the process, an important step was to decide the allocated budget per employee per month. The GM approved the suggested amount of 660 RON /month. After the completion on the planning part, the most important step was to schedule a meeting with the service provider, Sodexo. The meeting was initially scheduled for 08/05 however a preliminary discussion took place on 04/05 with one of their sales agents. According to the discussion, the implementation of the process should take between 1-2 weeks to set-up the personalized content on the platform. The full scheme should be available for employees mid-June latest. As any solution might not be perfect from the start, first feedback will be gathered after 1 month of usage. After 3 months, the progress will be monitored based on the evaluation KPIs and after half a year of implementation, monthly reports will be made to monitor the success of implementation. If all goals are met, after 1 year from implementation, a celebration with all employees will take place. A detailed task overview can be found below.

Title	Assignment	Start Date	Due Date	Bucket	Progress	Priority
Researcher presented the 2 possible solutions	Bianca Popa	25/4/2023	25/4/2023	Initiating	Completed	Medium
Decision upon the chosen solution	MANAGEMENT TEAM + B. POPA	26/4/2023	26/4/2023	Planning	Completed	Important
Assign responsibilities	GENERAL MANAGER	27/4/2023	27/4/2023	Planning	Completed	Medium
Design the benefit plan	Bianca Popa	27/4/2023	3/5/2023	Planning	Completed	Medium
Discuss budget and eligibility criteria	MANAGEMENT TEAM + B. POPA	28/4/2023	28/4/2023	Planning	Completed	Medium
Decided upon the offered benefits	MANAGEMENT TEAM + B. POPA	1/5/2023	1/5/2023	Planning	Completed	Medium
Preliminary discussion with Sodexo	GENERAL MANAGER	8/5/2023	8/5/2023	Executing	In progress	Important
Request demo from Sodexo	GENERAL MANAGER	10/5/2023	12/5/2023	Executing	Not started	Medium
Test Demo	MANAGEMENT TEAM	13/5/2023	20/5/2023	Executing	Not started	Medium
Sign contract with Sodexo	GENERAL MANAGER	21/5/2023	24/5/2023	Executing	Not started	Medium
Start implementing the benefit plan and mybenefits platform	MANAGEMENT TEAM + SODEXO	1/6/2023	7/6/2023	Executing	Not started	Medium
Gather first impressions after implementation	F&B MANAGER + FO MANAGER	20/7/2023	1/8/2023	Monitoring and con	Not started	Medium
Review progress	GENERAL MANAGER	15/9/2023	15/10/2023	Monitoring and con	Not started	Medium
Monitor and report monthly status	GENERAL MANAGER	1/12/2023	1/12/2023	Monitoring and con	Not started	Important

Figure 17 - Task overview

Survey current benefit plan	Bianca Popa	1/5/2023	5/5/2023	Monitoring and con	In progress	Medium
Survey new implemented benefit plan	Bianca Popa	15/9/2023	22/9/2023	Monitoring and con	In progress	Medium
Before & After assessment based on the survey results		25/9/2023	16/10/2023	Monitoring and con	Not started	Important
Celebrate success		3/6/2024		Closing	Not started	Medium

Figure 18 - Task overview

4.3 Communication plan



Figure 19 - General facts (Pagan, 2021; Bank of America, 2022)

Communication is key in the success of change (Hasanaj, 2017). A proper way to communicate is not only going to ease the process of change but will also create a sense of belonging in the process for those who are involved (Collazo, 2020). The purpose of communication is to create awareness, understanding, acceptance and lastly commitment (Benz, 2023). To ensure employee engagement and reduce the risk of resistance from management, it is essential to keep employees involved throughout the implementation process. Since benefits are about people, employees and their families should be the key stakeholders in this process. Two-way communication through a townhall meeting with all employees will not only provide an opportunity for feedback and support but will also confirm again the importance of the presented solution. To best deliver the message, a mix of channels will be used including emails, visuals through the brochure and face-to-face communication. For ultimate success, it is not only about the offered benefits but also how they are communicated to the employees to enhance their utility.

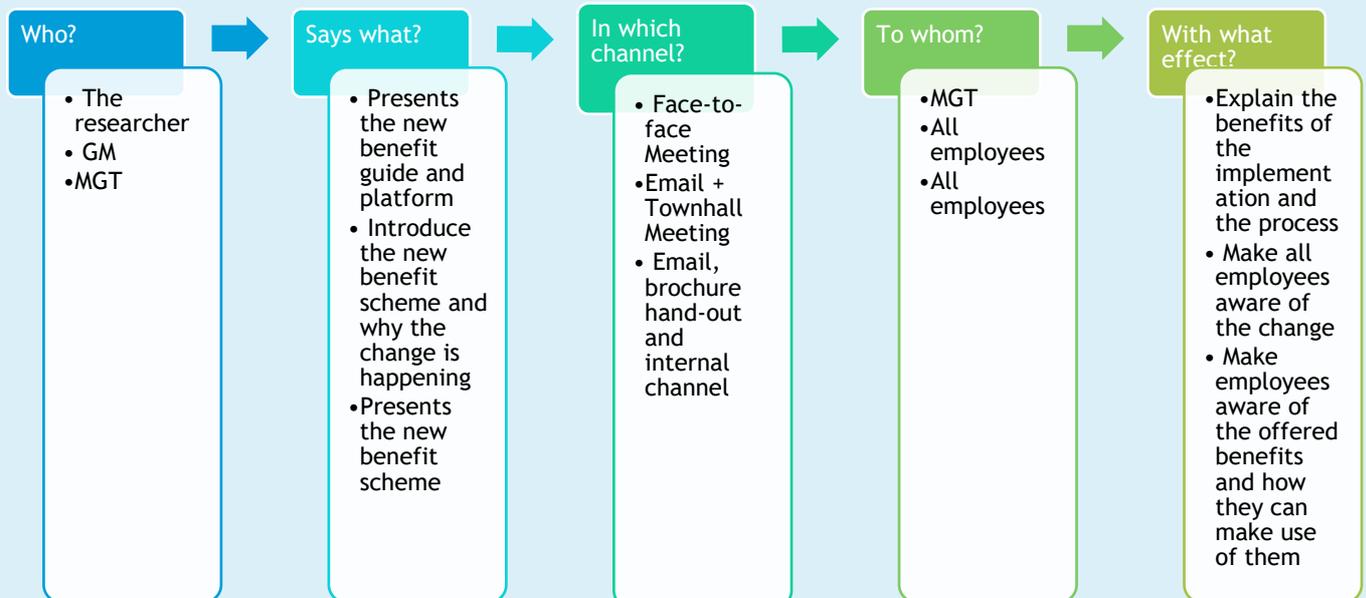


Figure 20 - Communication Plan

4.4 Final checklist

	<h3>Socially accepted</h3> <p>The client was satisfied with the proposed solution and provided great feedback to the reseracher</p>
	<h3>Employees centered</h3> <p>The solution is about people , in this case hospitality employees from 4-star hotels and their families</p>
	<h3>Economically profitable</h3> <p>The solution will have long-term benefits and it is seen as a return on investment as employees will stay longer with the company and reduce turnover rates thus also the cost of new hires.</p>
	<h3>Technically feasible</h3> <p>The proposed benefits along the platform provided by Sodexo is already used by J W Marriott and Intercontinental Hotels & Resorts</p>
	<h3>Added value</h3> <p>Employees will feel more appreciated for their work and will stay longer in the company enhancing loyalty.</p>

5 Evaluation

Measuring the success of a benefit plan might be hard to be determined however the perspective of the evaluation should be oriented towards the goals of the implementation rather on the ROI.

A before & after employee benefit plan survey will be used to assess employee satisfaction with the current and the new benefit plan. This will highlight their satisfaction and the retention potential. For the before survey and the questions used, please refer to App. 8.21.

According to the expert interviews, it is crucial to measure the success of the benefit plan through various methods, thus some KPIs have been selected. These will be used for the assessment after 3 months from implementation but also on a regular basis.

$$\text{Employee Retention} = \frac{\text{No of employees who stayed during time period}}{\text{No of employees at the start of time period}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Turnover Rate} = \frac{\text{No of separations in a given period}}{\text{Average no of employees in the same period}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Voluntary turnover rate} = \frac{\text{No of employees who voluntarily leave in a given period}}{\text{Average no of employees in the same period}} \times 100$$

$$\text{Usage of a benefit} = \frac{\text{No of employees using a certain benefit}}{\text{No of times used per month}}$$

$$\text{Level of participation} = \text{No of employees using a benefit per month}$$

$$\text{ROI} = \frac{\text{Cost of the offered benefit}}{\text{vs}}$$

Added value created (increased productivity, reduced healthcare costs, improved employee engagement)

Based on the current status survey, all employees of HT are aware of the offered benefits however these benefits do not meet the needs of the 48% of respondents while 52% are only partially satisfied. Many stressed out the importance of work-life balance and the lack of policies to support that. The majority mentioned the need of offering bonuses, discounts, meals on shift and gym membership. Only 24% respondents would trade certain benefits for a higher salary meaning 76% value the importance of extra benefits. No employee would be likely to recommend the company as a great place to work as the majority is neutral.

5.1 Stakeholders & Dissemination

To identify the major stakeholders impacted by the design of the solution, a stakeholder map based on the power-influence model has been created (See App 9.2)

The commissioner, identified through the owners of HT and the GM, are the stakeholders that should be kept satisfied as if the solution is not satisfying the interests of the owners, might lead to failure.

To have a successful implementation, the HR Department plays a crucial role as the benefits scheme is in their responsibility to be later delivered to the organization and monitored. However, the departmental managers will be the ones in charge on the premises as the HR Department is a general department at the HQ,

The core stakeholders are the employees, as their needs must be carefully considered into the design process and be informed at all stages of the implementation.

5.1.1 Dissemination 1

To make people open to change, a sense of urgency had to be created. This has been done through a presentation workshop for the MGT where the process behind the design of the solution has been explained. The focus was on the MGT to make them aware of the need for change and avoid possible resistance.

The brochure was presented in an online format and the added value of the solution was highlighted. The benefit guide will empower employees to make their own choices and choose the benefits that fit their needs. Through this, employees will feel more motivated and appreciated at work thus will be inclined to stay longer in the company improving the retention rate. This change is also in the MGT's best interest as they will show more appreciation and they will promote good work-life balance and a healthier lifestyle.

The overview of the cost analysis has been presented while stressing out one aspect: The benefit plan is about people, and it is a long-term investment which can reduce healthcare costs over time and make employees loyal to the brand.

After the presentation, a discussion about the feasibility of implementation took place agreeing the easiness of implementation with the help of the 3-rd party, Sodexo.

A slight resistance can be expected from the owner's perspective as new costs will be involved. After the presentation, the GM addressed the topic and after thorough examination, the owners acknowledged the importance of showing more appreciation to their human assets.

Below, the used presentation

HOTEL ★★★★★
TRANSILVANIA

Employee benefits plan

What is the issue and how do we solve it?



Issues



High fluctuations in personnel especially in FO and partially in HSK

Benefits between departments are not equal and they lack consistency



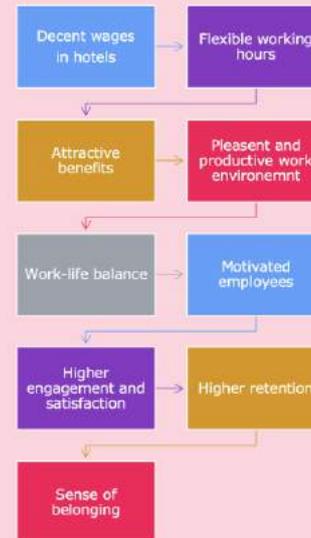
Employee satisfaction about the work-conditions related benefits is low

Current



VS

Desired situation



Why the change should be made

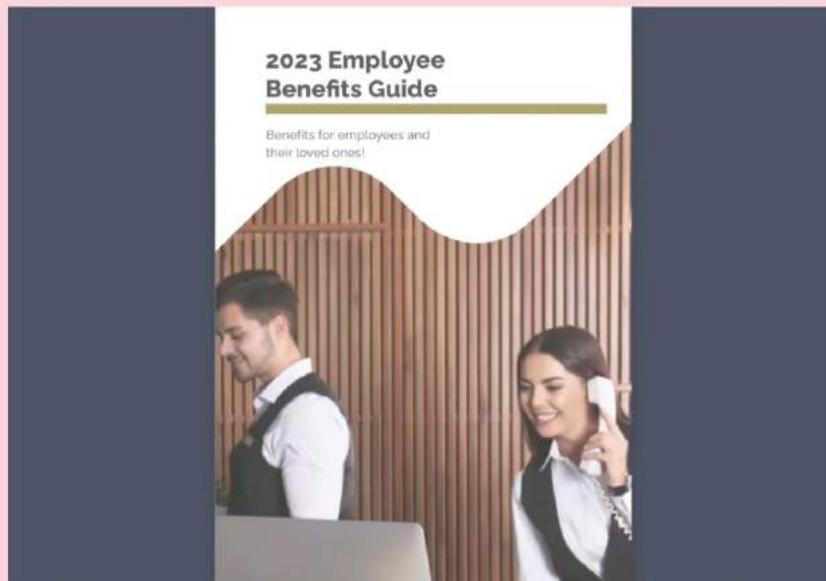
- Employees would stay longer in a company if they would have a complex benefit scheme.
- Romanian employees do not really understand the means of benefits
- The current benefit scheme does not comprehend many benefits desired by workers in the industry.
- They are not tailored to the employee's needs.
- Enhance retention & show appreciation

Why is it important

- Appreciate employees for their efforts
- Enhance employee loyalty for the brand
- Differentiate from CS
- Reduce employee fluctuations
- Make hospitality industry more attractive



The product



Cost overview

Cost breakdown per employee		
Holiday bonus	400-500 RON / twice a year	
Holiday vouchers	700 – 1000 RON / year	
Birthday Bonus	300 RON / year	
Medical insurance	2000 RON / year	*Deductible expense by law
Cultural Pass	200 RON / month	*Deductible expense by law
7Card	100 RON / month	
TOTAL	Approx. 620 RON / month ⇒ 7400 RON / year	

Added value



Empower the employees to make their own choices and choose the benefits that fit their needs.



Make employees feel more motivated and appreciated at work



Higher retention rate and stability



Differentiate from CS and set a new standard in the hospitality industry

2023 Employee Benefits Guide
Benefits for employees and their loved ones

WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO
For us, our employees are the most important as they are at the core of what we do.
Through this benefit plan, we want to make you, our employees, more satisfied with your job and boost your motivation while making you a great asset that will stay with our company.
We know that you are doing a great job and your hard work doesn't go unnoticed. That's why through this complex and flexible benefit plan we hope to reward all your efforts!
Keep up the good work and benefits won't stop to surprise you!
If you need any clarification, don't hesitate to reach by email and we are more than curious to hear your feedback!

University:
The Management Team

Partners
SALIS
SUBURV
TAVIKEN
SPACTAN
LUXEPULSE

Health Benefits
Croscometa

Lifestyle Benefits

Paid Vacation Time

Benefits at Work

Feedback and questions?

5.1.2 Dissemination 2

When a solution is designed with the help of multiple sources of data, it is a benefit to share all the information with all the participants in the study to show them where the research led and how they contributed to the result.

Below, the email with the key findings and other materials sent to the interviewed managers and HR experts can be found.



Figure 21 - Key findings

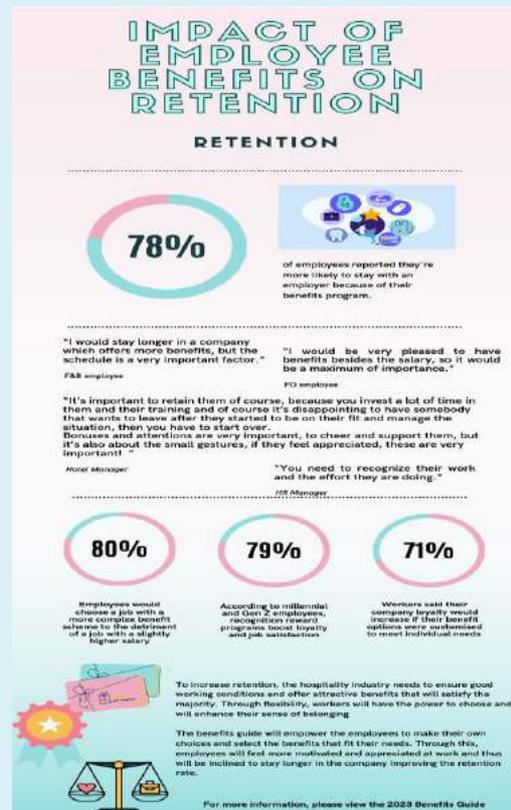
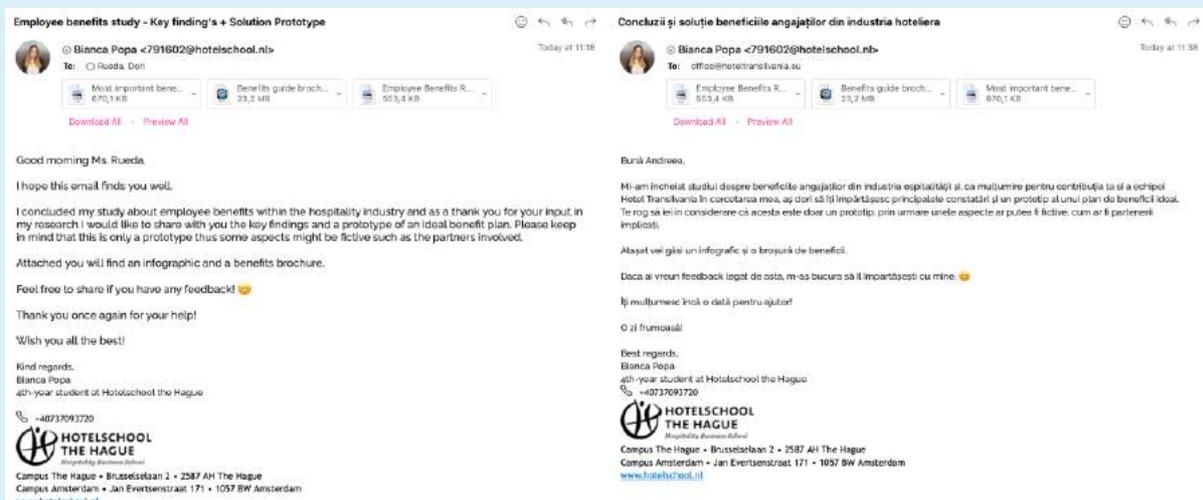


Figure 22 - Infographic



Concluzii și soluție beneficiile angajaților din industria hoteliera

Today at 11:47

From Bianca Popa <791602@hotelschool.nl>
To: info@iaa@roftourism.ro

Employee Benefits R... 103,4 KB
Benefits guide broch... 23,2 MB
Most important bene... 670,1 KB

Download All - Preview All

Bună Maria,

Mi-am încheiat studiul despre beneficiile angajaților din industria ospitalității și ca mulțumire pentru contribuția ta în cercetarea mea, aș dori să îți împărtășesc principalele constatări și un prototip al unui plan de beneficii ideal. Te rog să iei în considerare că acesta este doar un prototip, prin urmare unele aspecte ar putea fi fictive, cum ar fi partenerii implicați.

Așașat vei găsi un infografic și o broșură de beneficii.

Dacă ai vreun feedback legat de asta, m-aș bucura să îl împărtășești cu mine 😊

Îți mulțumesc încă o dată pentru ajutor!

O zi frumoasă!

Best regards,
Bianca Popa
4th-year student at Hotelschool the Hague

+40737093720



**HOTELSCHOOL
THE HAGUE**
Hospitality Business School

Campus The Hague • Brusselslaan 2 • 2587 AH The Hague
Campus Amsterdam • Jan Evertsenstraat 171 • 1057 BW Amsterdam
www.hotelschool.nl

Concluzii și soluție beneficiile angajaților din industria hoteliera

Today at 11:52

From Bianca Popa <791602@hotelschool.nl>
To: roceptosourism.ro

Most important bene... 670,1 KB
Benefits guide broch... 23,2 MB
Employee Benefits R... 103,4 KB

Download All - Preview All

Bună Claudia,

Mi-am încheiat studiul despre beneficiile angajaților din industria ospitalității și ca mulțumire pentru contribuția ta în cercetarea mea, aș dori să îți împărtășesc principalele constatări și un prototip al unui plan de beneficii ideal. Te rog să iei în considerare că acesta este doar un prototip, prin urmare unele aspecte ar putea fi fictive, cum ar fi partenerii implicați.

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Îți mulțumesc încă o dată pentru ajutor!

O zi frumoasă!

Best regards,
Bianca Popa
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Concluzii și soluție beneficiile angajaților din industria hoteliera

Today at 10:21

From Bianca Popa <791602@hotelschool.nl>
To: la.sandra.constantin.22@yelfora.com

Most important bene... 670,1 KB
Benefits guide broch... 23,2 MB
Employee Benefits R... 103,4 KB

Download All - Preview All

Bună Casandra,

Mi-am încheiat studiul despre beneficiile angajaților din industria ospitalității și ca mulțumire pentru contribuția ta în cercetarea mea, aș dori să îți împărtășesc principalele constatări și un prototip al unui plan de beneficii ideal. Te rog să iei în considerare că acesta este doar un prototip, prin urmare unele aspecte ar putea fi fictive, cum ar fi partenerii implicați.

Așașat vei găsi un infografic și o broșură de beneficii.

Dacă ai vreun feedback legat de asta, m-aș bucura să îl împărtășești cu mine 😊

Îți mulțumesc încă o dată pentru ajutor!

O zi frumoasă!

Best regards,
Bianca Popa
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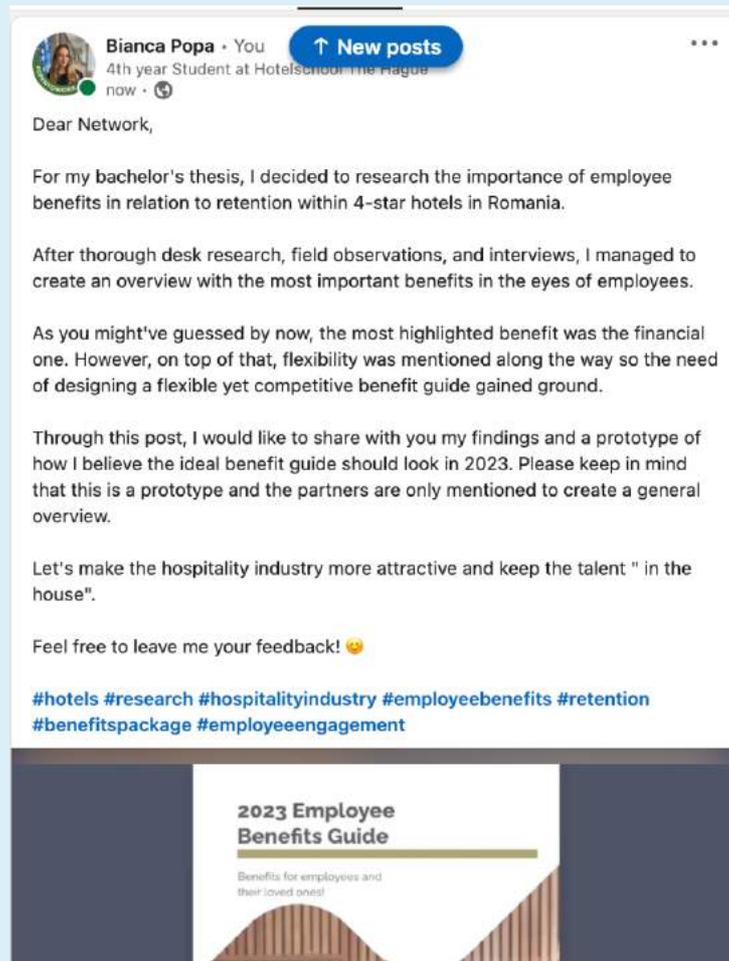


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5.1.3 Dissemination 3

To celebrate the result, a post on LinkedIn was created to share the conclusions of the study and the final solution with other experts in the field with the aim of inspiring other hospitality professionals.



6 Academic reflection and future implication

Employee retention is a challenge that most industries are facing but within HI, the topic gained more ground after the pandemic when employees realized the importance of job and financial stability. To keep up with the trends and secure talent, hospitality leaders must improve their benefit scheme as the current offer seems to either be incomplete or not adapted to employee's new needs. The pandemic had a huge impact on the human needs as the social factor was limited and because of the freer time, they started to acknowledge the importance of work-life balance as many discovered hobbies that they never had the time for. Along that, they also discovered the importance of spending quality time with family, Now, the HI must tackle these needs to enhance retention between its employees.

In Romania, no in-depth study about the importance of employees benefits in relation with retention in HI has been done. Thus, exploratory research was conducted with the goal of gathering information and insights about the importance of employee benefits in relation with ER within 4-star hotels, without making definitive conclusions or predictions. As the core of the research are the employees, qualitative data has been gathered to emphasize on feelings and to understand the reason behind a certain choice.

Employee benefits are an essential component of any organization's compensation package, and their importance in the HI cannot be overstated. HI is a highly competitive field, and retaining talented employees is critical to an organization's success. One way to achieve this is through a comprehensive benefits package that not only attracts but also retains employees. Employee benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, and PTO are essential in promoting the well-being and financial stability of employees, which can significantly impact their job satisfaction and ultimately, their decision to remain with an organization. When employees are satisfied with their benefits, they are more likely to remain loyal to their employer, reducing the cost of recruitment and training new employees

The suggested solution gives HT and other 4-star hotels from Romania a unique benefit guide along the implementation plan to combat the high turnover. Further, a complex benefit package boosts employee engagement and reduces health costs over time. Additionally, higher productivity can be expected, as happy employees are more productive (Bellet et al., 2019). Due to time limitations, the benefit plan could not be implemented completely as it requires 3-rd party agreement. Having all interviews in English could have speed up the process however not all employees were comfortable. Thus, HT has the benefits guide and a plan on how to implement this with the help of Sodexo. Another limitation is that without the actual implementation the researcher will not know if the benefit plan was used or not in reality as the owners seemed resistant for the change in the beginning due to the extra costs involved.

To determine if all employees benefit from the same package and if the plan was a success, HT must monitor its effectiveness by measuring the usage of a benefit and level of participation. To highlight the added value on the long time, the productivity and engagement of employees should also be monitored. It needs to be considered that engagement is much depending on the offered benefits and how these are communicated but also on the work atmosphere. As job needs changes with the generation and with time, the benefit plan must be verified and adjusted yearly to keep up with the trend's development. Additionally, hoteliers suffer from employee shortages, therefore the benefit package will also improve the hotel's brand and attract talent. Since HT had a high turnover in the reception, an equally relevant study could have been about their recruitment methods and processes. However, once the manage to hire a new receptionist, HT will benefit more from the retention as it will also reduce the cost of a new hiring.

6.1 Implications for future research

The solution is based on qualitative research, which, without drawing any firm inferences or forecasts, provided insights into the significance of employee benefits in relation to ER inside 4-star hotels. If there is a correlation between the two, quantitative study would be helpful to gather more insightful data. The interviews were done on a small sample of the employees of HT and similar hotels, implicating a difficulty to validate the results for the whole population thus the study's population might be expanded to include other industries that are related to hospitality, such as travel, food and beverage, or aviation. The significance of employee perks in the hotel industry needs more investigation and it is advisable that an HR expert perform the studies because the chosen subject is related to human resources and the researcher lacks significant knowledge in the field.

During the interviews, besides the usual reasons of leaving HI due to low salary or poor working conditions, the topic of work atmosphere and leadership style has been brought up. Even if benefits will combat the issue of high turnover that the industry is facing, no benefits can compensate for a bad leadership style. Thus, further research could be done regarding the impact of leadership style on ER. The following questions could be used as a starting point:

- ⇒ What is the relationship between different leadership styles and employees' intentions to stay with their current organization?
- ⇒ What role does leadership communication play in the relationship between leadership style and employee retention?
- ⇒ How do the different leadership styles of top executives and mid-level managers impact employee retention rates?
- ⇒ What are the key factors that determine the success or failure of leadership style in retaining employees?

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8 Appendices

8.1 Organizational chart

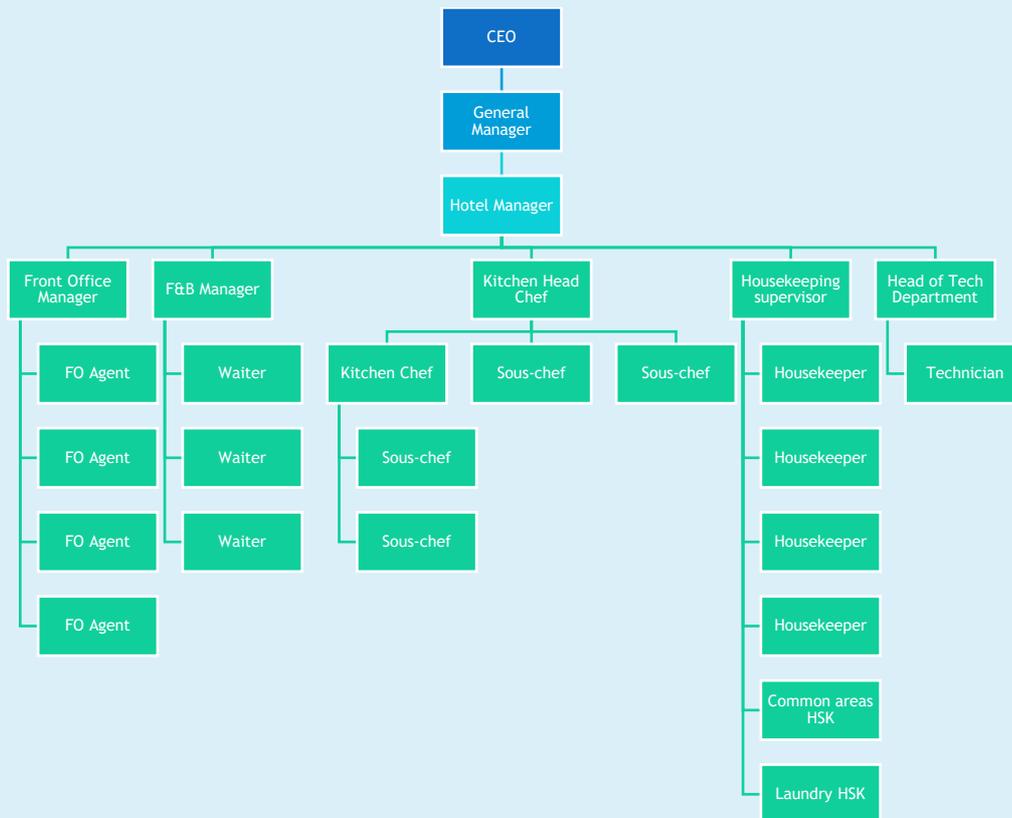


Figure 23 - Hotel Transilvania Organizational Chart

8.2 Stakeholders map

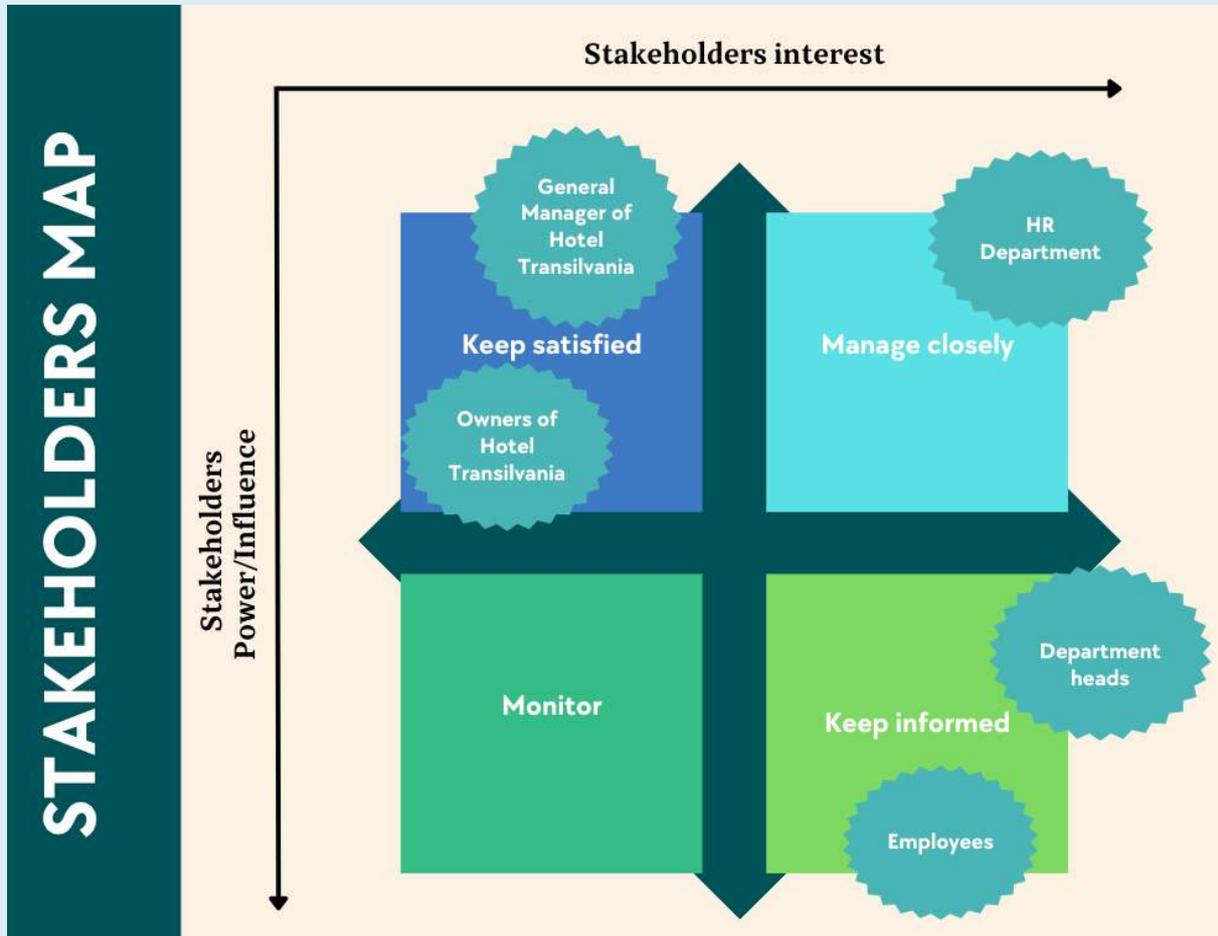


Figure 24- Stakeholders map

In the above research, the main stakeholders have been identified. The owners and the general manager of Hotel Transilvania are the stakeholders that should be kept satisfied as they have a high power of influence however, their interest is not that high as from an owner perspective, employees can be easily replaced. On the other side, with a high interest in the project but also with high influence, is the HR Department, that should be managed most thoroughly as this department is the one that is responsible to ensure ER and monitor their engagement. On the bottom, with a high interest but low power, there are the department heads and the other employees, who should be kept informed through all the process.

8.3 Trends analysis

Based on the discussion with employees from HT within the RD department and F&B, but also with field experts, some key aspects that are valued by employees when talking about retention have been identified. Furthermore, according to several projections, the below mentioned aspects are the future trends regarding the workplace. (Kropp and McRae, 2022). To fully analyse the subject and get an in-depth understanding of what it takes for an organization to ensure retention, the following topics have been further explored. Throughout the individual subjects, some examples from other industries were given to highlight what the HI can learn from their competitors in the talent war.

Flexibility

Flexibility at work does not only refer to remote or hybrid work, but also to the extent in which employees can opt for certain shifts and receive understanding from the employer when unexpected situations occur (Hotel Transilvania employees, 2022). From the employee side, flexibility within the workplace can be seen as a vote of confidence. By giving employees the freedom to choose when they prefer the work, their level of engagement increases (Pankowski, 2022). A study on FWAs has proven that work flexibility can foster a positive work environment (Declan O. Gilmer et al., 2019). Offering flexibility in the workplace helps firms retain their current talent, raise morale, and attract new talent in addition to increasing efficiency (Leading Effectively Staff, 2022). HT is already trying to keep up with this trend and a good example would be the FO department. During low season, the team preferred to have 3 days off in a row, so the division of the shift was 24/72. In this situation, everyone's needs, and interests were considered to the best extent, however, improvements can be made for the whole organization.

Free time

The cliché quote “Money cannot buy happiness” is partially true as money is needed to cover basic needs, but beyond that, science could not determine to what extent the relation is true. Happiness is often more time, not more money, according to Whillans (2019). Scientists have proven that free time is not only beneficial for mental health but also a key component to achieving work-life balance (Naude et al., 2012). If employers want to make sure that their employees stay productive, they need to make sure that they have enough leisure time to recharge their batteries and reduce the possibility of burnout. According to a Gallup survey, staff suffering from burnout are two-thirds more likely to report in sick (Wigert, 2020). On the contrary, according to an Oxford University study, being happy can make employees 13% more productive (2019). This represents an opportunity for HT to provide their employees more benefits that foster leisure activities to improve their level of happiness and thus their work efficiency.

Work-life balance

The controversial topic of work-life balance has been explored in many research papers; however, several questions are remaining unanswered. Because everyone defines work-life balance differently depending on the stage they are at in their lives, it is fairly difficult to define the concept (Lupu, 2017). According to Lupu, some people thrive in imbalance and others enjoy working long hours before starting a family, but when priorities shift, the significance of work-life balance increases (Campbell, 2022; 2021). Therefore, a healthy work-life balance is a requirement that many firms now insist upon as more workers experience burnout or stress from overburden. Companies as Asana offer flexible PTO while Outbrain offers a free gym membership and access to telehealth along the 31 days off a year, including 13 holidays and 18 personal times off days. But for the front-line staff, none of these solutions truly match the hospitality sector. Flexible scheduling needs to be the foundation of every work-life balance program. Former regional director of HR Americas, Magdalena Hamya, shared on LinkedIn the way she managed to introduce flexible scheduling in the hotel she used to work through a time management IT system (Hamya, 2017). But how can employees achieve work-life balance while no health-related benefits are offered?

Competitive Benefits

Many define employee benefits as any non-wage compensations which contribute to employee engagement (Klonoski, 2016). A qualitative study has identified employee compensation in terms of benefits as being a crucial factor to determine ER and satisfaction (Davis, 2013). SHRM has revealed the 2022 employee benefits survey where the needs of employees are slowly returning to normal after the pandemic (2022). According to the labor market specialists from Panorama, the benefit scheme has become the 2nd most important factor after salary when searching for a job (Spiridon, 2022). Romania-Insider.com has revealed an eJobs survey about the benefits offered by Romanian employers (Van Kline, 2022). The main benefits offered in Romania are meal vouchers, holiday bonuses, private health insurance, extra days off, professional development, and team building. Even though these benefits might sound like a standard, not many are offered in the HI. Along these, some companies also offer transportation, gift vouchers, and some other benefits which can be found in a small number of enterprises (ibid). A company within the local area that stays ahead of CS through benefits is Bosch Blaj. Their benefit plan includes 25 holidays off compared to the regular 21 days, a flexible schedule, relocation package or transportation, private health care, training and development programs, wellness programs, product discounts and vouchers for every holiday, meals and parking during working hours, language courses and bonuses for talent recommendations (Bosch Romania, 2022). The benefit plan of the automotive company can be an inspiration for HT to develop a more complex and modern compensation scheme and take the trend as an opportunity for future growth.

Career Development

While some might define a career as a profession that needs special training, Sullivan and Barunch's definition refers to the work-related journey of an individual, inside and outside of an organization (2009). A famous quote by Waitley has encouraged people to "view life as a continuous learning experience". Through this quote, employees are requesting benefits related to their professional development as nobody wants a dead-end job, transforming it into a crucial aspect for employers who want to ensure employee engagement and retain top talent (Balakrishnan et al., 2013). However, career development is not only about climbing the career ladder, but also about staying on top of the continuous change in a VUCA world (Bergeron, 2022). This can only be done through constant training offers for skills development and by understanding the personal goals of every employee to determine a clear career pathway (Hedge and Rineer, 2017).

8.4 1st Meeting with the client

The 1st meeting with the client took place on 17/11/2022. As the meeting took place at the hotel, the meeting was not recorder however notes were taken during the conversation.

The screenshot below shows the conversation the day before the meeting to agree on the meeting time.



Figure 25 - Screenshot with proof of the established meeting

Translation:

Researcher: Hello! I will be in Alba Iulia today and tomorrow. Would you be available for a short discussion today or tomorrow?

FO Manager: Hello! Tomorrow sounds better as today at 15:00 both me and the General manager have to leave the hotel to go to the dentist.

Researcher: Good luck to the dentist. Let me know when you have time tomorrow. If you would be available in the morning, would be perfect!

FO Manager: Yes, you can come in the morning.

Researcher: Great, thank you! I will see you tomorrow. I will be there around 9/10 if that is alright for you as well.

FO Manager: Yes, yes, that is great.

8.5 Observations Hotel Transilvania

9th of December 2022 Early shift 09:00 - 12:00

During the 3h, the behavior of the employees has been observed. The focus of the observations was on team interaction however guest interaction was also relevant to determine the engagement of the employees. The observer was situated near the reception, at the entrance of the hotel and could observe both the interaction of the Front Office department and the F&B Department. As the employees were familiar with the observer, some interactions on the topic took place.

The observations have been taken in a notebook, freely, to give more insights into the behaviors of the employees, rather than a standardized observation.

Transcript of observations:

1st contact with the reception -> warm welcome by the Front officer and he offered his assistance (at that moment, the FO did not know who the observer was or what was the reason for the visit)

It was a busy day as 2 events were going on: 1 meeting with the owner's group and 1 workshop

FO-> he was always smiling when talking with his colleagues from all departments

FO communicates with F&B (the front officer was going to inform the restaurant manager about some adjustments; vice versa, the restaurant manager was approaching the reception to clarify information about the lunch set up)

FO greets a walk-in visitor and after he understood the purpose of his visit, he informs the guest that he could wait in the lobby for his partner. The guest mentions that he is not very appropriate dressed, and the FO kindly ensure him that this is not a problem as there is no such thing. (This indicated the FO polite behavior and the understanding of individual needs)

Good communication between FO and HSK as FO was calling HSK after every C/O to update them about the room status (the PMS system is not that efficient, and it does not allow HSK to monitor the room status on the spot)

During the early shift, 2 people were working at FO, the Front Officer, and the Front Office Manager

--- Conversation with Front Officer ---

About the Front Officer: Male, 21, master student in the 1st year at AACTS (Business Administration in Commerce, Tourism and Services), working at Hotel Transilvania for half a year and will leave in February for Erasmus

O: You are so smiling with everyone! You must enjoy working here

FO: I enjoy working here because of the team that I am part of

On the reception wall, behind the front officers, there was a diploma for the most smiling department (appreciation)

Very nice interactions with guests in English

Between the Front Officer and the FO Manager was a casual and friendly attitude

When the FO needed more clarification about an upcoming event, he approached the FO Manager, and she happily clarified the outline of the event

Feedback is given by the FO Manager however her friendly attitude shows openness for both way feedback

*! The problem is not that the employees are not engaged but the fact that they are not staying longer

New benefit: the employees can have breakfast from the breakfast buffet in the restaurant

According to the FO Manager, the benefit of having breakfast from the restaurant has been approved recently as there was a time when they were working 24h/72h due to shortage of staff and it was very expensive for the employees to pay for 3 ordered meals.

-----Conversation with Front Officer -----

FO: In February I am leaving as I am going in Erasmus

O: That sounds like an amazing opportunity! Where are you going?

FO: I am going to Portugal with old friends that I have met also in Erasmus 2 years ago.

O: It is so great that you are going with your friends.

O: So, you are quitting your job here or are you planning to come back afterwards?

FO: I am quitting for now and to be honest, I have not thought about coming back.

O: Would it be something that would make you consider coming back?

FO: A higher salary for sure, but also flexibility, trust to be independent and a place to grow as I am interested to develop my career

O: So, let's say that you have this opportunity to leave for Erasmus in February but when the company hears that, they offer you the possibility to work in a different department that would be attractive for you later?

FO: Depends on the department

O: Are you interested in a specific department? The whole group was a broad area of expertise

FO: If you put it that way, the logistics department would be interesting!

O: So, let's assume that instead of leaving for Erasmus, you also could move to the logistic department and by working there you will have different benefits. Would that be attractive?

FO: What kind of benefits?

O: You mentioned flexibility, so let's say that you could choose if you want to work for home or from the office if it is between 9 and 17.

FO: That would be attractive as working at the reception you often work during weekends and holidays

O: Well, if we are talking about reception, it is impossible to work from home as the guest interaction stands at the core of it, but how could we adapt?

FO: It would be nice to be paid double during holidays

O: There is some sort of extra payment by law if you are working during holidays, but I cannot tell you the exact regulations. Would there be any other way to compensate for working during holidays?

FO: For me as a student, an extra day off would be appreciated it as sometimes I have to study for exams

O: So, if you would have those benefits but you could choose which one do you prefer, would it make it more attractive?

FO: Definitely

O: So, if you would have all these benefits, the possibility to develop and to be independent and a flexible benefit scheme, would you at least consider remaining or to return to work for Hotel Transilvania?

FO: For me, the Erasmus experience is very important, but if the company would offer me those opportunities and benefits, I would consider coming back. Also, young people are more inclined to leave a job easily as they have no strings attached.

O: Thank you for your input.

All employees are very kind with each other as they were sharing their snacks (such as oranges)

On a short conversation with the F&B Manager while he was arranging the set-up for lunch, I explained him the purpose of the research and he mentioned that he does not know why some people are staying as they are not paid for the extra hours. Except from Reception and HSK, the F&B department has been stable for the past years.

Conclusion of the observations: The employees seem to stay because of the great team vibe and not because of the benefits that are offered.

8.6 2nd meeting with the commissioner

The second meeting with the commissioner took place in January with the scope of clarifying some information and receiving extra information related to the structure of the organization such as organizational structure, roles, benefits offered and who are the employees available for 1-1 interviews later. Also, the subject related a possible focus group for the development of the solution has been brought up however no clear answer has been given yet as no date has been set. This will be further determined.

8.7 Interview guide

8.7.1 Former employee interview

Good morning/afternoon

Thank you for being here today. During this semi-structured interview, I would like to discuss your time working at Hotel Transilvania. On top of that, we will touch upon the reasons that made you leave and the ones that could make you to stay

Firstly, I would like to ask for your permission to record this interview and to make use of the shared information in my research

Table 8 - Former employee questions

1.	How did you started working for Hotel Transilvania?
2.	What was your status when you were working at Hotel Transilvania?
3.	How long have you been working for the hotel?
4.	In which department have you been working?
5.	How was the working environment?
6.	Did your manager and your colleagues show you appreciation for your work?
7.	Schedule wise, did you managed to have a good work-life balance?
8.	If you could briefly explain, what were the reasons that determined you to leave the company?
9.	Was there anything that the company could do to make you stay longer?
10.	Lastly, according to you, what are the actions that the company should take to keep their employees longer?

8.7.2 Employee Interview Questions

Good morning/afternoon

Thank you for being here today. During this semi-structured interview, I would like to discuss your job at Hotel Transilvania/ in the hospitality industry. We will touch upon the work atmosphere, your job satisfaction, and the benefits offered by the company.

Firstly, I would like to ask for your permission to record this interview and to make use of the shared information in my research

Table 9 - Employee questions

1	To start, could you please state your age?
2	In which department you are currently working and for how long have you been working for the hotel?
3	Is the company offering you any benefits? If yes, could you please state what are those?
4	How satisfied are you with those benefits?
5	According to you, what should the company do to make you more satisfied with your job?
6	What type of benefits should the company/hospitality industry offer to make it more attractive?

7	How important are for you the benefits over the regular pay?
8	Would you stay longer to work for a company which offers a complex benefit scheme?
9	In the past 2 years, have you ever thought about leaving / changing your job? If yes, why?
10	What are usually the reasons why people are leaving the industry?
11	What are the reasons that make you stay with the company?

8.7.3 HR Expert Interview questions

Good morning/afternoon

Thank you for being here today. During this semi-structured interview, I would like to discuss the importance of employee retention and the impact of offering extra benefits

Firstly, I would like to ask for your permission to record this interview and to make use of the shared information in my research

Table 10 - HR Specialist questions

1.	Why are employees in the hotel industry keen to switch positions so quickly?
2.	What is your opinion on employee retention in HI? Why do/don't you think it is an issue?
3.	As an HR specialist, what do you consider that are the key elements that contribute to employee retention?
4.	To what extent are employee benefits related to employee retention?
5.	Why are employee benefits important?
6.	Do you think monetary or non-monetary incentives are more important? Can you please elaborate why?
7.	What drivers do employees have which makes them remain in a specific working environment?
8.	What would be the factors that could attract people in the HI?
9.	What are the most attractive benefits that employees are looking for?
10.	How would you ensure that all employees are satisfied with the offered benefits?

Maybe a success story about employee retention / benefit scheme offered to employees

Extra:

- If you would have the option to choose, what would be the most important benefits that you would offer to enhance employee retention?

What would be the benefits that you would offer if you wouldn't have such strict budgets?

8.7.4 Color coding guide for transcriptions

Category	Color code
Financial Benefits (discounts or cashback, bonuses, vouchers, retirement plan)	
Health Benefits (medical coverage, mental health support,	
Lifestyle Benefits (annual leave, gym membership, any leisure activity)	
Benefits at work (flexible schedule, career and skills development, meal on shift, team buildings, employees' parties, team vibe, uniform, accommodation, meal tickets, coffee,	
Intrinsic rewards (Appreciation,	
Leadership	
Retention	
Importance of benefits	

Salary

8.8 Interview with HR expert

Dear Ms Rueda,

I have sent you yesterday an invitation for an online meeting at 09:00 today. To give you some time to reply, I will adjust the meeting time to 09:30. Let me know if something else came up and we can reschedule.

Best regards,
Bianca Popa
4th-year student at Hotelschool the Hague

+40737093720

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From: Rueda, Dori <Dori.Rueda@lemeridien.com>
Date: Thursday, 12 January 2023 at 17:16
To: Bianca Popa <791602@hotelschool.nl>
Subject: FW: Interview about employee retention

Sorry Bianca
I had a very busy week,
Which time is better for you from 9 until 13:00?

DORI RUEDA
HR Manager
T + 34 977 16 68 69 F +34 977 69 29 99 M 626 06 13 02

N 41°11' E 01°33'
LE MERIDIEN
RA BEACH HOTEL & SPA

Figure 26 - Proof of interview meeting

Link to recording of the meeting: https://hotelschool-my.sharepoint.com/personal/791602_hotelschool_nl/_layouts/15/stream.aspx?id=%2Fpersonal%2F791602%5Fhotelschool%5FnI%2FDocuments%2FOpnamen%2FHR%20Specialist%20Interview%2D20230113%5F103419%2DMeeting%20Recording%2Emp4&ga=1

Interview transcript

Dori Rueda 0:12

Hello. Good morning. Nice to meet you.

Interviewer 0:14

Good morning. Nice to meet you. Thank you so much for accepting to do this interview with me.

Dori Rueda 0:19

No pressure from me also. I'm so sorry because actually today was a very quiet day but because someone is visiting me at 9 and then we have our briefing to attend okay, we will get to it, sorry.

Interviewer 0:36

Thank you. No, no, no worries. I assume that you are very busy so there's no problem with it. Do you mind if I record this interview?

Dori Rueda 0:45
Not at all.

Interviewer 0:48
Thank you so much. I will start first by asking you why the employees in the hotel industry are so keen to switch positions quickly because we are now facing a shortage, especially in the HI after COVID... So why so many people are leaving the industry?

Dori Rueda 1:13
Okay, I think also at least in Spain, the conditions for the hotel industry are not the best. You know, the **schedules are hard**. They work bank Holiday when everybody enjoys days, weekends, and summer, and I think after COVID and before COVID people want to have quality, more quality and they have seen other opportunities in the logistics sector and other industries that are low people to manage the personal life with their work life. And I think this is one of the most real and economical because **salaries in Spain in the hotel industry, are low and you can work even less not on the weekends, and yeah, and earn the same money.**

Interviewer 2:09
Yeah, I completely understand what you're saying. We have the same situation in Romania with poor working conditions and low salaries within the industry. So, I'm guessing it's more like a general factor that it's within the HI. Yeah. All right. So, because they are leaving for better conditions. Do you think that employee retention within the HI, is important and is it an issue for the HI?

Dori Rueda 2:40
Of course, it's an issue is something that I think from high-level government, must invest and put attention to because here in Spain and also I think in Romania, also, tourism is one of the biggest incomes for the country and we need qualified people and we need to offer good conditions to retain talent, because if not, talents, will go, will move to other sectors and they cannot retain if you have someone really brilliant you need to retain, to develop a career.

Interviewer 3:20
And how would you ensure this retention? How would you make them stay?

Dori Rueda 3:27
Okay, do you mean here in our hotel as an example?

Interviewer 3:30
Yes, exactly

Dori Rueda 3:30
For example, we try to **recognize employees by giving extra money or giving a plus, when they, for example, accomplish three years or four years, but we try to recognize them, to promote them internally, to offer promotions indefinitely to develop their careers.** I think this is the most important and also try to they could manage their **workday and personal life, also try to manage schedules,** and put attention that they have quality time. But mostly with **internal promotion** and **financial recognition**

Interviewer 4:13
And is it working?

Dori Rueda 4:14

Okay. Depending, because young people also want something different, and they want to develop their careers but also move from one place to another. They don't want to stay just in a hotel all my life. No, they want to know other people and other countries and so it's a possibility that tourism offers to connect with other people everywhere. So, it's easy to move and then they move of course

Interviewer 4:49

It's way easier exactly for young people to move from one country to another because they don't have the restrictions of having a family or being tied up to a place, so I completely understand it.

Dori Rueda 5:03

And they learn so much when they travel and work in another country is not only work is another philosophy, another culture, so you can learn more than if you stay imagine like a waiter and you can grow and develop until director of F&B but if you stay always in the same place it's also a bit worried because you need to get more experience in other places.

Interviewer 5:29

I completely agree. So, you mentioned the benefits that you are offering regarding extra money to offer recognition to grow internally to take into consideration their personal time when you're scheduling the employees. But I'm wondering do you think that these employee benefits besides the regular salary are important for them?

Dori Rueda 5:56

In one sense, yes. For example, we have an average age here that uses the gym. We offer free gym for our associates and some associates say: "okay this is not a real benefit for me", but for others that are ready to go to the gym, having a free gym in the hotel is a real benefit. This is okay. Some of them just want money and they don't want a free massage or gym or whatever they prefer economic benefits, and this is difficult because we have a budget, a close budget and we cannot do extras.

Interviewer 6:46

But if you would have a no limited budget for offering any kind of benefits to the employees. I don't know, what would be the top five benefits that you would offer to them?

Dori Rueda 7:00

Could be the money of course

Interviewer 7:04

In the sense, for example, the 13th salary

Dori Rueda 7:08

Exactly, the 13th salary or incentive payment, extra payment for results for something they did. We can involve them in the business, this could be that they know the property like their own you know that I belong to this property, and I do my work and I received an extra payment for that. Yeah. It's a mix between recognition and economic recognition. Yeah. So, this will be also a promotion as commented if they see the opportunity, and they can develop a career in the property. I think this is also very attractive. If you start as a receptionist and you say okay, here you will have a front office manager and it's staying here for 10 years. I don't have any opportunity, this receptionist will move, even if we give extra money because we need to develop our careers and for young people is important. So, a career plan is at the top. And what else? So, money recognition, promotion, and also, company benefits this important. We are in Marriott International, and we have the company benefits. And Marriott must maintain these benefits. So, discounts in other hotels around the world where we have also discounts for family and friends when they are accommodated in our hotels. This is also so important to retain because they know they belong to a big company and a company that takes care of associates

Interviewer 9:18

Okay, so these would be the top that you would find. Okay, great. And so, these would be also the ones that will drive the employees to remain within the HI. Because if they have more monetary benefits, if they have more company benefits and a career plan to grow and develop their skills will keep them more within the industry. Is that correct?

Dori Rueda 9:48

Exactly. Great. **We need to keep talent.**

Interviewer 9:53

We do, we definitely do. And I completely relate to the example that came with the front office employee being there for 10 years and maybe there is no place to grow within the reception because you only need, for example, one front office manager. But if you have no budget limitations, maybe you think oh maybe we can open a new position to be an assistant manager

Dori Rueda 10:23

Yes exactly, an assistant or supervisor, or even we are looking always to improve our services so we can create a position that is more like a guest specialist, or more invoices inside the reception but more focused on invoices or on guest satisfaction

Interviewer 10:48

Exactly. Because also retention is directly related to their satisfaction because if they are not satisfied, they are not going to stay with the hotel.

Dori Rueda 10:58

Yeah, exactly. And, perhaps you can consider if you have someone that has a special interest in an area, you can also offer for example, a junior position in another department to show how it works and perhaps discover another area to work. So, you can learn always, inside the hotel.

Interviewer 11:28

Exactly. I was also thinking of cross-training between departments, for example

Dori Rueda 11:34

Yeah, you can discover something that really interests you and you didn't know before.

Interviewer 11:41

And you mentioned earlier about the young people that are so easy to move between cities, countries, positions, and everything. What would be the benefit that would attract that generation specifically it's so hard to come up with a general benefit plan because the young generation wants something, and the middle-aged generation wants something else so you cannot offer the same thing to everybody.

Dori Rueda 12:12

No, no. For example, what I recommend to you, **young people, I think they prefer to have free time** instead of security or stability. For an associate who has a family, has children and they need to pay every month for school and utilities, they would rather look for stability. Young talent, I think they move more for interests. So, what the property offers to me, what can I learn, and if I can enjoy it. So, I need to have free time for myself. **I work but I want to have also free time to enjoy, go out with my friends, connect with other people, and meet other associates after work. They are more social than average people. So, I think they move more with this kind of social benefits you know, if you make team buildings, if you organize, like the gym for example, or English classes or sports activities, all the social things, I think it's a benefit that they consider as opportunities for travel. For example, discounts around the world. I think they prefer this kind of benefit.**

Interviewer 13:59

I can completely relate.

Dori Rueda 14:03
You're young so.

Interviewer 14:04

I can identify myself with that generation. So, I can completely agree. Because it's important to have a social life besides your work life. And it also contributes to the work-life balance that we realized when COVID came when we stayed at home not doing anything. We missed the social part. So, you need to have balance.

Dori Rueda 14:30

Yeah, so I think with COVID, the generation who lost more are the young ones. So yeah, because Millennials and young because they need the social, you know, for myself, in my case for example, I was okay at home and just phone someone because I don't have the purity. I don't need to be connected all day and go around with friends. I have my family, my husband, and my children. So, for me, it's okay to stay at home is no problem. But for my children, for example, they went to university and after that they are together for lunch, to take a drink or something. Wow. It was hard for them. I think new generations need to be connected and afterward, after work. They need to have this connection that will have an impact on the business. And if they feel well in the work and after work with colleagues, I think this has a great impact to create a good atmosphere.

Interviewer 15:39

That's great. You know, what do you think that very simply trying to implement in a hotel a four-day work week could be a possible solution to ensure this free time for this generation?

Dori Rueda 15:54

In one sense, yes, but for example, we are a seasonal hotel. That means in summer sometimes we need to work six days a week. Not five, but six, so it will be really difficult to manage a week for four days. In low season is okay but for us would be difficult. I think it could be a good solution if you offer this possibility to some associates so that they can choose if they want to work five days or four days. But it will be difficult to manage the reality of the daily business.

Interviewer 16:39

So if we think about the high season where I'm assuming you have the hotel full and you have events and everything because I saw that it looks amazing. How would you then ensure their free time and this work-life balance we have the same in Romania when it's the high season people are working six days in a row 12-hour shifts, so it's insane

Dori Rueda 17:06

This is a process that we are getting better at every year. We try to have more hands and share the work, you can have two waiters working 10 hours and they will be frustrated, and upset but you can have three, and pay the same because if you need to pay extra hours is the same as if you have three waiters. This way the guests will be better attended because there are more people, and the waiters will have a better quality of work and life. And this is a process. The problem is that we don't find in the high season qualified talent and I don't know where is the tourism talent because they have moved to other sectors. After all, it's difficult to find stuff, Bianca, really difficult.

Interviewer 18:14

I think that's the biggest challenge that the HI faces right now. And not only because so many industries are saying that they are not finding the talent and I'm wondering where all the people are going because it's not like 50% of the population just died suddenly and there is no workforce anymore.

Dori Rueda 18:39

And if you see the numbers of unemployment, there are quite some people unemployed. You say okay, there are a lot of people unemployed, but we are looking for people so what happened?

Interviewer 18:52

But do you think maybe, I do not know, those people that are unemployed, we have the same situation in Romania, maybe they don't want to work or...

Dori Rueda 19:02

They are more selective with things and okay, I don't want to be impolite with what I am saying but sometimes they think that the government gives some aid that people have been accustomed to receiving short money. And they work, they do extra hours without a contract, so not legal. For example, someone that cleans houses. We can offer a contract to clean rooms and areas, but some housekeeper's clean houses after work. And they received, for example, 12 euros/hour to clean a house. So, cleaning two houses, they receive the same money as working for us the whole day. And so, if they received aid or a supplement from the government, and they clean without a contract, we say black money because they have time and they have time to enjoy with family and everything and in the end, they receive almost the same money.

Interviewer 20:29

Yeah, because the advantage is that if you don't "declare" the money with a work contract, then the government is not taking any taxes from your money.

Dori Rueda 20:39

Exactly.

Interviewer 20:41

And you can work today, let's say you can clean 10 houses if you want, and tomorrow, zero houses.

Dori Rueda 20:47

Yeah, exactly. I manage my time; I receive more money. And as I do not declare the money, the government helps me with aid, we say subsidies.

Interviewer 21:00

Yes, we have the same kind of help from the government.

Dori Rueda 21:06

Exactly. So, there are a lot of little things that complicate these things.

Interviewer 21:14

Yeah, I understand where you're coming from and where you're going because we have the same. The only thing that I don't understand is that this is a short-term solution. So, when they are going to be older and not able to clean houses anymore, how will they live them?

Dori Rueda 21:32

Now you need to save money that is difficult nowadays to save money because what you receive then you will need to spend it go to the supermarket and every day is expensive so you can earn money. So, I don't know but it's a short business, but in the end, no, I think it doesn't work.

Interviewer 22:00

Well, thank you so much for all this information. It has been very helpful. Spain's situation is very similar to Romania luckily so that's great it was super nice to see what your perspective is on this whole situation because Manuel told me that you have a lot of years of experience within HR.

Dori Rueda 22:22

Thank you. Yes, I think we need to also change politician mentality.

Interviewer 22:30
That's very hard.

Dori Rueda 22:32
Yeah, I know, but they need to think in Romania, is also the same, that Spain, Romania, and Greece, we are countries that live from tourism, and we need to have tourism of quality, and to have tourism of quality we need to have people qualified and to have people qualified you to need to invest and pay good salaries and offer good conditions. If not, is like something that is running but you can't find the solution.

Interviewer 23:06
Unfortunately, you are so right about it. But to be honest, I think the private owners have more, I don't know, free hand let's say to offer a higher salary or exceed these legal limitations, rather than a state-owned company.

Dori Rueda 23:29
Exactly. But also from schools... So here in Spain, there are universities for tourism, and we need to have students qualified, we need to continue in the HI, learning and we need to invest in tourism.

Interviewer 23:55
And also invest in dual training if we think about universities to have students from their first year come to practice in the hotel, to know what they will be expecting after they graduate because if you don't know, how would you be able to work there afterward?

Dori Rueda 24:13
Yeah, we have. So, we have quite several trainees in summer, they come from around Europe, sometimes even from South America or other countries. And they stay with us for three, or four months. I think it's a good opportunity because the young student wants to be what we said before, to move to other countries and they can combine. So, on one hand, I am learning and on the other side, I am living an experience abroad and I am meeting new people and it's a good opportunity.

Interviewer 24:53
It is, I did it myself in France in my first year. So, it is a nice opportunity to learn. The downside of it is that sometimes people are not staying because they are just traveling around for their internship coming from so many countries. So, they are not necessarily staying at the hotel.

Dori Rueda 25:15
No, no. They stay for one season; four months and they then move. But sometimes we have had students that one year later, have not gotten out the door and we have offered a contract because we saw an opportunity

Interviewer 25:33
That is very nice. And it's also encouraging a lot of students to stay within the industry because you know, okay, I am doing an internship for four months to learn what I'm supposed to do in the hotel, and I also get a job because even though we are young, I think it's important to know that you have a job and that you're not just free riding.

Dori Rueda 25:55
No, no, exactly. **You need to recognize them with a plan** or something so that they see that the efforts the students are making are recognized because we treat them like any other employees. Okay, we have more passion, and we learn more but, in the end, they are working. So, we need to consider them and offer a little input to **recognize their work and the effort they are doing**, they are out of their country, far from families, and friends and you need to treat them well.

Oh, I think they are calling me for the meeting.

Interviewer 26:38

Yes, that is alright. Thank you so much for today. You have been very helpful, and I wish you good luck with your meetings.

Dori Rueda 26:45

Thank you, Bianca. And I hope I have helped you a little bit and if you need something else, feel free to contact me.

Interviewer 26:53

Thank you so much. Have a nice day.

Dori Rueda 26:56

Have a nice day, Bianca.

Interviewer 26:57

Goodbye.

Dori Rueda 26:58

Bye bye.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>

8.9 Interview former employee



Translation:

SUN, 18 Dec

Researcher: Hello, can we meet around 4:30 PM?

I am now on my way to Alba

Interviewee: Hello, yes

Researcher: Great

Interviewee: Now I am waiting the elevator. Are you already there?

Researcher: Great, I just went up. I am waiting you up front.

Interviewee: Ok

Researcher: Thank you so much for the coffee and the information given. It was nice to see you.

Figure 27 - Proof of meeting

TRANSCRIPTION OF THE MEETING:

Interviewer: Hello, thank you for meeting me

Interviewee: Hi, it's my pleasure to help out

Interviewer: So, as I already told you, the discussion will have the set-up of a semi-structured interview where I would like to discuss your time working at Hotel Transilvania. On top of that, we will touch upon the reasons that made you leave and the ones that could make you to stay

Interviewee: Sounds good for me, it was a short period, but I hope I can provide you with relevant information

Interviewer: To start off, how did you started to work for Hotel Transilvania?

Interviewee: I just saw an opening position and I went to leave my CV. I was starting my master's and I wanted to have a side job until I get my diploma.

Interviewer: Oh, I understand, so what was the position that you applied for?

Interviewee: Receptionist

Interviewer: And for how long have you been working as a receptionist?

Interviewee: Only for 4 months

Interviewer: Why did you left after such a short period?

Interviewee: Well, I only had 2-3 days of what they call training and after that I was left alone in reception. I did not have any previous experience, but I like to think that I get the hang of doing certain activities easily. As the team was new, later I realized that the conditions were not great. We did not have any meals assured during working hours, we started working on a schedule 24/72, meaning that we had a 24-hour shift and then 3 days off, but I was so tired afterwards that the 3 days off were more like 1 day and a half cause I have spent most of the time sleeping to recover.

Interviewer: So, the working conditions weren't that great... But what about the working environment?

Interviewee: You mean the vibe at work with colleagues?

Interviewer: Exactly, how did you get along with them?

Interviewee: The vibe with the colleagues was great, everybody was friendly, we were making jokes and we started to get to know each other and work as a team.

Interviewer: That sounds great! Did your colleagues and manager show you appreciation for your work as you mentioned that after 3 shifts you were left alone, so I believe that you had to take some decisions on your own based on your own experience

Interviewee: Well, in some situations yes and in some not. I mean, there were times when the manager was telling me that I am doing a great job but besides that. I don't know what you refer to as appreciation for my work

Interviewer: Let's say for example that you had a complaint during your shift, and you managed to solve it and make the guest happy in the end. Your manager/ team could show you appreciation for that not only in the sense of congratulate you but also in the sense that if you are a problem-solver in general, to appreciate you publicly, or to give you a bonus

Interviewee: Aaa, I see... well, bonuses were never given regardless of how hard you worked... Compliments in person became quite common and, in the end, I don't know if they weighted that much...

Interviewer: So, what kind of appreciation you would've liked?

Interviewee: Hmm, if you refer to the performance at work, bonuses would be a very attractive way to appreciate the hard work, I don't know, movie tickets, or vouchers at different shops

Interviewer: That definitely sounds more attractive! Would that be something that would have made you stay longer for the company?

Interviewee: I think so, at least it would've made me think twice before I left

Interviewer: Was there anything else that the company could've done to make you stay longer?

Interviewee: If we would've had a better schedule, to be more flexible, a place to develop your career, as there was not much room to grow, a meal per shift as it was expensive to always order or bring your own food, incentives for holidays such as Christmas bonus and more time off because usually you miss weekends or holidays with family and friends...

Interviewer: And if they would've offered you these benefits, you would've still resigned?

Interviewee: I think I would've stayed longer.

Interviewer: Alright. If you could briefly explain, what were the reasons that determined you to leave the company?

Interviewee: Well, to be honest it was mainly due to schedule, but I haven't told them that. It was near the holidays period, and I wanted to make plans, so I've informed them in advance however they haven't taken that into consideration. I had a holiday planned with my family and it was very important to me so the fact they did not take it into consideration was what made me leave. Plus, the schedule was very intense, with long shifts and there was no room for career development. I did not want to end up being a receptionist my whole life. I have bigger aspirations.

Interviewer: I fully get that.

Interviewee: And the low pay was also a contributing factor as now I have a better paid job where I have my weekends and holidays off and I can enjoy my free time. I did not have that luxury there.

Interviewer: So how did you manage the work-life balance?

Interviewee: Honestly, I don't think I did, or I've done a bad job at it because I told you, after a 24h shift I went straight into sleeping for 24h at least... and the whole time I was feeling tired so I was barely enjoying anything in my free time.

Interviewer: That must be hard to manage and once your body is tired it's hard to recover. Lastly, according to you, what are the actions that the company should take to keep their employees longer?

Interviewee: They should care more about their employees and offer more benefits because it's hard to work when everybody is off, so they must compensate somehow.

Interviewer: Could you give me some examples of the most important benefits for you?

Interviewee: Well, money benefits are important, place to develop professionally in the company, vouchers, or discounts for different services such as coffee, groceries or movies, gym, more free time or better say, better scheduling and no extra hours to be able to manage your private life also, private insurance, holidays off and personal recognition.

Interviewer: You just described a very accurate benefit plan! If you would have all these benefits from a hotel, would you come back to work in the HI?

Interviewee: Probably yes. I would probably come back to work in the HI if I would have all these benefits.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time! This has been very useful.

Interviewee: My pleasure. Good luck with your research!

Interviewer: Have a good evening!

Interviewee: You as well.

8.10 Interview F&B employee Hotel Transilvania

Bianca: Hello! So good to see you after such a long time! Thank you for taking the time to meet me.

F&B employee: Hi! Happy to see you as well. It's my pleasure. What have you been doing?

Bianca: Well, mainly university and travelling. Now I am writing my bachelor's thesis and since I've done my first internship here, I've thought it would be a nice place to research. I am curious to find out the importance of employee benefits and what benefits would be attractive for you to stay longer in a company. Also, if you are ok with it, I will record the interview and I will ask you to sign a confidentiality form so all your data will be kept anonymously.

F&B employee: Tough subject. I don't think I am comfortable with the recording, but I will sign the form, just to be safe.

Bianca: No worries, then I will just take notes during our conversation

F&B employee: That is fine, thank you for understanding.

Bianca: Of course, I don't want to expose you. To start off, could you please tell me how old are you and in which department you are working?

F&B employee: I am 25 years old, and I work in F&B at HT for 6 years already.

Bianca: Oh, that's quite some time! So, tell me, in these 6 years, what kind of benefits has the company offered you besides the regular salary?

F&B employee: Honestly, almost nothing. It is my first job, so I don't have any comparison but besides **meal tickets** and **free pool access during summer**, I don't know what else. Well, we also had some **Christmas and 8th of March Party**, and in the first year when I got hired, they did something like **Waiter's New Year**, but that was the only time we had it. We can have **discounts at the restaurant** if we are having a dinner with family and friends outside work hours and I think that's it.

Bianca: At least that's a start. Better than nothing right? And how satisfied are you with these benefits?

F&B employee: **Well... yeah, it's okay but to be honest it could be way better. For example, we have so many over hours and we are never extra paid, unlike Reception.**

Bianca: What do you mean? Can you elaborate on that?

F&B employee: So, we technically should work 40h per week, so 160h per month. **Last month I had 220h worked so 60 extra hours which have not been paid extra and at FO, they are paid for every extra hour that they do. It is not fair. We sometimes receive money besides the salary, like cash but they are not declared**

Bianca: So meaning that the hours are not declared either... And how do you feel about that?

F&B employee: Obviously, **I am not satisfied**, and the **schedule is even worse**... We work from 7 AM till 12 AM sometimes. 5 days a week with 2 days off but you can't do anything besides that, and the **salary is very low**. Yes, we make tips but it's not covering for everything. I am actually considering leaving.

Bianca: Wow those are very long shifts! How do you handle that?

F&B employee: It's very difficult. I barely have time for something else but when you have 5 days off it's nice.

Bianca: And where are you planning on leaving?

F&B employee: I applied for a job in the public sector, I don't want this hectic schedule anymore.

Bianca: And have you talked already with the managers?

F&B employee: No, not yet, but I was planning to do it this week.

Bianca: I am curious to see how it will go! Is there anything that they could offer to you to make to stay?

F&B employee: Well, **firstly the schedule, if they would change my schedule to 8h shifts, with Sunday off I would stay**. It's not necessarily about money but I want to be able to do something extra as I've done a manicure course and I want to be able to work in parallel.

Bianca: Yes, I saw that, congratulations! Ok, so schedule is the most important for you.

F&B employee: In this situation yes. Because if they respect the schedule and hire at least 1 extra waiter, I won't have extra hours, so I won't complain about the payment.

Bianca: I get it. And in an ideal situation, what kind of benefits would you like to have at a job?

F&B employee: Oh, let me start dreaming with my eyes open. Firstly, **paid extra hours** would be nice along with fair treatment of employees. **A meal per shift**, **gym subscription** because I am a sports person, **discounts at taxi** as they own a taxi company and maybe even for **fuel** as they have gas stations, **tickets for cinema or theater**, **private medical insurance** would be a great plus, and **bonuses** of course, for holidays at least. Maybe also **holidays vouchers** but I don't know if we can receive that in the private sector. I think these are the most important ones.

Bianca: Sounds like a fair benefit scheme. How important would these benefits be for you besides the regular salary?

F&B employee: Well, if they would be available, **very important!**

Bianca: And would you stay longer to work for a company which offers a complex benefit scheme?

F&B employee: **Yes, I would stay longer in a company which offers more benefits, but the schedule is a very important factor.**

Bianca: Ok, I understand. What do you think are usually the reasons why people are leaving the industry?

F&B employee: Well, **I think mostly leave due to schedule, as it can be very tiring and intense and might lead to stress or burnout**, **salary** I think is also a factor and many people want to **progress in their career**. I think this is also something that I haven't done because I enjoy this routine and I did not want to put any extra effort so that's probably why I accepted all these poor working conditions. But now I am decided to do more, and hopefully it will go well.

Bianca: Fingers crossed for you! And is it something that makes you stay with the company?

F&B employee: Well, **I really like the team and I've been working here for a long time so I don't know how's somewhere else...** but if they won't change something with the schedule, I think I will leave.

Bianca: You do have a beautiful team there in the restaurant.

F&B employee: Yes, and we are always there for each other however I think the manager should step up more for the team and ask for our rights as he is also aware of the non-payment of extra hours, and nothing is changing.

Bianca: He should be the one to take the situation in the attention of the owners.

F&B employee: But I am decided to make this step now

Bianca: I am happy for you. It is your right. Be confident in your skills! If you can please let me know how it went!

F&B employee: Thank you for the support. I will.

Bianca: Thank you for all the information shared. Here's the confidentiality form if you could kindly sign it.

F&B employee: Of course. I hope it helped you for your research.

Bianca: It definitely did. I am surprised to see that there are differences in benefits from a department to another. It's so unfair.

F&B employee: Yeah, and they are doing these types of things so often. But it is what it is.

Bianca: I hope they will try to improve something.

F&B employee: Me too.

Bianca: Good luck and talk to you soon!

F&B employee; Thank you! Good luck with your thesis!

*3 weeks after the interview we met in an informal setting, and we discussed about how the discussion with the management went. In the end, she obtained to work 8h shifts, from 7 AM till 3PM with 2 weekends where she was working only on Saturday and 2 weekends off. Any other things remained the same, but the schedule was the most important for her as now she can do other things in her free time.

8.11 Interview former FO Manager Hotel Transilvania (on maternity leave)

Bianca: Hello my dear! Good to see you! Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today.

FO Manager: Hello darling! Good to see you as well! I am happy to help.

Bianca: Well, I already know that you used to work in the FO Department as FO Manager, but I don't remember exactly for how long you have been working there

FO Manager: Since 2015, so until I entered the maternity leave were 6 years

Bianca: Oh, that is quite a long time. And while you were working there, what kind of benefits did you have besides the regular salary?

FO Manager: hmm, let me think. There were small things from time to time but there was nothing regular. Almost every year for the hotel's anniversary they were arranging a dinner with all the employees. Once they also gave us a free night stay in the hotel for all the employees, that was actually very cool because we kind of switched the roles, because we, the employees, we were the guests, and the owners were the employees, so they checked us in, they cleaned the rooms, for real, they were waiters at the restaurant while serving us

Bianca: Oh my god!!! That sounds so cool!!! When was this?

FO Manager: Hmm, I think somewhere 2017 / 2018. Plus, they also offered us a citadel tour with guide like we were a tourism group, and for the overnight stay in the hotel, we could also bring our partner

Bianca: That is so cool!! I think it would've been nice if they were doing these types of activities more often

FO Manager: Yeah, I know because every year you have at least one new employee who haven't gone through this experience

Bianca: I think it doesn't even matter if there is a new employee or not, it's about the fact that they are putting themselves in your shoes for one day and you can enjoy the other side, the guest perspective. It might even be a beneficial thing because as a guest you might observe things different.

FO Manager: Yeah, exactly, and the afternoon before the overnight stay we had a dinner with a small party. We had one time, in the 1st week of January, the Waiter's New Year after the regular New Year which was a party organized for all employees because most of them were working during that night. We also had parties for 8th of March, a party for the women within the company almost every year. Once we also had a Halloween party... and I think that's kind of it.

Bianca: But were they offering any benefits constantly? Like not only occasionally.

FO Manager: Let's say, constantly, you could rent the bikes from the hotel to have a ride within the city. We had 5 bikes and 2 for kids and we could have rent them for free. But I don't know if they are still offering it. And, after they opened the pool at the other hotel, I think 4 years ago, we as employees could enter for free but only for us, we didn't have the same benefit for our family for example.

Bianca: Okay, and how satisfied were you with these benefits? Because it doesn't seem like a lot.

FO Manager: I can't say that I was satisfied with these benefits because they were only a few and any human being is happy if they receive something which is money related. We did not have any holiday bonuses ... Oh actually, when I got hired, in the first 2 years till 2017, we used to have a monthly meeting, which after from monthly it became 3 times a year, and after 1 to 2 times a year where they were given a prize for the employee of the month at the beginning, at that time it was 200 lei (€50). During that meeting we were also discussing what was good and bad during that month, we were looking over the client's review and what comes next, if it was something planned business wise, like a strategy or so.

Bianca: And why they stopped doing this?

FO Manager: I don't know. I literally have no clue, but it was a very good thing. They were also telling you what you did wrong, not necessarily individually, like they were not pin pointing someone, only naming the department, but they were also congratulating you for the good things. And they were telling what should be done related to some issues. I really enjoyed participating because I was hearing what is happening around the business. On top of that, we as reception, we were looking from time to time what the reviews were saying but the other colleagues from HSK or F&B, they had no clue what was written there, and through the meeting was a great opportunity to find out.

Bianca: And was that something that could've made you more satisfied with your job if they were continuing doing it?

FO Manager: Yes because I was more involved. I once won the employee of the month prize and I've always putted the extra effort to win it again. Because those extra €50 were quite some money in 2016.

Bianca: Okay and what other benefits they could've offered to make you more satisfied with your job?

FO Manager: Honestly, that part with discounts for food at the restaurant, to have 50% discount at any item from the menu, or to make a simple menu with discount prices for the employees to have a warm meal while on shift and to have a designated break to sit down and eat, not to be always on the run

Bianca: And if we think about the ideal benefits to make the hospitality industry more attractive, what do you have in mind?

FO Manager: Some benefits related to the transportation to the workplace for those who are commuting, holiday bonuses, an extra day off after every year of work for the company, so after 1 year in the company you get 1 extra day off, after 2 years, extra 2 days off etc.... As I mentioned earlier, meals on shift or at least to provide 50% discount on any item from the menu, a gift for kids day, something symbolic, it doesn't have to be expensive, vouchers or discounts (at least 20-30% off) for gym subscriptions, gifts for women's day (also for the

male employees for their wives) , **holiday vouchers**.. or at least an amount to be spent on holiday... **private medical insurance**. I can mention so many benefits that would be ideal.

They tried something with the gym at some point, they offered us 20% discount or so, but nobody wanted to go.

Bianca: So, they tried to offer something, but it wasn't something that would fit the needs of the employees at that time. Okay, and what would fit your needs for example?

FO Manager: As we used to talk a while ago, **it would be interesting to offer an experience to be able to stay in another 4-star hotel in the country, like to offer an exchange opportunity.**

Bianca: Yes, in the sense to make a partnership or a collaboration between 2 hotels, let's say the employees from Hotel Transilvania can have a 50% discount at Hotel Golden Palace Mamaia and the other way around. And maybe also discounts for restaurants within the city

FO Manager: Yes, that also be super nice! Because maybe if you would have **restaurant discounts**, you would go out more often.

Bianca: So how important are these benefits besides the regular salary?

FO Manager: In percentages? **It's quite important especially when you are hearing others talking about their benefits, how is at Bosch for example**... and you start comparing what you get vs what they offer, and you receive almost nothing compared to them. They have so many benefits, from transportation expenses to cheap meals during working hours for lunch, bonuses for everything and so much more. So yeah, **benefits are important.**

Bianca: And would you stay longer in a company that would offer you a complex benefit scheme?

FO Manager: **Definitely! I think anyone would do that.**

Bianca: I think it depends, because there are some people who would go for a salary of 2500 lei (approx. €510) with no benefits to the detriment of a salary of 2300 lei (approx. €470) with a complex scheme of benefits, even though those benefits might compensate even more than the difference of €40. Just because they are attracted by money and not many would think about the benefits offered.

FO Manager: I would go for the job with a complex benefit scheme, especially if they are offering any kind of benefits that you can think of, as I said earlier, medical insurance, holiday bonuses, discounts for food and fuel

Bianca: Yes, that's what I am saying. I think somehow these benefits added up, they compensate more than a few hundred lei on the basic salary.

FO Manager: Exactly.

Bianca: And while you were working at Hotel Transilvania, have you ever thought about leaving or changing your job?

FO Manager: Of course, many times. But I can't say that I've started to look for a different job because I've heard that the salary wasn't that great in other places either and I was comparing with my salary at that point. And I was also thinking if I go to a different position or industry, I will have no experience so there was no way getting the same salary and when you have some years on the same job somehow you start limiting yourself, it becomes a routine, you know what to do , you know the people, you also know the good and the bad parts of the business.. Probably this is a flaw in our behavior, you don't want to evolve more even though you are

aware that there are good and bad parts in the business, but with all of that, you think that somewhere else won't be perfect either and if you go somewhere else where you don't know anybody and you don't know the bosses there, you prefer to stay like this, in a place that you are familiar to.

Bianca: And what were the factors that made you think about leaving?

FO Manager: It was a period when I've thought a lot about it, within the first years, it was because of the work atmosphere, it was very tense and there was a marketing manager that was constantly yelling and she was always finding mistakes in everything that we were doing, even though it wasn't her job as we were not in her suborder. She was overreacting to everything, and she was making everybody stressed and of course I was stressed for my team because I wanted to stand up for them. So that was a very tense period ...

Bianca: Ans what made you stay then even though the work atmosphere was very tense?

FO Manager: I said to myself that I should try to speak to her to tell her to chill out a bit and I also wanted to see if the owners are appreciating me because if they didn't, I would've left. So, I asked for a salary rise, and I was curious to see if I am going to get it or not because if not, it would've been clear for me that it's not the place for me. But I did receive the rise! So, it was clear that they were appreciating my work and it gave me courage to keep up. I never mentioned to them that I wanted to leave, so the fact that they wanted to keep me there and they accepted the rise made me feel appreciated.

Bianca: It is very important to feel appreciated. And not only verbally but also financially.

FO Manager: It is very important, not only financially but also verbally. Only a "good job" said at the right moment can make such a big difference because it's motivating people. It's always important to tell them whenever they do something good.

Bianca: I partially agree because of course, good words always matter, but at some point if you only say it and not taking any actions, people might start to doubt if you are only saying something just for the sake of it or you actually mean it.

FO Manager: Yes, of course not to exaggerate with the good words...

Bianca: No but if you are always doing a great job and they are saying to you over and over again "keep up the good work", at some point you will be like, ok, good job to me and what else? You need some sort of appreciation, at least a chocolate, or a bottle of wine or something... And it's not about doing it every time but from time to time... to show them that you are appreciating their work

FO Manager: Yes, I see where you are coming from. In the last 2 years before I left, while I was hotel manager, marketing manager and FO manager all together because we were short staffed, as I was sitting next to the GM (the owner's wife), we got to know each other better and many times she asked me to join her for lunch and it was nice to be invited and to have a warm meal, I really appreciated her gesture. Also for my birthday, the owners were always bringing me flowers...

Bianca: Those small gestures also count!!!

FO Manager: But as you said, those were some occasional benefits.

Bianca: That's what I am trying to say, it's not a standard that they are doing, it's not like how it is at Bosch for Women's Day, they are giving to everyone, women or male, for the wives, a voucher or some package. Which is a very nice gesture from my point of view because they are not making any sex differences, they are caring about all their employees, even if it's not directly for them, but for their wives. It's nice to involve everyone.

FO Manager: Yes, some vouchers

Bianca: And about the thing with flowers, it is indeed a beautiful gesture that they were offering you flowers for your birthday, but it would be way better to be equally for all employees, for example for their birthday, we give any employee a voucher of x amount. Because maybe they were bringing flowers to you, but I doubt that they were doing the same with the HSK ladies.

FO Manager: No...

Bianca: That's my point. So, it's a partial benefit because it was only offered to some people and it's not equal.

FO Manager: I know, and at Bosch they had the same for child's day.

Bianca: Yes, they have so many. It's hard to compete with that. Okay, and why do you think people are leaving the hospitality industry, because many decided to change their jobs after the pandemic especially.

FO Manager: Well, the salary is a reason because here salaries are quite low within the hospitality industry, I don't know about other cities but it's also hard to compare because the cost of living is different also from a city to another so I don't think you can compare salaries from a city to another. Also, not everyone can work in this field, you must be able to work your way around certain situations, to be responsible etc. It's not that you really need studies in the field to work in hospitality, unfortunately many were hired without any experience or studies in the field, but you can see who is made from the job because not everyone is hospitable from nature.

Bianca: For sure, and perhaps they can't find their place, or they don't identify themselves with the job, and they leave.

FO Manager: If they are not made for this, at some point they will give up and leave to find something else and usually they are changing the domain of work.

Bianca: And I think this will happen regardless of what you would offer to them because if a person is not made for the job, you could offer them anything... and it won't matter.

FO Manager: Yes, we even had situations that the owners gave them even a salary rise, and they didn't want to stay, they wanted to leave for different reasons, not money related. They felt that they were not part of the team, they were not integrated, they did not like the work atmosphere ... we had cases who after a month said that they don't feel integrated and that they can't get along with anybody...

Bianca: It can happen. As you mentioned, it's not a job made for everyone, you must be sociable, to be able to multitask, etc.

FO Manager: And on top of that, working with people is extremely difficult. Because when they are in front of you frustrated, you should keep your calm, and not everybody is able to do that.

Bianca: And no day is the same.

FO Manager: Yes, it's a challenge. I also had situation when I was blowing off on the inside when a guest was yelling at me, you have literally no fault, only that you happened to be in front of him at the wrong time.

*Laughs

And for anything that was going wrong in the hotel, regardless if it was something about the bed or a light not working, you had to do everything that was in your power to make the guest happy before going to bed. You had to fix the problem somehow... as much as you could, and to keep a positive attitude.

Bianca: It's about at least trying your best to solve the problem.

FO Manager: For us it was also a problem that after 7 PM, we did not have a technician on the premises in case something was broken ... so, it was very difficult... We did not have a person who could carry an extra bed if it was a last-minute situation... the girls from the reception had to go upstairs with the extra beds for kids, or to change the batteries of a remote. I don't know but I don't find it normal to leave the reception without any supervision to go upstairs and move beds.

Bianca: You're right. It's not. But if there's no other way? What should you do?

FO Manager: Well, you'll have to. Even if they were missing some towels or soap, for anything, the girls from the reception had to go. It should be somebody, at least a security guard. This thing has always been an issue. From my point of view, in a 4-star hotel you should have a security guard or somebody who would also help with the luggage etc.

Bianca: From all the interviews that I've had with employees from Hotel Transilvania, everybody mentioned security, and up until today, they haven't implemented it.

FO Manager: A security guard especially for the night and on day shifts to have somebody who could help at many different things, for helping with luggage. We had so many situations with celebrities that were expecting to be somebody who would help them with the luggage since it's a 4-star hotel. Usually, we were asking the guys from F&B to help us out because we did not have another solution...

Bianca: You were figuring it out somehow with the resources you had. So, there is place for improvement.

FO Manager: Yes, there is, and you see, all these minuses are also affecting you as an employee, directly and indirectly. It also affects me, as a receptionist, also the guys from F&B, also the ladies from HSK, everybody is influenced about any minus, or problem the company has. The fact that we did not have enough personnel was affecting all of us because we all had to work much harder and put in extra hours, to go above their duties and responsibilities, and it's not a pleasure for anyone. That was something that we were all struggling with, because I was doing my best to do everything right even though it wasn't my job, to make a good job for you as an owner and make the guests happy, to do this and that even if it is not my responsibility, but you as an owner, you are not trying to do more for us. Not even saying a good job the next day, like good job because you from reception went to change the linen on a bed or you brought an extra bed and prepared everything even if it wasn't your responsibility. Because there were many situations when everybody was doing extra tasks above their responsibilities because if you weren't doing it, the client was yelling at you, then you would've received a bad review the next day....

Bianca: I think many owners don't even realize how big of a difference would make a small gesture...

FO Manager: Yes... and only the fact that you are hiring an extra person and yes, you are paying an extra salary, but it will make the everyone's job easier. During summer for example, is a huge need of an extra waiter because the terrace is always full and the restaurant is also full because the hotel is full of groups and tourists, and 2 waiters on shift who must take care of the bar, orders, serving and clear the tables is just impossible to handle that in 2 people per shift. I went so many times during breakfast to help them out

Bianca: I have one more subject that I am curious about. Why you at reception don't receive **night bonuses**?

FO Manager: Well, they never gave it.. This is how it is in the company.

Bianca: But why?

FO Manager: I don't know what they did or how they did it because legally, I think it should appear on the pay slip

Bianca: I started looking up the labor law because I had discussions with different hotels and some mentioned that they are receiving night bonuses, weekends bonuses, holidays are paid extra etc. and I know that you never had it and according to the labor law for people working between 10 PM and 6AM, a bonus of 75% out of the base salary per hour should be paid. I mean, it's a legal aspect and I don't think they are avoiding the law but it's also not clear if it's a must that has to be respected also by the private owned companies, because some are doing it and some don't.

FO Manager: To be honest, I have no clue. I also never asked HR or the owners about this night bonus, I never worked night shifts for them and then I haven't asked but also the employees from reception who were doing the night shifts, they never raised the issue to me to take it further

Bianca: Yeah, probably because they didn't know about it..

FO Manager: For sure, and the thing is that we don't receive the pay slips. We never received them to see all the things that are included in your salary.

Bianca: Not even if you ask for it?

FO Manager: If you are asking for it, then you will receive it, but normally it would be to receive it at least via email or something. But they never gave it to us.

Bianca: Where I used to work, we had an app from where we could download it, but it wasn't always working. And at some point, they decided to send via mail all pay slips.

FO Manager: At least you had something. The intention counts!

Bianca: But it's important to know how you are paid, what is deducted etc.

FO Manager: Yes, it is.

Bianca: I tried to find an explanation why they would not give these bonuses, but I can't.

FO Manager: Well, I think that it would imply salary increases if they would add the bonuses and the extra hours on top of the minimum wage, because **all of them are making extra hours, especially in the restaurant... they have like 240 worked hours per month...** so just imagine. I think they've found a way to avoid this, I don't know. And also, if you don't receive the pay slip you don't even know if it is included or not.

Bianca: Yeah. I don't know what to say anymore... Anyways, thank you so much for your time and answers! It was nice to talk with you!

FO Manager: It was my pleasure. It was good to see you again.

Bianca: I will just send you the confidentiality form via WhatsApp and I will kindly ask you to sign it and return it to me.

FO Manager: Of course! No worries. Good night!

Bianca: Thank you once more. Have a good night!

8.12 Interview transcript FO Employee Hotel Transilvania

Bianca: Hello! Good to see you! Thank you so much for taking the time for this interview.

FO Employee: Hi! Of course, I am happy to help!

Bianca: So, to explain the background a little bit. I did my first internship here in my first year of study during the pandemics. As I am a student in the Netherlands, and I wanted to write my final thesis in the hotel field of work as it is a domain familiar to me. And as I have worked here before it is quite familiar to me. So, I will explain you briefly what my interest is related to. When I came here afterwards, I had a shock, everybody was new. I did not recognize anyone in the reception comparing to the people I used to know before. Consequently, I thought to myself that a lot of people left the job here for a certain reason and my main interest is to understand and find out to what extent and how are you satisfied as employees, with the benefits you have form the company and what would be the ideal benefits so that you continue to work in a hotel like this one, leaving aside the fact that we are talking about Hotel Transilvania.

FO employee: ok, I understand...

Bianca: or any other 4 stars hotel. That would be the main idea. I must also add that all the information provided will remain confidential. At the end of our discussion, I will give you a form of confidentiality for you to sign and acknowledge as in the and I am not interested to point out who said what. The main goal of my research is to encourage the management team to do a little bit more for you, the employees. I can only hope that this would be the result, but I cannot guarantee. As I said before, I spoke to your fellow workers the other day, and with your manager, she was very much involved in my research from the beginning, and everyone has a very different opinion on the matter. That is why I wished to discuss with everyone to know exactly your opinion. I expect that the interview will take at least half an hour, I hope it is ok with you. So, let's start. How long do you work here?

FO employee: I have been working here since last year, in May.

Bianca: Oh, so it is quite some time. Almost a year now. Super! Please, if you do not mind, can you tell me how old are you?

FO employee: I am 34, going on 35 years.

Small informal discussion about boys and girls in high school...

Bianca: So, you said that you have been working here since May. How come you end it up to work here?

FO employee: So, I used to work in retail, as a shop assistant. Inside the Penny store in Ampoi there is a little shop, Transeuro. So, I used to work there. I had to leave because I had an agreement with the management in Transeuro but after 4 years of work, there did not obey the agreement, so this was the solution to terminate the contract in good terms. Afterwards, I stayed home, unemployed for 2 months, to rest, and recover and then I realized that I had to do something with my life, I could not just stay at home doing nothing, only domestic chores like cooking, cleaning, looking after my girl, on and on. And I saw the advertisement for the job and I sent my CV.

Bianca: Super. And how do you find the job so far?

FO employee: the job itself is very nice.

*During the interview, the employee had also to answer the phone calls and check reservations. *

So, this is my job, to work with the people. I like it a lot, therefore, all along my working time, I have been working with people. I do not think I could stay in an isolated workplace to work with machines. This is what I like and know how to do. There are of course, also busy days, difficult days but I like this type of work. So, the job itself is very nice, people, most of them are ok. But you know, you worked here.

Bianca: yes, I worked with the former FO Manager, I do not know if you have met her...

FO employee: No, but I like what I do. It is not very difficult. You know, it is not brain surgery or else...

Bianca Yes but working with people can be difficult sometimes.

FO employee: Yes, you are right. Working with other people can be difficult but if you really like it is just fine. I can't do things like a robot. To come to the job and just do nothing. When a client comes, I like to talk, to discuss, to make jokes. I like to put myself in the client's position. I like when going somewhere to encounter a person very open, willing to answer my questions, and in good mood. Otherwise, I will not go there for another time.

Bianca Yes, but it is also important the way you are as a person. If all this comes naturally.

FO employee: Yes, otherwise, it is fake, and its noticeable.

Bianca Ok, and because you like to work here so much, the company offers you some benefits, aside from the monthly salary, for example days off, meal vouchers?

FO employee: Well, about days off, depending on the amount of work, just now a colleague left so we are short personnel. For example, I had a family event, and the company made a discount. Of course, there are things than can be improved but on the overall, situation is ok.

Bianca. So, you are satisfied with the benefits. I like it that you already answer my future questions. Coming back to what you have just said, what would be the improvements? What could the company offer in addition, from your point of view?

FO employee: To be honest, the financial aspect can be improved, regarding the salary. That would be the main aspect that can be improved.

Bianca Ok. Beside the salary, what else? You mentioned that you have a daughter. For example, if the company would provide tickets to the movie to go with your daughter every month.

FO employee: Yes, it would be terrific. But you know, during summertime, the company also owns Astoria Hotel with the swimming pool, and we have free entrance. But for all of us the salary remains important.

Bianca: You stay in Alba?

FO employee: No, I commute.

Bianca: So, for example, if the company, would not raise the salary but they would sponsor 50% of the price for transport form home to the hotel and forth.

FO employee: That would be very good. It would compensate somehow if they would give me cashback for transportation.

Bianca: or, given that they also have Taxi company, if they would agree to offer you a ride with the car.

FO employee: Hm, they hardly find cars for the cooks. It is very complicated. Before, I used to work in a taxi dispatch, and I had a car to go and leave the office every day, but here, things are different.

Bianca: Well, what else could they do to make you more satisfied? Voucher to the seaside, or something else...

FO employee: You know, I am very realistic, so I do not want impossible things but only what I deserve for my work. Because there are days, very busy days when I can barely go to the toilet, not to mention food or a cigarette, as I am a smoker. I like the program, 2 days on and 2 off. Because I have more time to spend with my daughter. Usually, I have my parents to stay with her, but it is not the same thing. But the salary remains the main issue.

Bianca: I think it is the same problem in the entire hospitality industry. Maybe if the management would add 200 lei (approx. €50) which is not much but for you would make a difference. You can use these 200 lei extra to stay with your daughter one weekend in the mountains. But probably, for the management, 200 lei is nothing and they cannot understand that for you would make a big difference. And probably, that is why people are not attracted to come to work. Here at Transilvania hotel, it is the same situation, it has been a month or so since the other receptionist left and yet no replacement... So what do the companies in the hospitality industry should do to attract more people to come and work? People are restrained to come and work in the hotels, as they do not have holidays, no weekends off from time to time.

FO employee: You know, speaking strictly about hotel Transilvania. People already know the level of salary is very low, 1700 lei (approx. €350) is very low for night shifts included but on the other hand, if you really need a job and want to work and need the money you have to accept the salary offered. For example, this year, as we were in a full team format and the hotel was also 2 days closed, I had the perfect Christmas, 6 days of holidays, for the first time since I was in school. So let's be honest, not all the holidays are ruined because you work in a hotel. And if you really have a problem, you can rely on your colleagues... But the salary... and people talk...

Bianca: And it is a small town. So they have to be careful with the mouth-to-mouth publicity that they are encouraging.

FO employee: But not the official advertisement which is promoted by them. The real and informal one shared by the people.

Bianca: Yes, and you could also say that things have changed, the salary is not so low, and they also provide us private medical insurance, they offer us holidays bonus, so on. So, I am saying that beside the bare salary, they can add supplementary benefits like holidays bonus, food cheques, holiday vouchers for private company, in the amount of 1400 lei every year to spend it at the seaside or in the mountains, gym membership.

FO employee: Of course, there are a lot to be done to improve the recruitment offer. Also, what you mentioned about movie tickets would be an interesting benefit to have, I would probably use it.

Bianca: There are a lot to be done, to raise your level of satisfaction.

FO employee: You know, I have not met yet a boss to be interested in the employees' quality of life. So, for example, you have 200 tourists in the hotel and only 2 persons in the reception. They are only interested that everything is in order and not how it has been done. Only to get the money.

Bianca: Yes, but this is a problem. Maybe it would be better that all the managers would think more about the employees and to appreciate a little more the effort they make. Because without their effort, they would not obtain profit.

FO employee: Yes, you are perfectly right. I hope you will not change your mind. I would like to meet you in 20 years, and you would have your own company and treat your employees the way you say now. Maybe the managers from our company should think that, as they have a lot of companies, all of them on profit, to think a give a little back, to keep the employees satisfied. So, let's say in a lunch break to convene a short meeting with all the staff in the hotel to discuss the needs and requirements on both sides.

Bianca: And do you think that people would say anything?

FO employee: Probably, at the beginning, nobody would say anything, but I think it is important to be one vocal and some others will follow. That would be the beginning of change.

Bianca: The idea is that people are afraid to say all these. They are afraid not to lose their jobs, they do not want to stir the waters, as they got used to job, with the colleagues, and they are afraid to make any changes.

FO employee: Everyone should make his/her own inner analysis to know exactly what the advantages, the faults, and be honest in discussion if he/she considers deserving more for the work. Now, I am waiting for a discussion with the manager, because at the job interview it was an offer for the first period and then the salary was supposed to raise...

Bianca: I wonder what they would do if you all leave, and the reception will remain vacant?

FO employee: You know it is a saying that there is a line in front of people waiting to get a job here. But I have not seen anyone. There are looking for people for months so...

Bianca: It is also important that you are here a well-founded group, from what I discussed with your colleagues as well and you step up for each other and maybe its a group power.

FO employee: I do not know what to say, but we would like to continue as a team not to change. Because starting with April it is hectic, a lot of tourists, groups, events... and we won't have the necessary time to train new people. And when a guest comes to complain, the receptionist is the interface and has no instrument to solve the problem only to convey the complaint to the manager.

Bianca: You know, I used to work in the Netherlands and France and we used to have a monthly budget out of which we could spend to satisfy the guest and to improve. Maybe something like this might give you more freedom. To provide that wow experience or to compensate for any inconvenience.

FO employee: Not a chance to see this here. But what is also hard is that people have expectations that it is a 4 star hotel and there are the small details that can make a difference.

*Min 41 to 47 - out of context conversation about another company and group reservations

FO employee: I hope I could offer you all the necessary details for your paperwork or maybe not?

Bianca: What I like is that from one question, there comes another one, natural questions and answers, as well. And I am very much interested in the core of things. I also have a partial answer to one of my questions so I will have to ask again. How important are the benefits besides the salary? I understand that the salary is very important. But on a scale from 1 to 10, how important would be for you to have benefits besides the salary?

FO employee: I would be very pleased to have benefits besides the salary, so it would be a maximum of importance.

Bianca: Would you be determined to remain more in a company that offers you benefits besides the salary?

FO employee: Absolutely! I told you that I worked in 3 places in 16 years. I like stability.

Bianca: So, in other words, this would also help you to be more loyal to the company.

FO employee: Yes. For now, the program is the more important aspect that makes me stay here.

Bianca: There are a lot of pros and cons for the program in general, regardless if you work in shifts or 9 to 17.

FO employee: In the current week, I had lot of shifts and extra shifts as we are one person short in the reception, but the important thing is that they pay us overtime. Otherwise, who do you think somebody would have worked so hard?

In February, for example, we were only 3 in the reception, and we had to work a lot, 100-120 hours overtime.

Bianca: It is good that the overtime is paid, as I have understood you do not receive extra for night shifts, which is very odd, considering that you do have night shifts on a regular basis.

FO employee: Normally, it is not very legal but there are some connections within the territorial labor inspectorate, to pay as low as possible for every employee and from what I know you are also registered differently work wise.

Bianca: Back in 2019, during my internship, there were some discussions related to the night shifts and the pay for them only if you graduate a certification course as receptionist, but I am not sure how it works legally.

FO employee: I did not know that!

Bianca: But I don't know exactly the law. Maybe you need recognition.

FO employee: But it would be normal as an employer to come and say that we should attend this course. It is strange that as a 4-star hotel nobody here has this course.

Bianca: Ever since you work here, have you thought about leaving?

FO employee: I have received 3 job offers since I work here, from the guests but the program keeps me here for the moment in an ideal situation when we are 4 receptionists and 1 FO Manager.

Bianca: So basically, the program of 12h on with 48h off keeps you here, the team members.

FO employee: I like the colleagues, especially the girls.

Bianca: What would be the reasons for the people to leave the jobs here?

FO employee: Money, the job itself, health issues, program, getting pregnant, going to study. Normal things for which usually people leave the job.

Bianca: So, you do not think it is something different in the hospitality industry?

FO employee: No, no.

Bianca That would be all. Thank you very much for everything. Somehow, during the conversation, you also offered me some extra answers. I will give you here to sign the form and I thank you once again for your availability!

FO Employee: It was a pleasure!

8.13 Interview FO Employee Hotel Transilvania

Bianca: Good morning! Thank you for taking the time to speak with me.

FO Employee: No worries.

Bianca: I used to work here at the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 and I was very shocked when I enter the reception and I have not recognized anyone here. I am pretty sure that you have not anyone I knew...

FO employee: I am the most recent employed here, so I am sure that I have not met anyone you once knew working here.

Bianca: How long have you been working here?

FO employee: Since September

Bianca: So quite recent

FO employee: Only 6 months

Bianca: And do you like working here?

FO employee: Yep

Bianca: This is what matters.

FO employee: As a student it is ok. I am first year in a Master degree course, in Business Administration. It is ok because it is hybrid and I can also work. I am from Republic of Moldova, Causeni.

Bianca: Oh, that's great! Let me explain a little bit. As we are speaking, I am also filling in some questions. I am writing the finale these for finishing the graduation on the subject related to the level of satisfaction experienced by the employees in the hospitality industry in general. During our discussion I would like to tackle issues like the working environment, your level of satisfaction during your work, what the benefits offered daily by your employee and what would be the ideal benefits in your opinion. My main interest is to understand what your really needs are and how the employee could really satisfy your needs. If everything is ok, I would also like to add that all this information would be used in my paper but anonymously. At the end of this interview, I will also give you a form to sign stating that everything remains confidential. It will only be data from reception and the restaurant. My main interest is maybe to try and improve your working conditions. For the beginning, can you please tell me your age?

FO employee: 22 years old

Bianca: Usually, people very young choose to work in this field because they need the money while still studying in the University. You said that you are working since September.

FO employee: Yes, I worked in August part-time as an intern but as a full-time employee since September.

Bianca: And for internship you worked also in reception?

FO employee: yes, I did.

Bianca: So, in this period, could you tell me if the company offers you any benefits? For example, do you receive compensation for transport, free meals or food stamps.

FO employee: Yes, we have **food stamps** and also, **during summer season, all the employees can enter the swimming pool of Astoria for free.** And **we also have free breakfast.**

Bianca: Ok, this is an improvement. When I used to work here, it was no such thing as free breakfast.

FO employee: Other benefits, I don't know, **for us working in reception, the transport is not refundable.**

Bianca: I don't know, for example, do you receive any financial bonuses for holidays or parties? As far as I know, there were some kind of activities.

FO employee: No, no, only for **New Year's Eve, we received some gifts, something symbolic.**

Bianca: Do you have some discounts in hotel?

FO employee: **We may have room discounts,** but for the moment I didn't need them.

Bianca: And at what extent are you satisfied with these benefits?

FO employee: 100%. For me it is ok. I could not ask for more as I live at 20 minutes' walk and it would be absurd to ask them to pay for a taxi for me.

Bianca: Ok, so what could the company do for you to make you happier?

FO employee: Firstly, **a salary raise,** **to have all the same uniform in 2 changes,** at least, especially for situation when you have to work 2 or 3 shifts in a row. For me living in a student hotel, it is quite impossible to clean the uniform so quickly.

Bianca: So, for example, if you could clean your uniform at the hotel laundry service, it would make a difference for you?

FO employee: No, I don't think this is an option because if you have 2 groups in 2 days, the lady working in the laundry would be very busy and it would be impossible for her to do all these on short notice.

Bianca: Yes, you are right. What else?

FO employee: Other benefits?

Bianca: Anything. Think about the ideal job, the job that you dream of.

FO employee: **To work 8 hours shifts instead of 12 hours as it is right now.** Because during night-time it is very tiring especially if you have guests staying in. I am sorry, please, excuse me but I have some clients at the desk...

Bianca: Yes, of course, take your time. It is very hard to be in 2 places in the same time.

FO employee: In an ideal job, it would be more than welcomed to have a bodyguard. Sometimes, poor people come to beg inside the hotel, and they can be aggressive, and you need someone to take care of them not to enter the hotel. And, when there are conflicts with some clients, not very often but still. Especially during the night as across the street there is a night club so there are some shabby persons around. Especially for my lady fellow colleagues. And that would be all.

Bianca: So, ok, if that is all you need, this is all I pit down. And why did you want to work in a hotel?

FO employee: A friend of mine worked here and he suggested me to work here. Even if I had a job offer from a Ukrainian refugee as a manager, better paid but without legal papers, I denied it and decided to work here. It is better and safer for me like this.

Bianca: And you also mentioned that you are attending relevant Master classes. In the future, do you consider working in this industry?

FO employee: I would like to return to the Republic of Moldova and set up my own cafe or a restaurant with traditional food.

Bianca: That's a great idea! So, from the point of view of a future entrepreneur in this field of work, what would be the right benefits that might attract people to come and work in the hospitality industry? Because, lately, people are quitting more often from this industry.

FO employee: Firstly, a motivating salary, secondly, a manager to be tough but also friendly, to be objective, because, when a manager is too tough, people resent the environment and decide to leave but also, when it is too friendly, it is also troublesome, as they become more relaxed.

Bianca: And why do you think a manager should be like this?

FO employee: Because he has to know how to adapt to the situation.

Bianca: And, somehow, if the manager is not good, his team is the same. And what else would you offer to your potential future employees?

FO employee: Bonuses.

Bianca: What kind of bonuses?

FO employee: Different kinds of vouchers. To a shop, for example, to a gym and even some money cash, an extra day of vacation.

Bianca: And do you think vouchers to gym are attractive for people, especially nowadays?

FO employee: Yes, I think so.

Bianca: I agree with you. It is very important for people to have their free time and to have a 10% deduction to go to a gym. Maybe you are more attracted to go to the gym if you have this deduction. You also mentioned an extra day of vacation, according to the seniority or else...

FO employee: Yes, an extra day of vacation based on the seniority or on the time of working in that month.

Bianca: so, maybe the performance. What else?

FO employee: Free coffee?

Bianca: Ok.

FO employee: let's say 2 every day.

Bianca: Here, you are free to take coffee, right?

FO employee: yes, we are allowed to have free coffee. Also breaks, especially for the smokers. As if they are not allowed to smoke, they become frustrated and they make mistakes.

Bianca: And if you compare the benefits to the regular salary what do you think?

FO employee: I think benefits are welcome anytime.

Bianca: And, if you have a salary of 2500 lei with no benefits and 2300 lei but with a lot of benefits. What would be your options?

FO employee: 2300 lei but with benefits.

Bianca: ok, why?

FO employee: Because all the benefits compensate a lot the 200 lei difference and in reality, is really more.

Bianca: You are right. I am glad that you think like his. Would you be determined to remain more in a company that offers you benefits besides the salary?

FO employee: I would remain if the benefits would be constantly adapted to the market.

Bianca: So, to permanently update the benefits. Ok, let's say that today they are offering 5 meal vouchers, I don't know the exact number, but it is not important. And in a year time the prices for the groceries raise and they offer you 10 meal vouchers. This is the idea.

FO employee: Yes, but also to add or change.

Bianca: ok, now, since you have been working here, have you ever thought to leave the company, to resign? Or to change the job?

FO employee: Yes.

Bianca: Why?

FO employee: Because the idea in life is to head for the better. In case you receive a better offer you should not hesitate.

Bianca: So you said that you should aspire for the better in life and that if you receive a better offer you should not stay still. About that, I am thinking about some personal development opportunities.

FO employee: Yes, I am thinking about personal development and salary raise. Here there are some differences between us people from Bessarabia and from Romania. Even if we speak the same language, we understand things a little different.

Bianca: I think, people hear what they want to. But this is an interesting perspective.

FO employee: I said that we have to work more shifts because we are short of personnel, and it was interpreted that I complained.

Bianca: This is true. You really need some extra people to be hired. Do you think that this lack of personnel is also a reason why people decide to leave the branch of work?

FO employee: No, I don't think. This is just a period until they are hiring someone.

Bianca: Ok, then, what would be the reasons for people to leave this field of work?

FO employee: Maybe, they don't like to have direct contact with people. What else? Maybe, they think they had to work at the highest level possible. They have this fear, that they will not be able to meet the requirements. And they don't have information right from the source but only from what they hear from third parties.

Bianca: And if we think about your former colleagues that left. What determined them to leave the job here?

FO employee: Well, since I am here, only one guy left but he left to study through Erasmus.

Bianca: Generally speaking, there are a lot of people that used to work in hotels and decided, especially during the pandemic to change the career. As they realized that they can work from home, that you don't need to work during weekends or holidays.

FO employee: Maybe, also the salary is higher in other cases.

Bianca: or maybe as you said, they avoid being under stress.

FO employee: And also because **this is a job where your emotional state doesn't count.** No matter how you feel, you have to smile all the time, to be polite.

Bianca: And how could your managers take more care of your emotional state?

FO employee: I don't think it is up to the managers. It is also up to you. If you have something, and you don't feel good, you should take a day off.

Bianca: How about, having some benefits that prevent you from feeling upset. 10% discount to the gym might make you happier or a free ticket to the movie every month to go with your friends or to have a designated person to talk to.

FO employee: It would be an idea.

Bianca: Some things that would improve your emotional state?

FO employee: Here in Alba, that would be all, **gym or movie.** **But I also like the idea of having somebody to talk with when your emotional state is down.**

Bianca: What about other options? Theatre, bike, picnic, discount in buying groceries for picnic or they bring you those candies Bucuria.

FO employee: **I would rather prefer to be left to go home.**

Bianca: Maybe an extended weekend.

FO employee: **A week, to go home as I haven't been home for 4 months.** I missed Christmas and New Years Eve.

Bianca: And for Easter?

FO employee: I intend to if we hire somebody. I had 2 days of vacation and I got back-talk that I felt sorry that I dared to stay home.

Bianca: This is not normal. Vacation is your lawful right. In this case, what makes you stay longer with them?

FO employee: Nothing. I will remain to work until 31 of May.

Bianca: And after? Do you intend to leave?

FO employee: I applied for work and travel programme. And if I obtain the visa I will leave.

Bianca: So you don't have reasons to remain.

FO employee: even if I don't qualify for the programme, I will leave. Also because of my colleagues. In the reception I am the only man, maybe this is why we have all these tensions. Maybe if I had worked in the restaurant where there are men, they could understand me better.

Bianca: So you are determined to leave. Let's think if you obtain the visa, what could the company do to keep you?

FO employee: Nothing can be done to keep me but to return maybe if they raise my salary.

Bianca: And if you don't get the visa? What can they do to keep you?

FO employee: to find me a place to stay as the student hotel closes in August and one month till October, I have no place to stay.

Bianca: That would be all. Thank you very much for everything. I will give you here to sign the form and I thank you once again for your availability!

8.14 Interview transcript FO Employee Hotel Transilvania

Bianca: Hello! I'm Bianca, nice to meet you! Thank you for taking the time to speak with me!

FO Employee: Hi! Of course, I am happy to help!

Bianca: So, let's start by giving you a background context of what I am doing. I decided to write my bachelor's thesis about Hotel Transilvania because I did my internship here in my 1st year of university, so we're talking about 2021 and when I came to visit, I realized that I didn't recognize anybody from FO as everyone left so then I decided to focus on employee benefits and retention because I was curious to find out why so many people are leaving. Because this employee fluctuations it happened from some reason and we can mention many factors, but I am curious to find out what are the attractive benefits for you, the employees, to stay longer in a company.

FO Employee: Well now, most of my colleagues left due to their studies development for example ERASMUS. I haven't applied for university for now, and where I used to work before I was always free during the weekend however, I always thought that I want to work with people and that is why I came to work here. It was hard in the beginning, because you had to work during weekends and it was a period, especially during summer, when

it was very busy and I had to work extra hours but I got used to it and it's a pleasant work environment and you don't feel that tiredness at the end of the day, and sometimes people are making you mentally tired more than physically. But I can't say that I feel tired, or I am not happy when I come to work because it is a pleasant working environment. And it also counts the team you are working with. And benefit wise, these extra hours are paid, the schedule is quite flexible because you can arrange it up to your best interest as long as it is possible because we also have colleagues that are still in university and they have exams so we try our best to organize the shifts accordingly to let him/her go to the exam, whenever we need a day off, we can swap shifts that we don't necessary use one day off, and last year I ended up with 7 days of holiday leave that were not used and I used them at the beginning of the year but I am trying to say that you have enough time off and at least I, don't feel the need to take those days off when we work on a normal schedule because right now, we have one employee less at the FO and we have to work extra shifts. But it is a work schedule that is not making you feel tired.

Bianca: Yes, I understand. And especially if sometimes you are 2 on shift, it is way easier because your time passes by easily but maybe when you're alone not the same situation.

FO Employee: Once you get used to it, you don't feel much of a difference.

Bianca: Of course, if you are busy then you don't really feel it that way, but if you have those kinds of days when not much is happening, I think the time is going backwards...

FO Employee: It depends on the day because we also have days when let's say we have 3 reservations and there's not much to do but we go to the colleagues from the restaurant, we communicate with each other and in the end, the time goes by.

Bianca: Ok, clear so far. And to allocate your answers to a specific generation, could you tell me how old are you?

FO Employee: I am 21 years old.

Bianca: Congratulations! And you mentioned you work here for almost 2 years?

FO Employee: Yes, at the beginning of July I will celebrate 2 years of working here.

Bianca: Ok, so almost 2 years. And regarding the offered benefits, as you mentioned paid extra hours and flexible schedule, do they offer you something else?

FO Employee: Meal tickets and when I came in for extra hours by car, they also paid for my transportation costs but only for those days when I came in extra.

Bianca: Okay, so only when you came for extra shifts... but why aren't they doing this on a regular basis?

FO Employee: Well, this might also be my fault because I never asked for it and they haven't offered it to me either and it was a period in May when I worked a lot and then I went to discuss with the general manager if something can be deducted out of my transportation costs as I am travelling from a city nearby and they told me yes, and then it was possible and now, they don't do it anymore but I am thinking to go and ask for it again because I want to see if would be still possible. In the end I think it is possible because we have colleagues in the restaurant who are coming from a nearby village and they have a designated taxi (as the owners also have a taxi company) to bring them to work and then back home.

Bianca: Yes, so somehow the transportation is ensured by the company.

FO Employee: Yes. We also have discounts for hotel rooms, like 10% discount or a preferential price, if I would want to have my friends or family here

Bianca: And what about the restaurant? Do you have discounts there as well?

FO Employee: From what I know, I think we have, for events like a birthday or something, then you have a discount as an employee. Also, while on shift, we can have breakfast from the restaurant, it's a breakfast buffet

Bianca: Oh, that's an improvement! We didn't have that when I was working here.

FO Employee: Well, the FO manager has discussed it to have at least one meal per day... but I don't always have the time to take it.

Bianca: I know but is also good to know that at least is there if you want it especially if you have 12 or 24 hours shifts.

FO Employee: Yes, exactly. Also, we can have coffee as much as we like.

Bianca: And now for example you work the whole day?

FO Employee: Yes, from 8 AM till 8 PM.

Bianca: And for those who are coming for the night shift, I can imagine that they don't take breakfast....

FO Employee: No because breakfast starts at 7 AM and they finish their shift at 8Am, so they don't really have the time...

Bianca: Ok, any other benefits?

FO Employee: Well, now for 8 March we had a party at our other location, we also had Christmas parties, to socialize, we also had Secret Santa and we received gifts. It wasn't a bonus but at least it was something.

Bianca: And if you would think on a scale from 1 to 10, how satisfied are you with these benefits?

FO Employee: I would say an 8, around that.

Bianca: Oh, and I forgot to mention that I am taking notes and I will use these details in my thesis, but your personal details will be kept confidential so feel free to be as honest as possible, don't be afraid and later I will ask you to sign the confidentiality form.

FO Employee: Yes, I know, no worries, that is completely fine. I am honest about everything and since I am here for already 2 years, and I also do not consider leaving I think it's good for now.

Bianca: And what do you think the company should do to make you more satisfied with your job?

FO Employee: So, this part with transportation cashback, it would be nice if they would compensate 50% of your monthly expenses for traveling back and forth for work for those who are travelling from a different city / village. Also, salary rises, once a year, would be nice, regardless of how small it will be but to come from their side, not from us going to them to ask for a rise. I would also add a meal at the restaurant, at least for lunch, and even if it's something like the menu of the day and even if we would have to pay for it, to have a special price, like a symbolic price, and there is that time frame from 12 till 2 PM where we don't have much to do and our body is starting feeling hungry.. And I don't know what else, this is what is crossing my mind for now.

Bianca: If these are the things that would be important for you, then it's great! We could think of so many benefits that they could offer if we want to think ideally.

FO Employee: I think what I've mentioned above would be enough for a start to make somebody stay.

Bianca: Ok and still related to this, what should companies offer to make the industry more attractive? Because also right now you are looking for people in reception and it's quite difficult to find people so what should the company do to attract those people to work in the industry?

FO Employee: To be honest, I think... so look, we had a girl who came in for an interview but when she heard that you must work during the night and she will be here alone, she said that she doesn't want this. So, if you want, you can add on the list a security agent or something who will stay here during the night in case something is happening, this is also something that would make me more satisfied with my job and would also make me feel more secure during the night.

Bianca: Yes, I agree, especially as a woman it can be very dangerous when you are alone at night because you never know what people might do.

FO Employee: During the evening we close the doors, but when somebody rings the door, we open because you can't leave the person outside and maybe they seem normal at the beginning but in reality, they're not and we had some cases.

Bianca: exactly, and you can't tell if it's a guest or it's somebody else.

FO Employee: Because also somebody is making a phone reservation and you don't know how they look like, and we even had an unpleasant situation. Anyways, whenever people are coming to a job interview, they always ask about money, and I think this would be the 1st thing that counts for them because I think that's why people are not even coming to interviews, because the salary is not as it should be, it's not the best salary...

Bianca: Ok, and besides the salary, let's say that they would offer a decent salary, I don't know what the standard is, but let's say that they offer a net salary of 2500 lei (approx. 500 €). What could they offer besides this to make it more attractive because 2500 as a salary might sound decent but what else could you offer?

FO Employee: For a start I think is good, holiday vouchers I think would be something attractive, a good working schedule.

Bianca: What do you mean when you say a good working schedule?

FO Employee: Well, how our schedule works I think is okay. Of course, you are coming to work during weekends and when you are coming to work at night, to have that night bonus, which we don't have for example, we don't have such thing, but it would be nice to have.

Bianca: Really?

FO Employee: Yes, we don't have this benefit.

Bianca: I was trying to think if it was different before ...

FO Employee: I don't think so because not much changed, because when I started working here 2 years ago no bonus was offered to me.

Bianca: That's not nice.

FO Employee: And also during weekend, if you are coming during the weekend, or if you work during holidays, not for Christmas because sometimes we are closing the hotel, but for New Years and Easter, we are working

Bianca: And I guess you are double paid for holidays, no?

FO Employee: No, that's what I am trying to tell you, we are not double paid, we are not offered an extra day off since we are working on a holiday ...

Bianca: To be honest, if I would think from my own point of view, I think I would rather take an extra day off to compensate for the fact that I worked during holidays, and of course money is also good, but I think I would rather prefer a long weekend

FO Employee: For weekends it really depends on because you hardly get a weekend off, I think I haven't had a weekend off since January.

Bianca: Oh my god and we are in March...

FO Employee: Yeah, I know... on 25th March I will have my weekend off, I am so looking forward to it.

Bianca: See, if you would've had an extra day off from New Year's you could've now taken Friday off as well to have a long weekend.

FO Employee: Yeah, I've worked on New Year's, and it would've been nice but no. Look or to have an extra person in case something is happening, meaning if I get sick or something, they should have somebody that could step in because we can't work so many extra hours... because we don't have an extra person ... and even if you have an emergency there is no one to step in to cover you.

Bianca: You mentioned that you work here quite for a while and you haven't gone to university so far , if for example the company knows about your situation and they approach you with the following scenario: " Look ... , we think that for the past 2 years you did an amazing job and we are aware that you haven't applied to university and we were thinking to offer you some extra courses that will help you later to advance in your career path for the position of FO Manager " , would this be an attractive offer for you ?

FO Employee: Yes definitely, I would love to have this type of career development benefits.

Bianca: Or let's say that you enjoy what you are doing at the reception but besides that, one day your manager has asked you to create some flyers for the guests, with a valentine's day promo offer. This is usually something that the marketing department would prepare but they were busy with other things, and they asked for your help.

FO Employee: This is something that wouldn't bother me because I am doing these things already.

Bianca: Oh, so there you go! And what if they would say "We know that you enjoy making the design for the flyers and promotion and we thought about sending you to a marketing course because we might have an opening in the marketing department if you would be interested".

FO Employee: Yes, that would be something.

Bianca: Somehow this will imply that the company is acknowledging the skills that you have and to invest into the perfection of those skills to encourage you to grow inside the company before considering hiring an outsider.

FO Employee: This would be a very nice idea. Because I thought about the fact that I never applied to university but that doesn't mean that I will never apply. At that moment when I graduated from high school, I didn't know what I wanted to do and I thought that since I am working in hotels for quite a while and I am not considering leaving, I started thinking that maybe I could apply in summer to take my bachelor in marketing but I am still considering if I should do it or not.

Bianca: And how would you have felt if this proposal was coming from the company side with a course for that qualification?

FO Employee: It would've been great because it wouldn't take as long as 3 years of university, probably it would've only taken a few months and it would've been easier

Bianca: And somehow I think you would've felt appreciated because somebody was noticing your effort so it wasn't an extra work for nothing

FO Employee: Yes exactly. Also regarding courses, we have a FO Manager, and there are things that she is doing and I have no clue how to do that even after 2 years of working here but I think it would be a good idea to learn how to do those things, because it's the same situation... in case she is not present due to any reason, holiday, sick leave etc., somebody should be there to replace her. For example, during the weekend she is off and we had situations when we had events and people were asking so many questions but we didn't know what to answer because you haven't had a previous situation which was similar and you also did not take care of all the arrangements of the group and then we always tell them "Please speak on Monday with our colleague because she is the one who took care of your reservation and I don't know what to do or how to help you" and it would've been nice to have somebody there or at least to have another person who knows what to do in those cases when she is not present

Bianca: What if you wouldn't have an extra person but you would have a folder with all the possible scenarios? would that help? Because those special details if she took care of the group reservation and the group is there during the weekend, are hard to be found in an SOP.

FO Employee: Yes, well these reservations we usually prepare them together and we have some things written there but is not the same, because maybe she writes something, and I am reading it but maybe I don't know exactly how to put it in reality.

Bianca: Fair point. You mentioned that you enjoy working in the industry, but if you wouldn't enjoy it that much, what would make you enjoy it? I mean, maybe at some point you had a colleague who wasn't that excited to work in the hotel.

FO Employee: We have one, and I really don't see him trying because when I come to work, I don't see him smiling, I don't see him making a conversation with the guests. For me, whenever I see a client, I am super excited, I have a small talk and he is not like this, he is very serious ...

Bianca: Okay, interesting. And if you would be the hotel manager, what would you do to make him more satisfied with his job, to make him more excited to perform his tasks and make his job in the hospitality industry more attractive?

Bianca: I know... hard questions.

FO Employee: I don't know what to answer to this. I think if you don't like to work here you won't stay either. I mean at some point you will leave ... but I really don't know.

Bianca: I think this colleague you're referring to would be a good person to interview for my research.

FO Employee: Yes, I recommend you do that! He is from Rep. of Moldova, and he is also studying something related to this field.

Bianca: Thank you for the suggestion! Anyways, any information is useful and is good for me to see what the different perspectives from a person are who enjoys working in the field vs a person who is not enjoying that much and is only working for money.

Bianca: and since we were also talking the importance of the salary, how important are for you the benefits next to the regular salary?

FO Employee: Hmm, you mean benefits ...

Bianca: All the benefits that we discussed earlier, it could be meal tickets, meals on shift, transportation, holiday vouchers, discounts, employees parties, bonuses anything that you can imagine as a benefit

FO Employee: Well, they are quite important especially the meals on shift, regarding employees' parties, to be honest I could live without them, it's not a must for me to go there but discounts at the restaurant or meals on shift are important and will definitely help out on shift as I won't have to order or go somewhere else to have a warm meal, the compensation of transport expenses is also very important because it's an extra expense and for me is very expensive to commute... so I think this would be my most important benefit if I would have to choose one, so they are quite important.

Bianca: And would you stay to work longer in a company that would offer you a complex benefit scheme?

FO Employee: Yes, definitely!

Bianca: Because even those benefit may not be necessarily financial, in a sense that there are no extra money added to your salary, but those discounts and settlement of the extra expenses such as transportation it adds up to something that you would actually pay out from your salary so it's balancing it out

FO Employee: Exactly, because that's why I am saying it matters, and it's not necessarily about having extra money to the salary.

Bianca: Alright. And now that you are working here for almost 2 years, you mentioned that you enjoy working here but has it ever crossed your mind to leave and change your job?

FO Employee: I've thought about it but ... I've thought about it when we were short staffed and we had to work a lot of extra shifts because we couldn't find somebody for the job, and I wanted to say that this month I've thought about it too but there are moments when I feel that I just can't anymore because I am very tired and at some point it starts to kick in... Last month, I had 50 hours extra, this month again I have 40 hours extra ... if till next month we can't find somebody it will be difficult. But yeah, it did cross my mind to leave but I've never took it to the next step. I think everybody from here sad at some point that they are leaving but we're still here...

Bianca: It's not only about the fact that you haven't take it to the next step... The moment your body is so tired, and you are thinking that you might want to leave if... after that it's only about why you are not doing it? What are the things that make you stay then? do you like the team? Is it about the routine or the fact that you already know this workplace? Because many are afraid to try something new because the uncertainty scares them

FO Employee: The team would be one of the reasons that make me stay. The work schedule, the work atmosphere as I always see people and I socialize with them. Before coming here, I worked at Mercedes, and to stay 8h straight on your feet and to not speak with anybody ... here is different. Whenever I need to take a

break, people understand. If I don't have something to do workwise, I can work on personal things as long I am staying at the reception.

Bianca: I see. Okay, but you mentioned that you thought about leaving recently because of the extra hours that you had to work due to lack of staff. Do you think that this could be a reason why people are leaving the industry in general?

FO Employee: No because it's not happening very often. The majority who left from here, left because of their studies, I don't know if they left because of the salary ... When I got hired, I know it was a discussion about salary but I couldn't tell for sure and since then, everybody left for their studies and only one person said that she left because she didn't feel integrated and the job wasn't a good fit for her

Bianca: Ok and if we think globally about the hospitality industry, do you think there are other reasons why people are leaving the field?

FO Employee: Hmm, I think the team could be a factor, because if you don't have a good team vibe so you can communicate with each other, it won't work, it really depends on the team you have because we had a colleague at some point and no one could manage to get along with her, I think it is also about working in the weekend because some people really don't want to work on weekends, they want to have that work week from Monday to Friday, the high schedule can also be a factor, also safety wise because some might be afraid to stay here alone the whole night, and perhaps some people don't have patience to work and deal with people all the time because some might be angry and you have to temper yourself, to keep on smiling..

Bianca: I get what you mean, I like to describe our industry like the industry with a smile because you always must smile, regardless of what is happening.

FO Employee: Sometimes guests are standing in front of you and yelling at you and you must smile and it's not even your fault. In many cases is not your fault, let's say one light is not working and they start yelling at you because you're a 4-star hotel etc... You can't do much then... You keep on talking with them, you are smiling, and you try to fix the situation somehow.

Bianca: I know how it feels, I can relate to this! You try your best to not take it personal and you get over it...

FO Employee: At least these things are not happening on a daily basis and also not often, at least in the past months, so this year was good so far

Bianca: And as a round off question, even though you mentioned it many times by now, what are the reasons that make you stay in the company? So I've written down the team vibe, the flexible work schedule, meaning that you don't have to take a day off necessarily if you have an important appointment like an exam or something because you can swap shifts, the social factor because you can speak with guests

FO Employee: Yes, you get to know a lot of people because there are also celebrities coming to stay here or important public people. I also wanted to say that for example, you are offered some opportunities because a while ago we had a guest who I checked-in and at the end of his stay he told me that he has a hotel in UK, and he asked me if I would want to work there in the reception because I can speak easily in English etc. He left me his business card, but I wasn't very sure about the situation, I mean it was a bit weird and random situation and of course, I wouldn't go but it was an offer anyways.

Bianca: Funny... I had a similar situation with a gentleman who was the head of concierge at a 5-star hotel in Milano and after their stay, he left me his business card and told me that if I am ever looking for an internship or I am visiting Milano, I can contact him and it's very flattering to receive these type of offers because it makes you realize that guests are actually noticing your professional behavior and for me it was a huge compliment, regardless if I am going or not because you never know where life takes you.

FO Employee: Exactly, maybe that offer in UK won't sound that bad later.

Bianca: Well, this was kind of it. My end goal is to make a complex benefit scheme with what are the attractive benefits for employees because everyone is different, and I am aiming to find the middle point to satisfy the majority. And maybe from my ideas, the management will find something that fits their interest and they will consider to implement it.

FO Employee: Yes, maybe they will take it into consideration, at least a small thing.

Bianca: I hope to. At least to inspire them to improve something!

FO Employee: Yes, even a small thing would count.

Bianca: Yes, I would be very happy with that because at the end of the day, without you, these services couldn't be provided and because of you the hotel has all those positive reviews. And this is a general note that management should appreciate more their employees.

FO Employee: Yes, because we are putting a lot of effort in everything we do.

Bianca: Yes, and also working with people it has never been an easy job and finally, it has to be a win-win situation for the guests, for you and also for the owners.

FO Employee: Yes, there were people who were complaining and we always try to step in even though those things might not be necessarily in my attributes, but I did everything in order to make those guests happy and it counts a lot to put effort in what you are doing and to enjoy what you do!

Bianca: Exactly, and it can also be about the small things, even a good job at a good time

FO Employee: Yes, I even had a situation like this with a group last summer and it was very intense and at the end, they told us "Good job girls! the event was a success! "and I went home so happy.. it was very nice to hear a compliment for all the effort.

Bianca: And it's such an easy thing to do which can have such a big impact... especially when it's honest and it's coming from the bottom of their heart

FO Employee: yeah, exactly

Bianca: well, that was it. Thank you so much for your time and it was a pleasure to talk with you today! I really hope that something will change to better for you!

FO Employee: It was also a pleasure for me! I really hope that they will consider from your solution.

Bianca: Yes, me too! Here I have the form for you to sign about the confidentiality of your data and I will only write FO Employee to not prejudice your identity.

FO Employee: That's great thank you! I hope my signature is fine, it kind of looks like a kid drew something.

Bianca: No worries, the information was important. Thank you once again for your time!

FO Employee: Of course, any time! and I hope you will speak with our colleague as well.

Bianca: for sure, thank you!

8.15 Interview hotel manager Aura Unirii - Alba Iulia

Bianca: Good afternoon! Thank you for having me today!

Manager: Good afternoon! It's my pleasure!

Bianca: To give you a little bit of context, I am interested to find out what are the employees needs regarding benefits in the hospitality industry from your perspective as a manager. So firstly, do you offer any kind of benefits and if yes, what are those?

Manager: They have a flexible schedule; we tried many options to see which one fits them best and probably this is not the last one we change, and they have 5-6 schedules to choose from and I am talking about reception here. They also need attention; everybody needs a lot of attention.

Bianca: Yes indeed, attention is also very important! Okay, and maybe things like meal tickets?

Manager: Yes, yes, they receive meal tickets, they receive 50% discount to everything they would want to eat from the restaurant, for us was more convenient like this because we did not want to limit anyone, and we didn't want complaints, and this was they can eat when they want and what they want.

Bianca: I think it's very convenient for them that you are so flexible! And you also offer discount for accommodation for friends and family?

Manager: We had situations when we offered discount for friends for accommodation yes, we also offered them free access to the pool if they want to come in their free time

Bianca: According to you, how satisfied do you think they are with these benefits? I know it's a short time since you opened.

Manager: I see them very satisfied considering that all of them came with traumas from other places. And we are a very open-minded type of company so it's from the start different if you are coming from a place with strict rules.

Bianca: I think it's also an advantage that you are quite a young team as I observed.

Manager: Yes, we have quite a young team, except for a few staff members from the kitchen and the HSK ladies but other than that it helps that we are from the same generation because we can understand each other more easily.

Bianca: Can I ask you how old are you if you don't mind?

Manager: I am 26 years old.

Bianca: You are very young, and I think a young and open mindset helps from a management perspective.

Manager: Yes, and a person who has seen a little bit of everything because I started as a waitress for quite some time, after that I worked in reception, then I moved to a position of manager somewhere else and by doing this, I think I can understand everyone's needs.

Bianca: I think this helps a lot because also based on your experience you might understand better why employees in the HI want to leave due to certain work conditions.

Manager: and due to the competitors, because everyone thinks that somewhere else is better with perfect conditions and they leave. After that, they usually come back with their head down. Luckily, we didn't have yet people who wanted to leave but we are expecting it at some point. We are aware that it's not a job for life, they are just accumulating experience, and everyone is up to decide for themselves if they want to go to something better, I will always support evolution! As long you announce it well in advance, I am more than happy to see people who want to progress in their career.

Bianca: It's great that you are aware of it.

Manager: It's because I worked in the field and nobody is irreplaceable and I think it's better to be prepared for the worst-case scenario, because then you know how to manage it. And, if somebody was sick and we couldn't find somebody, I also did the rooms myself.

Bianca: That is great! it's good that you have your previous experience, and you are not the type of manager that doesn't want to "get her hands dirty"

Manager: No, that's not the type of manager that I am. And then, it cannot affect you that much. Of course, long term it affects you if you can't find somebody but on the spot for an unforeseen situation, it's manageable.

Bianca: So do you think that keeping your employees is important? or do you think that you can easily replace them so their retention is not that relevant?

Manager: It's important to retain them of course, because you invest a lot of time in them and their training and of course it's disappointing to have somebody that wants to leave after they started to be on their feet and manage the situation., then you have to start over.

Bianca: And do you think the industry is facing high employee fluctuations currently?

Manager: Yes, due to the pandemic because many employees who worked in the hospitality previously changed their jobs and now there are many new people in the industry, at least from the people I know. And also, the new legislation that has been implemented from the 1st of January that they have to declare their tips it's affecting a lot of people, especially in F&B.

Bianca: And why do you think many people decided to change their jobs during the pandemic?

Manager: There was nothing sure anymore. The restrictions, the low income especially in the HI... forced them to look for something else. Because they didn't know what to do because all hotels were closed, everybody was receiving some aid from the government but if you have mortgages, kids etc... they don't wait for you to get back on track, so they were forced to find something.

Bianca: and do you think that there are some key elements that could contribute to keep employees longer in the hotel?

Manager: Yes, bonuses and attentions are very important, to cheer and support them, it's also about the small gestures, if they feel appreciated, these are very important!

Bianca: And through bonuses what are you referring to?

Manager: I don't know, maybe to pay one day for their food, to give them a coffee, to ask them how are they feeling and if they can handle it, to buy them a juice or if they are smokers, a pack of cigarettes, it's about these small things. Also, if let's say tonight you made huge sales, I can give you an extra 100 lei (approx. € 20)

because I saw you did a great job. These things are motivating them because if they know that they will be rewarded if they work hard then they will consider putting the effort.

Bianca: Are you doing this? It sounds very nice. I can already see some differences in the way you think about the whole situation.

Manager: Yes, I am. I am also struggling every day because my boss is quite old, and she is not fully understanding all these things, she cannot understand why they are sitting when it's nothing to do and why they are asking for more money when there is more work to be done... Well, because this is normal.

Bianca: Of course, if there's nothing to be done you can't pretend that you are working just for the sake of it.

Manager: Yes, but it's a huge difference in mentality and we are all struggling with it.

Bianca: At least they have somebody in their corner who has their back.

Manager: She doesn't understand the fact that you have to pay extra if you are bringing an extra waiter, she usually says "why do you have to pay extra because on Monday they didn't have much to do", yes but on Monday they were at work regardless of the amount of work, he was there. If you want him to come on a Saturday, you must pay extra, otherwise he will not come.

Bianca: And how strong are these benefits related with the employee retention?

Manager: For life, impossible but they are strongly related enough to not run away for a difference of € 100 extra. Meaning that they won't change that easily at least. But if there are bigger things such as a promotion or family related issues, you can't hold them with anything.

Bianca: And between extrinsic (financially related) and intrinsic rewards (empathy related), which one do you think is more important?

Manager: I think they are equally important. If you give them an x amount without saying nothing, without congratulating them or something to show your appreciation, it's not that relevant and it works the other way around, if you only thank them without giving them any financial reward it would be for nothing. They go hand in hand.

Bianca: And what do you think are the factors that could attract people to come to work in the hospitality industry?

Manager: To be well paid, because everything is related to money, nobody comes to work because they just enjoy it, everyone has needs, tips are also important.

Bianca: And what are the most important benefits according to you? You mentioned earlier something about flexibility.

Manager: Yes, the majority are looking for a flexible schedule, and many are looking towards the restaurant side because they have days off

Bianca: And do you think days off as a compensation method would be something attractive? Let's say that you work during holidays and then I give you an extra day off.

Manager: I do that sometimes especially in this period when there is not that busy during the week, I give them an extra day off and then they are coming on a Saturday when is busier and I don't have to pay them

extra. And it's a win-win because on Monday he couldn't make that many tips either, so he was happy to switch the days, it was in the best interest of all of us.

Bianca: Okay and what else would be attractive for the employees?

Manager: The fact that they are changing shifts between them so sometimes you have the breakfast sometimes you come later at like 12, and they like the flexibility because there is no fix schedule to come in at 7, it depends how they arrange it

Bianca: Is it anything else that crosses your mind? Maybe you've heard one of the employees talking about it.

Manager: No, not really

Bianca: Okay, and now from your employee perspective, because you're also employed here, what would you want as benefits besides the salary?

Manager: If you would ask me this question a while ago when I was working somewhere else, I would have said percentage (out of the sales/profit), but it's not the case anymore because now I have that benefit at the end of each month. Because this is all about helping you or motivating you to put the extra effort!

Bianca: Ok, so if this benefit is attractive to you from a management perspective, maybe also for the front office employees would be attractive to receive a percentage out of the direct bookings they are making because this way will save you from the commission fee for booking for example.

Manager: Yes but they have some sort of performance bonus, but it's not yet implemented, they will receive bonuses for any positive review, in the sense if somebody leaves a review of 10, I can check who was working that day and for every review of 10 or 5 star review they will receive something, the department who was mentioned so HSK if it's about cleanliness and so forth. Because it's very easy to find out who was working that they and then they can be more motivated to do their job

Bianca: I think this can be a very attractive benefit, and not only to retain your employees but also to attract potential new employees because this way they would feel more appreciated for their work, or their extra effort.

Manager: Yes, that's what I said but also if there is something negative to be kind of punished for that. but of course, they would only prefer the good part.

Bianca: Depends. Of course, they would only prefer the good part, but depends on what you have in mind as a punishment.

Manager: Also, money related, because that's where it hurt the most.

Bianca: From a management perspective, I think it would be interesting to see but from an employee perspective I don't think it will be the same.

Manager: Yeah, but there's nothing else with what you could punish them

Bianca: There's a leadership strategy based on rewards and punishments; it's called transactional leadership.

Manager: If you bring positive reviews, then you are rewarded, if you did something wrong, you must pay for it. I basically lose money because one bad review can affect the whole image of the hotel so then we must suffer, you go home, and you can sleep peacefully.

Bianca: We had an interesting situation of overbooking where I used to work,

Manager: do you work in the field?

Bianca: Yes, I used to work as a Duty Manager at FO in the Netherlands. But now no, I don't work in the field now, but I would like to keep on working in the industry because it's nice to work with people.

Manager: oh yeah, you told me but It's not how it used to be a while ago

Bianca: Yes, I can see where you're coming from, it can be very difficult.

Manager: It's nice to a limit because you reach a point that you just can't anymore. I realized that they were so addicted to me, kind of like a mother and I realized that I might've done something wrong. They were calling me for any small thing because they didn't want to make mistakes and I've reached a point where I was telling them "I don't know. Do what you consider. You should take the decision and own it."

Bianca: Yes, but it was also a newly opened hotel and a new team and probably they were looking at you for your approval as it was the start of a new business. so, I don't think you have done something wrong.

Manager: Yes probably. but also, people are meaner...

Bianca: True but it's still nice to work with people. I've worked my whole life in reception, I am not an F&B person, and for me reception is like the heart of the hotel.

*Job offer coming up

Manager: If you would ever want to work here, I would be more than happy to offer you a position.

Bianca: I'm flattered by the offer thank you. I don't know what to say about the salaries in the industry in Romania.

Manager: In reception you can also make tips, if you have the luck to have a guest for check-in and check-out and you are good at what you're doing, the odds to receive something are quite high

Bianca: I don't know what to say about that because in 3 years working in reception I don't know if I made more than €50 as tips.

Manager: In the hotel where I used to work, they used to have 100 lei per shift, because they were doing their job

Bianca: To be honest, I always had the impression that reception is not a place where you can make tips.

Manager: Now I am hearing discussions about changing the schedule from 24h shift to 8h shifts and I have people who would prefer early shifts, other late shifts, and night shifts, and now they started by saying if only one person works early shifts, she will be the only one who will make tips so then it's clear that they also make tips. I never asked and they never told me but if they started to bring it up like this it's clearly that they are making tips.

Bianca: Actually, I think I lied, I think I've made a 100 € but there were rare occasions.

Manager: If you are nice to them and you answer their questions, they will probably leave you something because you are willing to help them out.

Bianca: Of course, it's about going a little bit the extra mile. But getting back to what we were saying, how do you ensure that every employee is satisfied with the offered benefits?

Manager: I don't. I am not sure if everyone is satisfied, and we don't even wish for that because it's impossible to satisfy everyone.

Bianca: Agree. Let me rephrase. How do you ensure the satisfaction of the majority?

Manager: It's not only up to me, but also up to them and the work atmosphere that they are creating. It's not a 100% up to me or the company, it's about all aspects that can impact their vibe.

Bianca: Have you thought about doing like a survey about their satisfaction?

Manager: I thought about a satisfaction survey but I also thought about giving them more time, also if there are conflicts, usually they work it out in a couple shifts, only if it's something really severe, I interfere.

Bianca: And do you have any ways of promotion inside the company?

Manager: No, we don't do that. We are also quite small as a hotel and there's not much room for that. Yet we don't have an F&B Manager or FO Manager and we also did not catch a summer season yet but, in the restaurant, we have 2 people on shift... so it would not be necessary to make one of them manager, in reception as well, they are 3, so one manager will be above the others 2 and then it will be me. If they would be 5/6 waiters a shift, would've been useful but like this no.

Bianca: This might not be that relevant, but many things are differing from a hotel to another. Considering that in reception you have night shifts and in restaurant they also work in the weekend? Do you have night bonuses?

Manager: No because they are not legal because you can't hire somebody with 16h shifts legally, so legally they are hired with 8 hours. In this field, you can't hire them for night only.

Bianca: I've heard something that if you are certified as a receptionist, then you are allowed to receive night shifts bonuses etc.

Manager: They all have it now. We signed them up for the courses and they just had the exam for the diploma last week because we are a 4-star hotel so we need to have them qualified. But this only allows them to work 12h shifts.

Bianca: That's also an offered benefit!

Manager: And we did the same for waiters and kitchen staff, for everything that was necessary

Bianca: And were the courses paid by the company?

Manager: Yes, for waiters from what I've understood at the end of the course they will also get some money. And this is something that will help them later because they will not only have the experience but will also have the diploma.

Bianca: I think those were my questions.

Min 35 to 39 *Discussion about the university and my field of study and internships and previous work experience, but also about the industry in general but not related to the research topic*

Bianca: Have you ever thought about leaving since you work here?

Manager: No, never

Bianca: That's good. Where did you work before?

Manager: At Allegria Hotel and Maris Hotel, bigger hotels but this one was a challenge for me

Bianca: And why did you leave?

Manager: Sometimes you just reach the end point and there's no room to evolve and after I left for a management position at Maris Hotel that's why I said that I would understand them if they would want to aspire for something better. Because if you start limiting yourself, then you are not efficient anymore, you are not putting effort anymore... If you feel that you don't find your place anymore with the job, I think you should take the decision on your own to switch.

Bianca: and what would you do in that situation? To make them more engaged in what they are doing.

Manager: You can't. If you can't take it anymore you don't want to hear any offer, at that point it's not about money anymore, it's about your mental state

Bianca: are you familiar with the new trend of quiet quitting?

Manager: No

Bianca: It's a trend that is developing and it's about people who are going to work and do the bare minimum without putting extra effort, without being motivated...

Manager: I am trying to prevent this if I see that the reception is busy, I am asking somebody from F&B to help out with carrying a bed upstairs because I am also trying to make them bond and work together and the other way around. Just to help each other, it's not like you are doing somebody's else work.

Bianca: Do you also have uniforms? Because I see that the waiters are dresses the same

Manager: Yes for waiters we have uniforms, they have all the same shirts and vest, paid by us and these have to be worn with black pants and black sneakers. And for the reception, I am working on making them a uniform as well, I've done a lot of research, but I am waiting to be sure that I have a stable team.

Bianca: Yeah, I understand. That's also a benefit offered and it's nice to have this provided by the company,

Manager: And also a smart casual uniform is also comfortable and it's also differentiating the employee from the rest.

Bianca: It was very nice to speak with you today and it was also interesting to speak with such a young manager who took this hotel from scratch, and you are building up on it.

Manager: Oh, thank you, I am trying my best even though sometimes I am fighting towards the windmills, and I am struggling to balance out the needs of the employees and the owner's perspective even though I am always on the side of the employees, obviously.

Bianca: I can imagine that it's a challenge but it's beautiful and this is how it should be to keep it interesting.

Min 50 *out of topic conversation about the target market of the hotel and other competitors

Bianca: I will only kindly ask you to sign the confidentiality form for the collection.

*Interrupted by a phone call

Manager: By the way, the coffee is on the house!

Bianca: Thank you so much for your time and all the information!

Manager: My pleasure. If you need anything else, let me know!

8.16 Interview transcript FO Employee Rozmarin Hotel Predeal

FO Employee: Hello!

Bianca: Hi! I thought to call you on facetime because I think it's better to see somebody when you're speaking to them rather than just on the phone, I hope it doesn't bother you!

FO Employee: No, there's no problem. You might see me looking to another direction because I am at work but just don't mind me.

Bianca: Of course, no worries. The guests are the priority.

FO Employee: Yes, they are usually quiet after this time. they are usually enjoying a drink and the only thing they want from me is a coffee after that.

Bianca: I see. I want to thank you firstly for taking the time to talk with me.

FO Employee: No worries

Bianca: To give you a general overview of what we are going to talk about, I don't know if your manager already gave you some details about the subject, but I am writing my bachelor's thesis about the impact of employee benefits on the retention and satisfaction of the employees within the hospitality industry.

FO Employee: Ah... I don't know if you got the best person to talk to as I am the type of person that is very difficult to be satisfied.

Bianca: That's actually perfect! I think she did it on purpose but it's great if you are hard to satisfy, because this is exactly what I need, to understand till the slightest detail what are your needs.

FO Employee: Is this confidential?

Bianca: Yes, it is confidential. After the interview, I will send you a confidentiality form and I will not mention any personal name in the report, I will only mention the department and the hotel name, that's all.

FO Employee: Ok

Bianca: But if it bothers you, I can also keep the name of the hotel confidential and I will only refer to you as front office employee.

FO Employee: We are only 4 here, let's say there are 25% chances to know it was me, but we will see at the end of the interview.

Bianca: I can also omit the hotel name, my scope is not to pinpoint at you because you gave me a certain information, because I realize that people would be more reticent to share the information and I do not want to put anyone's position at risk.

FO Employee: Ok, so I assume you know that she is also my manager.

Bianca: I know, but the information from the report will not necessarily get to her, only if she is interested to see the proposed solution of the report based on the information gathered.

FO Employee: sounds good.

Bianca: Do you mind if I take notes during this interview?

FO Employee: No, that's fine

Bianca: First, could you please tell me your age or your age category if you do not want to mention exactly?

FO Employee: 31 years old

Bianca: And currently you are working within the FO Department. Could you tell me for how long?

FO Employee: Since 2015 so 8 years

Bianca: that's quite a long time, it means that somehow, they managed to satisfy your needs.

FO Employee: we could say that...

Bianca: Alright. Is the company offering you any benefit amongst the regular salary?

FO Employee: They offer us housing + utilities, meal tickets, meals while on duty, coffee as much as I would like but is maybe good for you to know that not everywhere here is happening this way.

Bianca: I know...

FO Employee: There are hotels where employees must pay for everything...

Bianca: I've heard.... For my report, as a starting hotel, I am studying the benefits and work conditions of Hotel Transilvania from Alba Iulia, I don't know if you have heard of it .. because that's where I did my internship in my 1st year of university, and it was a workplace that I used to know, and it was my starting point for reference, and I Really wanted to see how the things are going somewhere else because it might be different.

FO Employee: I have heard of it but that's kind of it... and it might be very different especially from the tourism point of view because the tourism is not even the same from a hotel to another ... let alone from one city to another.

Bianca: exactly... ok so beside what you mentioned, do you have any other benefits? Such as transportation or ...

FO Employee: Not me

Bianca: I am only interested in your benefits.

FO Employee: so only about me. well accommodation, meal tickets, meals while on shift, and from time to time when I need, I can settle my work uniform, but not totally, meaning...

Bianca: So, let's say if you need a new shirt for example?

FO Employee: I won't buy a new shirt every month but every few months there is no problem.

Bianca: Alright. And when you say accommodation, you mean that you can stay in the hotel for free or you have a certain discount?

FO Employee: since there is a limited number of rooms for the personnel, the company rented an apartment with 3 bedrooms, where we are living together 3 employees, everybody with their private room.

Bianca: That's very nice of them. Sounds good until here. You mentioned that you are quite hard to be satisfied, but how satisfied are you with these benefits if you would think on a scale from 1 to 10?

FO Employee: Hmm... Let's say 7.

Bianca: Okay... and what should the company do to make you more satisfied about your current job?

FO Employee: it is not necessary about the company but is about the system within the hospitality industry.

Bianca: Okay, can you develop on that?

FO Employee: The salaries in this industry are quite low, because if here at the end of the month after all the expenses, I reach somewhere around 4000 lei, if I would go to Bucharest where I have my own home roughly my salary would be the same.. Meaning, the fact that they are offering me accommodation is a reason that makes me stay only because if I would move, the situation will be the same.

Bianca: and on top of that, I am also from Bucharest and living in Alba Iulia for a while, made me realized that the prices if some products are different from Bucharest.

FO Employee: Yes, it's true but in Predeal things are also very expensive, trust me.

Bianca: I trust you, I haven't been there in a while, at least not within the past 3 years.

FO Employee: it's very expensive... at least in Bucharest you can find some stores where you can get a cheaper price for groceries... in Predeal there's no chance for that.

Bianca: Yeah, I get it... Okay, so if we talk generally about the hospitality industry, because I completely agree with the fact that the salaries are quite low within the industry... somehow the industry is "famous" for this ... what could the industry offer more besides salary to make the employees happier and more satisfied with their jobs? And also... to make the industry more attractive for work.

FO Employee: Well, I believe that we have to talk about money in the first place... the hospitality industry is not what it used to be a while ago meaning that if I go to a café, because I work in the industry I know what tip

means , but 90% of the guests don't know any more what tip is,,, and at the end of the month is barely noticeable meaning that if they don't raise the salaries within the industry probably they will end up bringing workforce from the undeveloped countries. And guess what? They usually get a higher salary.

Bianca: Yeah, unfortunately

FO Employee: Not unfortunately, because we have here people and they really work hard, and I have never heard them complaining, and as you can see, I am already bitching out.

Bianca: Yes, you're right, but I am saying unfortunately because somehow owners are making differences for the same work.

FO Employee: yest but no... those people are really doing hard work and maybe its not ok to say it on this tone but those people are really working, they came to work..

Bianca: Okay, I get what you mean but do you consider if it would be to compare yourself with them , would you say that they work more or they put extra effort in their work?

FO Employee: You see... there's also about different departments, because in the kitchen they work more than in reception, if we talk about physical work, but in the reception you work differently, and for us at reception there is the mental burnout, for them is physical burnout

Bianca: you are indeed correct. But then if we are talking about burnout, maybe the industry should think about offering some benefits to reduce the possibility of having a burnout of any kind. In the senses, maybe it would be attractive to have a 20% discount at the gym , or to receive movie tickets, or any kind of extra activities that would help you relax in your free time

FO Employee: Honestly, I haven't thought about this because every time I wanted to go to a movie, I just went to the movie, I haven't thought not even for a second that it would've been nice if the company would gave me movie tickets. Firstly, here in Predeal, you are a little bit isolated and the company is not going to build a cinema for you, or put a video projector in the hotel and project a movie, no thanks, that's something that I can do myself anytime... no .. it's all about money, because at the end of the day, you are coming to work for money not for something else.

Bianca: I agree but don't you think that somehow the extra benefits beside the salary , could compensate somehow? Let's say for example, you mentioned that you receive accommodation and salary, but if you would go to work in Bucharest, you would've received the same salary and from that salary you should've pay for rent also

FO Employee: No, if I would go to Bucharest, I will have the rent money included in the base salary.. in Bucharest a front officer gets around 4000 lei (approx. €820) , here a receptionist get around 2500-3000 lei (average approx. €560) and the difference is the accommodation,, so more or less, you get to the same point. But considering that I have my own house there, I would only have to pay for utilities, and I would be home, I wouldn't have to share the space with flat mates.

Bianca: Ok, but maybe I haven't formulated the example in the right way.. Because even though the salary is different, if you take into account the accommodation you get more or less the same amount, but for you, in Bucharest, it would not be a problem as you have your own house and you would not have any rental costs. But what if the scenario would be that you don't have your own house, and you should take a rental in Bucharest, if the hotel would offer you accommodation as an extra benefit, this would compensate for those extra 1000 lei let's say

FO Employee: In that situation, yes. I have answers you from my own situation.

Bianca: Of course, from your own point of view. Okay, I agree with the fact that we are going to work for money and that salaries are very important, but on another hand, I also believe that the benefits that you receive besides the regular pay, are helping to some extent, or at least they are contributing at least a little to have better conditions.

FO Employee: **yes, they help, but sometimes what is offered might not be what you actually need.**

Bianca: Yes, exactly, that's what I am trying to understand!!

FO Employee: Imagine that tomorrow the company would come to me and tell me "we are offering you a free gym subscription", I would not go, I mean is a benefit that would be useless for me and I would end up asking them "why aren't you giving me those money extra to my salary?"

Bianca: Ok, but then, according to you, what would be the important benefits for you? Or what would you think it would be relevant to offer as a benefit?

FO Employee: **As benefits beside salary, I don't see anything.**

Bianca: really? nothing?

FO Employee: No, from my point of view, no.

Bianca: Not even deduction of transportation costs?

FO Employee: I live 5 minutes away from the hotel.

Bianca: Maybe then they could offer you a bike.

FO Employee: No, we are talking about Predeal...

Bianca: What about during winter, to have a discount for the ski pass?

FO Employee: That's what I mean, we can talk in general but if you want to talk especially about me, I am a very difficult person to be satisfied. **We can talk in general, what are you saying sound pretty good, yeah, it's normal to buy a bike or an electric scooter to someone that needs it, a ski pass to somebody that enjoys it, gym subscription or pool... but these are not my type of activities.**

Bianca: I refuse to believe that it doesn't exist at least one benefit that would fit your needs.

FO Employee: it really doesn't exist.

Bianca: It has to be something... You mentioned that from time to time, they pay for your work clothes....

FO Employee: **Yes, look so one benefit that I appreciate is that if tomorrow I come with 50 people to the restaurant to have a meal, because I am with them, everybody gets 25% discount, it's a benefit.**

Bianca: Good, so what is you would have the same benefit for accommodation in the hotel?

FO Employee: why would I want that?

Bianca: Maybe you want to accommodate your friends there

FO Employee: Ah, that's no problem, we can get these type of discounts if we need, I can talk with the manager and I will receive a discount for my friends for accommodation

Bianca: Okay, so you mentioned that you find attractive to have discounts at the restaurant if you have a meal with 50 people.

FO Employee: Yes, it's a benefit that I find attractive.

Bianca: Agree, and what if you would have this benefit in different restaurants around the country?

FO Employee: Yes, would be nice but I do not really travel, but it would be nice to have restaurant discounts in other places.

Bianca: but what if you would go to Bucharest to visit your friends and family, and you want to go out for a traditional dinner at Caru cu Bere and you know that you have a discount of 20%, I think it sounds better when you go there, right?

FO Employee: I have, exactly at Caru cu Bere and at Hotel Vizitiu, I have a friend who works there

Bianca: ok fine, but it doesn't count if you have a friend who works there..

FO Employee: Yes, I know what you mean, but yes, it would be very nice to have , really, it's very nice to go somewhere else and know that you can benefit of several discounts

Bianca: Okay because you know.... Not everyone has a friend who works at Caru cu Bere

FO Employee: For sure, there are not many employees there, and guess what, I don't even like that place that much

Bianca: why not?

FO Employee: I find it too crowded, I prefer more the small restaurants, discrete, with 4-5 tables, where is not very noisy ...

Bianca: there are not many in Bucharest though..

FO Employee: I know some places that are very beautiful.

Bianca: Really? Well then, I am up for suggestions!

FO Employee: Have you been to Brasov?

Bianca: Yes

FO Employee: Do you know Dei Frati? Is a very beautiful Italian restaurant, owned by a Romanian-Italian family came from Italy and opened this restaurant behind the MC donald's from the city center, they opened a small trattoria. They only have a few tables, but the restaurant is always full and the food is amazing, actually I would say the best food that I had there, but there is a discrete place without much noise

Bianca: Thank you for the suggestion! I will try it out next time I will be in Brasov.

FO Employee: And try their risotto, because it's served in parmesan basket, and you must make a reservation beforehand because it's usually fully booked for 2 weeks.

Bianca: good to know, thanks for the tip

FO Employee: Dei Frati.. so, look how I advertised them without receiving anything.

Bianca: Yes, this is usually how it works. Word-of-mouth is the best promotion a place could have, regardless of if we are talking about positive or negative reviews.

FO Employee: yes, exactly

Bianca: Ok, good, at least we found one thing that you would like to have as a benefit. It's starting to be promising.

FO Employee: I told you from the beginning that I am hard to please.

Bianca: It alright, I am trying to understand what you need, and I am quite patient, so no worries. So then, what made you work within the hospitality industry?

FO Employee: After I graduated from the university of geography, I wanted more and I started to work as a guide in Greece, and after 4 years, I got to Turkey and stayed there for another 7 years and after that I wanted to come back home because I was tired to be away. I did not want to work as a guide in Romania because I saw how they are treated but I still wanted to work with people and if I started to work in the industry of tourism, a hotel position would have been a good option to remain in the same field.

Bianca: Okay, so the fact that you started working with people as a guide made you stay in the industry, right?

FO Employee: Exactly.

Bianca: Why haven't you consider a position of concierge because I believe that position would be more close to what you did as a guide in the sense you could organize tours, make reservations for different locations, to organize any kind of trips etc

FO Employee: Not in Romania

Bianca: I think at Marriott in Bucharest they do that, or not?

FO Employee: No, I have heard that concierge is kind of public relations and that's it, everybody is going to them to complain... they are not doing anything else besides giving complaint and feedback forms to guests, it's not what the majority of us from the industry know about concierge, not in Romania at least. In Romania, the guest is only going to the concierge to complain, the occasions when the guest is going to ask something like a suggestion to the concierge is very rare. Most people from abroad they are coming already through a tourism agency who already organized tours and have a guide.

Bianca: Oh wow, this is a very different definition of what a concierge is .. I have a complete different definition.

FO Employee: Have you ever discussed with a concierge?

Bianca: In Romania, no but abroad yes, where I am studying and in the different places I used to work.

FO Employee: Abroad yes, it's something different. There, the concierge is close to a general manager but not here.

Bianca: I used to work in reception in France and the reception works very close with the concierge and they were doing so many beautiful things. From what I've saw, the concierge is the person with the most connections within the hotel as they know all the ins and outs of a city.

FO Employee: Yes, theoretically this is how it should be but here is not like that... we still have to learn.

Bianca: Moving on, you mentioned that you work here for 8 years, have you ever thought about leaving? In the sense of changing your job or to completely leave the industry?

FO Employee: I would not do something else, if I would change my job, I would still work in a hotel. If I would leave from here, I would already know that I am working in another hotel. I would not leave if I would not have something else established.

Bianca: Ok, and what makes you stay in the industry even though the salaries are low?

FO Employee: This is what I know to do best.

Bianca: ok, and I think it also suits you?

FO Employee: This is something that somebody else should say. Sometimes some people are complaining about my attitude, sometimes they are appreciating me, I cannot make everyone happy.

Bianca: True, it's never possible to satisfy everyone's needs. And working with people is not easy at all and not everyone is made for this that's why I am telling you that I think it suits you because otherwise you would not have been doing it for 8 years already and still enjoying.

FO Employee: well, 8 years, but 4 have been splitted in half between Turkey and Romania as I worked here during cold season and went there during the warm season... so let's say 6 but I work here from 2015 and I have never interrupted the contact with the company, so I feel I am working here for 8 years

Bianca: I see, and what makes you to stay here, in this company?

FO Employee: **The fact that we are like a core together.** There's a part of the personnel who works here for a long time and we got to get to know each other very well and sometimes we don't need many words to say something, and we understand each other and this saves us from unnecessary effort, of any kind

Bianca: So the team that you have there

FO Employee: More or less yes

Bianca: Ok. Regarding what you said earlier, I am a bit surprised that you mentioned that if you would think to leave your current job, you would stay in the industry, because there are many people that, especially after the pandemic, they've ran away from the industry.

FO Employee: Working in reception, you have the possibility to get another part-time job quite easily if you need to, regardless of if you work 24 hours with 72h off or 12 hours with 48h off or any type of schedule, as long you work the legal amount of hours, you can easily get a side job. So, if I leave this job, I could start working at an office to sell keyboards let's say, with a schedule of 9-17 and 2 days off a week but that's kind of it, I can't do something else. Because if I would want to do something else, instead going home in the evening to rest, I would have to go to the second job, while here you can do something in parallel, regardless of if we are talking about something remote or not, and it's something that won't interfere with the main job.

Bianca: But then why do you think that people kept on leaving the industry?

FO Employee: Because they are poorly paid.

Bianca: so this is the main reason

FO Employee: I don't want to leave the country anymore but if I would want to, tomorrow I could leave the country for a better paid job in Ireland as night shift manager and the salary would be somewhere around € 3000 a month so you do the math...

Bianca: of course, but the way of living is also different in Dublin and the prices of commodities are different so as a rapport I think ...

FO Employee: Yes, of course, but at the end of the month you end up with €1500 in your pocket, here at the end of the month.. the salary is finishing up before the month ..

Bianca: Ok, so because they are not paid well. But do you think the work schedule is also a factor ? Because is generally known, that in reception at least, where we can both relate best, you work 24/7

FO Employee: Firstly, is very hard to find women that can work 24 hours because many can't resist to stay awake 24 hours after working 9 to 17 for a period in their life... To put them straight in a program of 24h work and 72h off you are killing them... You might think that I am misogynist, but in reality, men have more stamina

Bianca: No, I haven't taken it like that. I cannot say that I have ever worked 24 hours shifts , the longest was around 16 hours

FO Employee: and after that?

Bianca: Well... I went to sleep afterwards.

FO Employee: So, imagine that this happens every 3 days.

Bianca: To be honest, I would rather push myself to stay awake 24 hours and after that to have 3 days off.

FO Employee: Only 2 actually, because 1 you will be sleeping, trust me.

Bianca: Fine, 2 days but honestly, I don't think that my brain would work fully 24 hours, in the sense that I am also productive and efficient, not only awake.

FO Employee: Exactly

Bianca: But I have heard a lot of people complaining about the schedule in the hospitality industry and that's why I was asking for your opinion on it.

FO Employee: Look, so if tomorrow I would start working 12h with 48 hours off, I would start complaining because I am used to this type of schedule.

Bianca: I understand that your body got used to it, because I also saw myself getting used to the night rhythm but there are people who once get into the night rhythm, they can't switch back to the day rhythm right away.

FO Employee: Yeah, that's quite hard. For example, me and my colleagues, when we have the holiday leave for a week, the first 2/3 days when you come back are terrible because you are not used to it anymore as you got out of your rhythm and all of us are working like this for a while, but after a holiday break .. you just can't switch back that easily.

Bianca: true, and I think your body doesn't know how to act anymore, because it got used to that 24h schedule, then switched back to a regular rhythm, and after he has to switch back to the 24h schedule. it's very confusing for your body...

FO Employee: exactly

Bianca: And have you ever encounter issues during regular holidays? Like Christmas, easter etc

FO Employee: we are a team, and we usually plan well ahead who is working. For Christmas and New year's we usually know from September that 2 are working during Christmas and 2 on New Year's and we choose together.

Bianca: This is an advantage that you have because not everywhere goes like this...

FO Employee: Yes, it is but if it wouldn't be like this we would not have been here probably... and even sometimes we are allowed to make our own schedule, not as freely as you imagine, but still

Bianca: this is a good thing because it's important to have understanding from your company

FO Employee: And look, another benefit that I have, it's that I can bring my dog to work

Bianca: that's so cool! So, you are a pet-friendly hotel.

FO Employee: Yes, this is a benefit, we are a pet-friendly hotel and the manager accepted to bring my dog to work and this is what keeps me here.

Bianca: it's not a benefit that you find it often though...

FO Employee: it started to gain ground.

Bianca: maybe but maybe many are doing it unofficially, not with the permission of the manager or owners.

FO Employee: Look, so now I am sitting at the back office and during the day, there are two girls here and they used to be quite tense at work and whenever they are on shift with Cookie, my dog, they are so happy.

Bianca: I can completely relate to that! We used to have a similar situation where I worked and whenever the dog was there, the shift was already more positive!

FO Employee: Imagine that the dog is here with me 24h and this is the reason why I am still here, because if they wouldn't allow me to bring her to work, I would not be here right now.

Bianca: Yes, I understand, and only for the reason that she is there, and you can pet her. I guess it's making a big difference.

FO Employee: Well, she is mine. My colleagues are happy when they see her, I see her all the time and I am glad for that.

Bianca: I think it's a great plus to have her all the time, especially when you are at work and that you don't have to leave her alone for so long.

FO Employee: I wouldn't do that anyways; I would prefer to leave my job than leave her alone for so long.

Bianca: I see, okay good to know. It's so interesting in a way to see how many discrepancies are within the internal rules of the hotels.

*Confidential information about extra working hours and different bonuses for working during the night, weekend, holiday etc...

FO Employee: I started by telling you that the hotel next doors doesn't even have the same type of tourism let alone the same type of internal administration ... the hotels don't match even if they are 200 m away from each other, it's not the same thing... This is the reason why some have employees for 20 years and others barely can keep an employee for 6 months.

Bianca: Yeah, I think you're right and these things matter a lot especially when we are talking about keeping the human resource in a company to also ensure a good quality of your services, to have consistency... Because the people who are working there for a while, they already know the drill and you don't have to always invest in training new people and then after 6 months you have to repeat the explanations again because that person is leaving... as you are losing a lot of valuable time.

FO Employee: Exactly.

Bianca: Okay, well I believe those were my questions.

FO Employee: oh, it didn't even hurt.

Bianca: No, I was just curious to see what the differences from a hotel to another are and what would be the benefits that would be qualified as interesting amongst the regular salary and I am satisfied enough even with one option, meaning the discounts at several locations such as restaurants or hotels.

FO Employee: Look, so I also consider as benefit the fact that I can always bring my dog to work, and the discounts to other locations I think it would be more than welcomed, but other than that, I am quite a static person, I usually read, watch movies at home and go outside with my dog, I don't do much besides that because I am also an apathetic person but maybe my colleague would want what you have mentioned, discounts for movies, gym etc. This was only my point of view; I can't speak from somebody's else point of view

Bianca: True, and I am not even interested to know this information from somebody's else point of view. I am interested in your point of view because this is what I am trying to understand. Every individual has different needs, and I am fully aware that is impossible to design a complete benefit scheme to satisfy everybody's needs however I believe that you can find a middle point to satisfy the majority.

FO Employee: Yes, money. Trust me, if the salaries would be higher, people would be so satisfied that they would not even care about other benefits, and not only here in the hotel, but everywhere, we are very poor paid

Bianca: I agree, and of course it's not like if you receive some candies in December, they are going to pay for your utilities bill in January however if you would receive extrinsic rewards, for example under the form of holiday bonuses, let's say you receive a bonus of 500 lei (approx. 100 euro) or at the end of the year you receive a 13th salary... don't laugh, I am serious. It's a benefit, under the form of money but it's not a salary, it's an extrinsic reward.

FO Employee: Let's see it.

Bianca: But it would be something attractive, right?

FO Employee: From my point of view, this is how it should be the normality to receive bonuses for holiday or 13th salary.

Bianca: good. See? This is what I am talking about. And now we have found another benefit that would be attractive for you.

FO Employee: Yes, but this is how it should normally be.

Bianca: Yes, agreed but it would be a benefit that should become a norm for hotels in general to offer the 13th salary. What else?

FO Employee: I think that's kind of it

Bianca: Well, if I want to go more in detail, I can also think about performance bonuses.

FO Employee: There are some places that do that, and I would say that here they do it as well sometimes, but those performance bonuses are not necessarily rewarded as much as they should. And yes, I understand, you reward me but do it fair.

Bianca: Ok, I get it, so you would want to have a fair percentage which is established.

FO Employee: Yes, because if I would work as a sales agent, I would know for sure that I make 15% out of my sales, it's something that is pre-defined so I would want a fair percentage which is established.

Bianca: Okay, and what would be a fair percentage according to you, regardless of amount?

FO Employee: The moment you are helping the owners to win, to make profit, to not lose 20% of the amount, I think 5% of the amount should be a good amount. I don't think I am asking for much because the way they don't lose money and I feel a little bit more motivated for next time.

Bianca: Actually, I am happy to hear that, because compared to others, at least you receive something because in many cases they don't receive anything.

FO Employee: Yes... and I know, we are in Romania, and I want to be rewarded for that. But this is how a company is keeping its people, and create loyalty because otherwise you will end up hiring new staff every 6 months.

Bianca: No, I completely agree. But it is already a start the act that they are already thinking to give you something which somehow shows that maybe they would be open to a slightly improvement.

FO Employee: well, they are not very open to this because if you open up this subject it is a problem to give you some extra money, but it doesn't represent a problem when they are paying those money to Booking for example and I don't really see the logic.

Bianca: Well. me neither

FO Employee: Why would you want to give 20% of the money that you gain to booking instead of giving 5% to everything that I've sold as walk-in today? Because next time I would be at work , I would try to sell 10 times more because everybody makes money

Bianca: I wish I would have an answer to this, but I don't. Because every hotel's strategy should be to increase their direct bookings because these types of reservations are saving the hotel from a lot of commissions. booking has the highest commission fee.. expedia has quite high commission as well..

FO Employee: After we finish, I will answer an email and this doesn't count as my sale, it counts as the hotel's sale even though I answered the email, because they say that the guest would've want to book anyways

Bianca: Yes, I am capable to understand that as well but maybe somehow this things should be delimited in a sense if there are some reservations where you put extra work to sell that room, let's say not through email necessary, but if you have a walk-in, and they say look, so on booking you have this price

FO Employee: But also on email, because from sending the email to actually make the booking and pay there are some more steps to take.

Bianca: Agree, through which you can make an impression...

FO Employee: Those money is because of me. Because if I answer just briefly, you as a guest will think if you give me the money of not but if I give you a good enough answer to make you to want to give me the money than it's my benefit.

Bianca: what you are saying now makes me think of something else, or maybe it even happened to you at the hotel. After the guests were leaving, if they were extremely satisfied with the service provided, they would often leave a review and maybe they also mention your name by saying "Thank you so much for this pleasant stay and special thanks to x name from reception."

FO Employee: Not my case.

Bianca: I don't think nobody did that.

FO Employee: To leave a review with my name? No. They mentioned thanks to the reception but not on my name especially.

Bianca: Ok, thanks to reception. For every review which is above 9 and the reception is mentioned in the review, you could receive something as a department, and maybe not necessarily financially, but something as a reward, like a bottle of wine or I don't know.

FO Employee: don't imagine it's like a jail here. We receive different rewards, and not only from the company but also from clients and these small things. if these small things would happen more often would help you to be more motivated but many times you just receive a good job and then get over it

Bianca: Ok but if it would become a norm for it , to reward you every time the reception is mentioned

FO Employee: Where I used to work in Turkey, we also became very close as a team and some interesting things were happening. If something good was happening to the owner, he used to call us to the office with no reason and he used to take us out to a restaurant and he was paying for it and trust me, I appreciated those dinners more than if he would come to give me some extra money because he was taking me out of my regular rhythm and he would put me in a place where I can relax ... Here, when I do something good, the only thing that I get are some "congratulations", it doesn't compensate as much. I can congratulate myself as well but ... I see now that your battery is running low.. so I will round it off. In case you have any other questions, feel free to call me or text me, I am more that happy to answer and in case I don't, I am probably sleeping.

Bianca: Thank you so much for sharing your experience from Turkey, it means a lot and I feel that we were getting to a different perspective and somehow, I also wanted to get here, because of course, you appreciate a "good job" feedback given at a right time but you would probably appreciate more if you would see that your manager is taking his\hers personal time and takes you out for dinner

FO Employee: and their money, besides their time. Because my former manager in Turkey, he also had a restaurant, and he could easily take us out there, but he took us to a different place.

Bianca: I see. It's a great suggestion and it's something that I am wishing to implement in my final solution plan.

FO Employee: If you are going to implement all these things that we've talked about and you end up being a manager in a hotel, and to offer everything we discussed, contact me, I'll come to work with you.

Bianca: Thank you for that! Off topic, I am dreaming to open up my own hotel and to be able to understand all the needs of the employees because I know how it is to not be understood or my colleagues.

FO Employee: If you have the possibility to do so, also financially, it would be a good thing because you will come as a person with background and as somebody who understands both sides ... Because if you only come with the money, and you don't know how it is on the other side, you will end up having unsatisfied employees.

Bianca: I agree, and this is what I am working for now, to reach that financial possibility in the future.

FO Employee: There any many things that should be changed.

Bianca: I know that one person alone can't change the world, but I believe that if you have good intentions to do things right, you might influence others as well and then something might change.

FO Employee: Yes, you're right about that.

Bianca: Well, thank you so much for your time and for all the useful information. I will send you now the confidentiality form. It was a pleasure to meet you. Also, if you are interested, after I finish up the report, I can share with you the conclusion and the final solution design.

FO Employee: Yes, it would be interesting to see!

Bianca: Thank you so much again! Have a good evening and good luck to your shift!

FO Employee: Thank you as well. Have a good evening!

8.17 Interview transcript Manager Rozmarin Hotel Predeal

Bianca: Hi!!! How are you?

Manager: Good, I just got home! I thought of calling you today because I know how it is to wait after people to write your bachelor's degree!

Bianca: Thank you so much! I promise I won't take long.

Manager: No worries, take as much as you need.

Bianca: I've already talked with one of your front officers and I now have an idea about what you are offering, and I can tell you, it already sounds a little bit better compared to others.

Manager: I am glad to hear that!

Bianca: And I was very curious to hear your opinion from a management point of view, what do you think about the industry in general, because many are willing to leave the industry especially if we are looking now, after the pandemic, a lot of people left the industry.

Manager: That is true because we were closed, and many decided to change their career paths let's say because for 3 months everything was closed and after that only a few came back

Bianca: and why do you think they were willing to leave the industry? What could be the reason?

Manager: Well, honestly, I think it's money related because there are industries which offer better salaries and then, obviously you are going somewhere you are earning more and I also think that it counts a lot the work volume, because here in the hotel is a very high work volume, we are focusing on groups and it's more work compared to a small business

Bianca: And not everyone is capable to handle a high work volume.

Manager: Exactly and sometimes people are more commode, and they want to earn more money through less work because in hospitality there's also a longer period of working hours within a day, it's not like a multinational with 9 to 17 schedules, it's a busier program

Bianca: Okay, and do you think keeping employees within the company is an issue? I mean, is it difficult to keep them?

Manager: Yes, it is difficult. We have employees that are working here for many years, I can say that they are here since we opened the hotel, but there are employees, especially the young ones, who are very difficult to be retained because they probably do not have a family or they don't have something to keep them tied to a certain place and it's way easier for them to leave to a different place, and to discover other places and cultures

Bianca: And then, what are the things that you think is making them stay? Because you mentioned that you have employees that are there since you opened the hotel and your colleague from Front Office told me that as well

Manager: Yes, he also works here for quite a long time. To be honest, I think they are staying because we have been very serious regarding salary, payment, there was never a situation when we had delays when paying the salaries and we have been always absolutely upfront with everything that we do and also the fact that we are treating them nicely it's also something that counts, because if you are in a work environment which is very demanding and you work with people who yell at you and don't speak nicely to you, I think it doesn't make you feel good and you'll wish to go somewhere else, but as long as you see that your employer is supportive, correct and nice to you, you wouldn't have a reason to leave. And of course, this is only applicable if you don't find something even better, because in the end, we also understand this kind of situations.

Bianca: Yeah, I get what you mean, and, in the end, you can't stand in front of someone who already decided to leave.

Manager: Exactly, if they want to leave, there's nothing you could do to make them stay.

Bianca: And then, to what extent do you think the offered benefits are contributing to employee retention?

Manager: I think it contributes quite a lot, because if you don't offer certain benefits and bonuses for example, or to reward them when you consider that they've went the extra mile, or when they came for extra hours, I would say that any kind of gesture counts for them because basically you are rewarded for what you have done

Bianca: Yeah, and somehow you also motivate them to keep on doing those good things because they are also appreciated for it.

Manager: Exactly, to motivate them to do it again next time

Bianca: And could you give me some examples of the benefits that you are offering?

Manager: We have holiday bonuses for Christmas & Easter, we also give a bonus to every employee for their birthday, paid extra hours, and these kind of things

Bianca: Okay, and what would you say that is the most appreciated benefit of those offered?

Manager: Anything that is related to bonuses. It doesn't matter if we are talking about a holiday bonus, or a performance bonus, it's about those financial bonuses.

Bianca: So, if I understood correctly, somehow you think that those extrinsic rewards (the financial ones) are more important than the intrinsic rewards (non-financial, only social interaction, personal development)

Manager: Yes, I think so. To be realistic, for everyone, the financial part is more important. Of course, the other part, the more emotional part let's say it also counts, because this way you show them that they are appreciated but if we want to be honest, money is what it counts.

Bianca: Yeah, it's true, they kind of go hand in hand but I can agree that one might overcome the other for a little bit. But what about discounts for example? They are not necessarily financial, but they have a financial implication. As I understood from your colleague from FO, they can have discounts at the restaurant if they want to organize a dinner there.

Manager: Yes, that's correct, and I think that also counts because every time we gave the employees the chance to have discounts at the restaurant and accommodation if they wanted to bring their family & friends to visit because many of them do not live here in Predeal and I think that's also something that counts.

Bianca: It definitely counts! Your colleague from FO also confirmed and somehow, it's not a financial reward but it has a monetary impact as in the end, they will have to pay less, even though you are not giving them any extra money.

Manager: Yeah, that's true, and this also counts. In general, this is kind of what we offer to our employees, discounts to rooms and restaurant, bonuses ...

Bianca: Okay. And do you think another factor that make people stay in a company, or in your company, can it be the leader/ manager that they are having? In this situation, I know we are talking about you.

Manager: Yes, of course. As I mentioned earlier, I believe it counts that we've always been nice to them and I am not only talking about myself, I am also talking about my parents (the owners), the director of the hotel and it's very different to come to a workplace where you are enjoying the atmosphere, to enjoy what you are doing and where your needs are understood and it's completely different to always work under pressure and to know that you will be pointed out at any small mistake.

Bianca: I agree. And, if we are thinking in general about the behavior of a manager from the hospitality industry, they should be more opened and to be close to the people within their organization to make them stay.

Manager: Definitely, 100%! Because regardless of how much money they would make, if you are not going to your job with pleasure, I don't think you can stay there for long, to work under pressure while you have a boss who is constantly yelling at you and every day, he has something to say to correct you, I think it's impossible to resist. Maybe you accept it for 1 month or 2 for the money, but other than that no.

Bianca: You're right and I believe that these things go hand in hand because if you don't have understanding from your manager and you don't have that click, that social interaction with the manager, it's not like you have to be best friends but just to show understanding.

Manager: It's also about respect. I offer you a job, I pay your salary on time, meaning I am doing my part of job towards you, and I expect the same in return, it's a win-win kind of situation.

Bianca: Yeah, respect is always important. Okay. And if you would want to hire somebody at some point, what would be the factors that would attract people to come to work in the industry more than currently? Ideally of course.

Manager: Well, I believe the workplace atmosphere is very important, the salary, it is very important the team that you will be working with, because this is also an important discussion. To give you an example, in the restaurant, where you work on shifts and also with other people, if you don't feel okay with the other people and you don't have a good relationship is difficult to work because it always have to be understanding. So the team that you are working with is also very important because if the team is not okay, you will end up leaving.

Bianca: How could you ensure that the team is well founded or how would you ensure that the new person would fit into the team?

Manager: It's very difficult to ensure that because you can't control the others 100%. Let's say that while you are there you are trying to make everybody understand each other but the moment you leave you can't control 100% and you can't control people in general because in the end everyone does and say whatever they think it is right. Here, when we had conflict between teams, because it happens, we tried to speak with them to explain them that they should be focused on their job and not on others and we try to see both sides of the story but it's very difficult to control because it's impossible to control what others are doing.

Bianca: And for the discussions, you are talking with those involved separately or it's a common discussion?

Manager: It depends on the situation. We had situations when we took them for a discussion individually because everyone has their own version of the story, but we also had situations when we discussed with them together but sometimes this type of approach is escalating even more. The best is to talk with them individually, ask others that were present what happened and then we decide that the truth is somewhere in the middle.

Bianca: Ok, good to know. So you mentioned earlier that bonuses are very important for employees

Manager: I think so, yes. I can't say that we are giving huge bonuses but is also about the fact that you are giving something, this way you show them appreciation at least because they receive some extra besides their regular salary.

Bianca: Exactly, and besides this benefit, what would you say that are the most attractive benefit that employees are looking for, regardless if you are offering it right now or you are thinking to implement them in the future, what would be ideal?

Manager: Well, we also offer meal tickets (tickets of x value to be used for groceries) every month, and this also counts because everybody is buying something from the supermarket, also private medical insurances are

also interesting for the employees because you might need some tests or analysis and you know you are covered also if you want to go to a private clinic, so they have this benefit from the company.

Bianca: Ok, anything else?

Manager: This is what I can think off for now.

Bianca: Okay. As you probably know, everyone is different as they have different needs and wants and it's impossible to satisfy everyone's needs; how would you ensure that at least the majority is satisfied with the offered benefits?

Manager: In general, we talk with them and the majority, when they have moments when they think that they work too much and their salary is not enough for what they do, they usually approach us and ask for a raise because maybe we don't even realize that some people deserve a raise, and it also depends on the season

Bianca: It is indeed difficult to manage this because in the high season they probably work more compared to low season and then of course is hard to assess if they should receive a raise.

Manager: Yeah, it's not the same, but in general we talk with them and even if they don't talk directly with us, we usually find out if they start complaining about how much they work or that they are not receiving more money.

Bianca: Ok, and because they are approaching you directly to speak about those problems, somehow, I believe that you have an open-door policy, and everybody knows that they can come to you directly for anything.

Manager: This is what we wanted. Either to me or the hotel director, they have always come to us to discuss about their problems. Sometimes even more to be because I am women and I empathized more with their situation, and I hardly say no to something... but the hotel director, who is male, he might say no from the beginning if the idea doesn't sound good. I am at least trying to do something even if the final answer might be no, but I am trying my best to obtain something that will be in their best interest.

Bianca: And you as a manager, do you receive any benefits?

Manager: Well, I cannot really talk about my benefits as my dad owns the hotel and I cannot consider myself as a normal employee, because I do not have a fix schedule, I can work around my own schedule and then I can't say anything about benefits offered to me because I would be a hypocrite.

Bianca: Yeah, I get it. Let me rephrase. Compared to someone that works on a managerial position, like a front office manager or restaurant manager, do they have different benefits compared to other employees or everybody has the same benefit scheme?

Manager: It depends, because in the restaurant there is more physical work and they have some different benefits because firstly the salary is higher for a restaurant manager and also for a front office manager because is something happens in the department, they are responsible, and then probably the benefits at some point for them might be different because they are on a higher position and they also have a team to coordinate.

Bianca: and as kind of a last question, if you would have an unlimited budget to offer any kind of benefits, what would you offer?

Manager: If it would be unlimited, I would give everyone the biggest salary, like the maximum possible , bonuses for anything, holidays, performance, birthdays, anything because I also think about them and what would they need because in the end, I also work and I am an employee. I would also offer them the most

complex private medical insurances, meal tickets with the maximum amount, if I could, I would give them all the money and I wouldn't give anything to the state tax contribution because they basically take as much as the employee's net salary and the employee is deserving its money and we don't have many benefits from the state. So, if it would be after me, I would have given them the maximum possible to everything.

Bianca: Did you ever think about holiday voucher or gym subscriptions?

Manager: For gym for example, we have employees that asked me if they could have a preferential price for using the gym. As a concrete example, one of the waitresses who works here for about 20 years, asked me if she could use the gym in her free time and if I can make her a discounted price. Because she works for so long here, I told her that she can use the gym for free whenever she wants. If somebody asked us about a discount here in the hotel, we always say yes.

Bianca: So somehow it also works on the principle if you are asked to offer something and it is about something you can offer inside the hotel, you do your best to help them this way.

Manager: Exactly. Also, if somebody asks us to pay their salary in advance, we never had a situation to not accept this because everyone has their own needs... it has never been a problem to not give them.

Bianca: and more out of curiosity because I see that it is a very different policy from a hotel to another, do you give night bonuses, weekend bonuses etc. because you might be more familiarized with the legislation than I am?

Manager: Yes, we give night bonuses, weekend bonuses, we have been giving those ever since we opened the hotel, because in the reception the employees work on a schedule of 24h on with 72h off, and if somebody is on holiday and the others must step in and they change the schedule to 24h on with 48h off, that extra shift is paid extra.

Bianca: And do they have a special qualification as a receptionist?

Manager: No, if I am not wrong, only the FO manager has that certification but whenever you are hiring, you are looking for people who have experience

Bianca: Ok, I see, I was just curious why some are receiving those bonuses or not because according to the legislation is open to interpretation, but I think a minimum must be respected...

Manager: To be honest, I think everything is up to the owners on how they decide. If they want to give those type of bonuses or not because I don't think it's very well defined... I am not sure.

Bianca: I think it's also a huge difference between those who respect the limit of working hours and those who don't.

Manager: From what I've heard within the area, there are still people who are making black money in the industry and on their work contract they have the minimum wage and the rest, they receive in cash. I think that's also something that has counted within our company to keep the employees, because how much they were receiving was exactly the amount declared in their contract. Of course, they were also receiving bonuses, but on those we always made payment dispositions.

In Romania, there are still a lot of places that work with "black money" and many employees are happy about that because they receive more money in hand, and they don't think about what they will do when they get older because this is not contributing to their pension. And especially if you are young and you receive extra €100 which are not declared, they don't even think about the work contract.

Bianca: I was thinking about the same thing because many people are doing this and somehow, I have the feeling that they don't think in perspective, like ok, I have these extra money for now, but what if I get sick and I can't work anymore? What will happen then? Nobody will give me those money...

Manager: Exactly, and this happens the most with young people because they think pension is something so far away and this is also why young people are easily leaving and they are moving from one place to another because they are young, and they don't have a family, or any constrains to hold them back. And then for them is alright to stay in the winter at a mountain resort and in the summer, they are moving to a beach resort, work there for 3 months and make money and then they figure out something else. For them stability is not important, and it's not important if they have an official contract or not, they prefer to have the experience.

Bianca: and do you think that is something that could make the young ones to stay? Do you think that you as a company, could do something to make them stay longer?

Manager: Honestly, I don't think so. This is only up to them and in general, the young people want novelty, want to explore new things, new places, cultures, to have as much freedom as possible, I think this is the most important for the young ones, and you can't hold them back. I might offer them anything, I can promise to offer them one thing and then they go to another company, and they promise the same, but nobody will stress out the reality that is going to be a lot of hard work, long shifts etc.

Bianca: I get what you mean and, there's a saying that you should take the opportunity that is in your hand right now, not a promise that is not secured, and I can also speak from my own experience.

Manager: Of course, if a new position was offered to you with better working conditions, you would probably just go for it, you wouldn't think about how your employer is feeling, you probably just went for it because your young and you want to discover new things.

Bianca: I was in that position, within the same company but you are right. I would rather go for a promotion that is here right now vs to think about a position that will be available in 1 year from now. If it will be in 1 year, then after a year I will go for it if that is something that I really want.

Manager: Exactly my point. And I think most people think this way.

Bianca: I also think so but I like to confirm it with different sources.

Manager: and of course, my situation is different but if it wouldn't be this way, if I would have a better opportunity, I would also go for it, why shouldn't you try?

Bianca: Exactly! And I think anyone would want to develop themselves, financially and professionally.

Manager: If you have the possibility to develop yourself, then why not?

Bianca: Thank you so much for your answers! I am happy to see people that have this kind of open mindset!

Manager: There is still hope, right?

Bianca: Yes, it is! If you really want something I believe you can make everything work!

Manager: Correct! That's the attitude!

Bianca: Well, thank you for your answers, it has been very helpful! Also, if you are interested, after I finalize my report, my end goal is to create a complex benefit scheme that will satisfy the majority of employees and I will be more than happy to share it with you, maybe you will find some inspiration there.

Manager: Of course!! I would love to see the result! And maybe I would've had better answers, but this is what have crossed my mind at this moment.

Bianca: No worries, the most spontaneous answers are the best because they are natural!

Manager: If there is anything else that I can help you with, don't hesitate to contact me!

Bianca: Yes, I will ! Thank you so much for your time! It has been very useful!

Manager: I wish you the best of luck with your thesis and I am looking forward to the result!

Bianca: Thank you! I will only need one last thing. I will send you the ethics & consent form and I kindly ask you to sign it and return it to me.

Manager: Of course! I will do that tomorrow if that's alright for you!

Bianca: Yes, no worries! Thank you so much! It was a pleasure taking to you! Have a lovely evening!

Manager: Have a good evening!

8.18 Interview F&B Employee Phoenicia Grand Hotel Bucharest

Bianca: Good morning! Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me especially on a weekend! As I told you a few days ago, I am writing my bachelor's thesis about the impact of employee benefits on the retention and satisfaction of the employees within the hospitality industry and I am curious to see what's your opinion on it.

F&B employee: Morning! Thank you for coming in a quiet moment, I hope we won't get interrupted. That is such an interesting topic, I think I can give you some insights.

Bianca: That sounds great, thank you! To start, could you please state your age? This way I will be able to fit your needs into a generation.

F&B employee: Yes, I am 30 years old, and I am working in the industry already for too long. I am joking. But I started as a waiter when I was 19, so there are already 11 years.

Bianca: Oh wow, that is indeed a long time! So, you have worked your entire life in F&B. And for how long have you been working for the hotel?

F&B employee: I've always been a restaurant person; I like the chaos because I feel that I am organized in my own chaos and that's why it's working for me. I think I work here for about 6 years or so.

Bianca: So, you're already like a veteran in the company, I think you know by now all the ins and outs of the business. Is the company offering you any benefits? If yes, could you please state what are those?

F&B employee: Hmm, let's see. Well, we have a few meal tickets every month I think 10 or so (approx. €60), if we finish very late in the evening they give us like €5 for cab, but if you live in the other side of the city is not

enough or if you have your own car like I do so for me that is not really a benefit but for some of my colleagues is a good thing. We also receive bonuses for Easter and Christmas and if we work on those legally off days we are paid double. I would say the schedule is also a benefit because we are working 5 days on with 2 off and for me having a flexible schedule is very important because let's say this week I work from mon to fri and then I have the weekend off and then I work mon to wed , I am off thu and Friday and then I work again in the weekend, and this leaves me plenty of time to spend with my family because I also have a baby at home. And since we reopened after the pandemic, they've implemented something like a performance bonus at the end of the month, but I don't know exactly based on what is calculated. I think I received it twice; I think 50€ each time.

Bianca: Oh, congratulations!!! For the baby but also for the performance bonus. I think it would be interesting to see on what that performance bonus is based on.

F&B employee: To be honest, I've never asked, I was happy that I've received it but maybe if I knew based on what I received it, I would've worked even harder the next time to get it again.

Bianca: Yeah, I get it. You should ask for clarification. It's your right after all. And how satisfied are you with those benefits considering you stayed for 6 years?

F&B employee: Well, I think they are okay, I mean this is normal, there's nothing outstanding so I would say a 7. I mean it's decent, but it could be always better.

Bianca: So, what should the company do to make you more satisfied with your job? How could they make it better?

F&B employee: I think if they would offer private medical insurance would be a good thing. Also discounts at the other hotels from the chain because they have other locations as well, by the seaside. To offer a percentage out of the sales made per evening, something small like 2% or so but then at least you are more motivated to make more sales. A meal while on shift would also be nice or at least to have a discount on what is on the menu... to only pay for the raw mat costs, without any added costs.

Bianca: What are you saying about the sales percentage sounds like a very good idea. Where did you get it from?

F&B employee: I have friends working as waiters in different location, you know we all work in the same industry, so we end up knowing each other from different events or so, and I've heard a few saying that they are offered percentage out of the sales done per evening and I think it's a great motivating factor but it's also making your people stay.

Bianca: Definitely! Do you have any other benefits in mind?

F&B employee: Well, as they are offering taxi vouchers if you finish up late, would be nice to offer something also to those who have their own car, like the same amount for the fuel costs. Also, if we think about the perfect situation, holiday vouchers would also be something that would make me more satisfied with my job because I value the time I spend with my family. And I think also discounts to different activities such as gym, movie, theater would be valuable as it would make me spend a quality free time.

Bianca: Oh wow! You literally just said everything that I wanted to hear.... You mentioned your family a lot and the free time that you are having, and I wanted to ask you do you feel that you have enough free time? Like can you balance your work and your family?

F&B employee: To be honest sometimes is hard... because if I start at 11 and we close at 23.00, I usually get home after midnight because we have to do the closing, the cleaning etc. but I am trying my best to take

advantage of those few hours in the morning to spend them with my family. The good part about it is that the times are always the same, with small exceptions if we need to step in for breakfast if someone is on holiday.

Bianca: Yeah, I get it.. but it's important that you somehow find your balance and make it work. Just don't neglect yourself.

F&B employee: No, I have a wife who is taking care of that!

Bianca: Funny. Ok, back to the topic but now from a more general perspective, what kind of benefits should the company/hospitality industry offer to make it more attractive?

F&B employee: Well, I think a lot of discussions are starting with salary because if that one is very low, the benefit won't compensate for it. But to make it more attractive you said, hmm, so first, salary, then, I think anything that is related to bonuses, vouchers, meal tickets and so on are the most attractive ones, also I think discounts at restaurants or other hotels would be very appreciated because then you can travel or explore other places, or actually any type of discounts would be an extra point, private medical insurance, social activities such as team budlings or employee parties might be also attractive when you're young. I think that's mostly it.

Bianca: If the hospitality industry would offer those benefits, I would be the first one to apply! And as you said that it all starts with the salary... but how important are for you the benefits over the regular pay?

F&B employee: Well, they are quite important if you have them...

Bianca: And would you stay longer to work for a company which offers a complex benefit scheme?

F&B employee: Of course! If I feel more appreciated for my job through those benefits, for sure!

Bianca: In the past 2 years, have you ever thought about leaving or changing your job?

F&B employee: Well, yes, both, but I would say that I've though more about leaving the company rather than giving up on what I am doing because I like what I do, it makes me happy to see people happy.

Bianca: oh, that is perfect! It means that you're made for the job! Why did you thought about leaving the company?

F&B employee: Well, there were 2 moments when I thought about leaving. The first one was in 2018, so it was in my first year here. Our former manager left, and we had a temporary manager who was treating us poorly, he never knew how to appreciate us, nobody liked him because he was always yelling and giving orders without doing anything, and that was a moment when I wanted to leave because I knew that I deserve a better treatment but then, we as a team come closer and we were stronger together and in the end he left. The 2nd time was during Covid, because the restaurant was closed and we were not making any money and as you probably know, we as waiters live also from the tips we are receiving because the salary is never enough and, in that moment, I couldn't do nothing... I could barely afford to pay the rent and the bills, and I thought about moving to a different job to ensure a living for my family... The insecurity of the job pressured me to get a part-time job in food delivery because that was something that everyone needed. When things slowly started to get back to normal, I moved back to what I know to do, which is serving people.

Bianca: I completely understand... that period was full of uncertainty, and nobody knew what will happen and nobody was going to understand you and give you some extra time to pay the rent because you were a waiter... but you've found the way to make it work eventually! What are usually the reasons why people are leaving the industry?

F&B employee: Mainly due to the low wages in the industry, because if you don't make tips you have almost nothing. Also, for some the long working hours in the restaurant might be an issue because you can stay from 12 to 16 hours on your feet constantly running from a place to another and not everyone is made for this. I think the team and the manager matters as well because if you don't have a pleasant team vibe, you will fail under pressure. Also not being appreciated for your work is a factor that is making people leave.

Bianca: I agree. And what made you stay with the company in the end?

F&B employee: Mostly the team that we built up here, we have each other's back all the time and we support each other which is making the work atmosphere completely different! Also now we have an amazing manager that is always on the floor with us and I have the feeling he is fighting for us.

Bianca: That is great to hear! I am happy to see that these people still exist! Well thank you so much for sharing all these insights with me! I will also ask you to sign a confidentiality form regarding the data collected.

F&B employee: Of course! Is this information going to remain confidential?

Bianca: Yes, of course. I will only mention the name of the hotel and the department.

F&B employee: Thank you for that! I hope this was useful for you.

Bianca: It was! Thank you!

8.19 Interview HR Specialist - Radisson Blu

INTERVIEW GUIDE

What types of benefits do you offer to employees, and what is the rationale behind these benefits?

How do you determine which benefits to offer, and how do you ensure they are competitive in the market?

How do you communicate benefits to employees and ensure they understand the value of the benefits offered?

How do you handle employee inquiries and concerns regarding benefits, and what resources are available to support them?

How do you manage the cost of employee benefits, and what strategies do you use to keep costs under control?

How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your employee benefits program, and what metrics do you use to measure success?

How do you stay up to date on changes in the legal and regulatory landscape related to employee benefits, and how do you ensure compliance with these requirements?

How do you tailor benefits offerings to meet the needs of different employee groups, such as part-time vs. full-time employees, or different age demographics?

How do you promote wellness and healthy behaviors among employees, and what role do benefits play in this effort?

What are the most attractive benefits that employees are looking for?

Do you think monetary or non-monetary incentives are more important? Can you please elaborate why?

Bianca: Good afternoon! It's a pleasure to meet you! Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me!

HR Specialist: Hello Bianca! Nice to meet you. I am happy to help a young professional curious about the HR field. Let's see how I can help you.

Bianca: So, let's start by giving you a background context of what I am doing. I decided to write my bachelor's thesis about Hotel Transilvania, a 4-star hotel in Alba Iulia, because I did my internship there in my 1st year of university, so we're talking about 2021 and when I came to visit, I realized that I didn't recognize anybody from FO as everyone left so then I decided to focus on employee benefits and retention because I was curious to find out why so many people were leaving. So putting it in one sentence, I am curious to find out how 4-star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits

HR Specialist: Very interesting and up to date topic! We were planning to do an employee engagement survey on this topic soon because as you know, we opened in May 2022 so we thought that we should see how this is going 1 year after the opening.

Bianca: That's great! Maybe you can share some tips with me regarding how are you planning on doing that?

HR Specialist: Yet, we don't have a draft, but we always start by defying our goal. So, we want to do this employee engagement survey because we want to see how the employees are feeling after 1 year since we open and if they are satisfied with the offered working conditions and benefits. Next to that, we want to understand their expectations to understand what motivates them and what they are looking for from our side. After we have defined the goal, usually we start drafting the questions and we use an online survey because it's more convenient for everybody to complete it but also for us to analyze it afterwards. What is very important is to decide what questions you want to use. Since you know your goal, this comes easier. We were thinking to use both open and close questions because we want to ask about their satisfaction level but also to give them room to write suggestions if anything is missing. Also, what is very important, it to have these surveys anonymously because then people will be more opened to answer honestly.

Bianca: Sounds very clear! Can you perhaps give me an example of a question you want to include that is related to their benefits?

HR Specialist: Well, there's never only one question because in order to be clear you have to make a separate question for each topic so let's say you want to know something about their work-life balance, then you could ask for example " Do you feel that you have enough time to fulfill your personal obligations outside of work, such as taking care of family or pursuing hobbies? "or "Have you ever used any of our company's work-life balance programs, such as a wellness program or employee assistance program?". And you should make this about any topic or individual benefit that you want to check.

Bianca: I understand, so it's very specific on what you want to check. Could you perhaps then tell me what types of benefits do you offer to employees, and what is the rationale behind these benefits?

HR Specialist: I would say that we have a very attractive benefit scheme. We offer bonuses for holidays, meal tickets, meal on shifts, private medical insurance, trainings for skills development, career opportunities if they want to grow in the company, discounts in all chain locations and restaurants, wellness program like gym and we also have the employee assistance program in case they need somebody to talk to. I hope I didn't miss anything, but these are the most usual ones. Of course, they also have paid time off and they can also opt for a retirement plan.

Bianca: It sounds more attractive! I can already see the benefit of being part of a chain because with individuals hotels, you don't always see such a complex benefit scheme.

HR Specialist: It's hard to compete with a chain because they also have more financial power but taking care of your employees should always be a priority because they are the ones who are making you profit.

Bianca: I completely agree with that statement! It's very important to take care of your employees because without them you don't have a business to run. How do you determine which benefits to offer, and how do you ensure they are competitive in the market because even as a chain, there's great competition?

HR Specialist: **Actually, for us was quite easy because as we are a chain, we had to align with the benefits offered by the group. That's why I am curious what people think about these benefits in the north-west region of Romania. Usually, you design the benefit scheme based on the market needs in your geographical area and you also compare it with your competitors to differentiate yourself. As we are the only 5-star chain hotel in the city, we stay competitive by being on top of what others are offering, I believe we are one of the few offering medical insurances and especially with our "Yes I can" mindset.**

Bianca: It would be interesting to see what Romanians think about those benefits but compared to what I've heard so far, I think they are happy with these benefits. How do you communicate these benefits to employees and ensure they understand the value of the benefits offered?

HR Specialist: As I mentioned, the benefit scheme was already done by the group, but it was up to us to clearly communicate it to the employees. We used digital channels such as email and the company intranet to share information about the benefits package. On our website, we divided the benefits on 3 categories (financial well-being, physical well-being, and social well-being) to make it clearer and via email we sent them a document with all the benefits offered and what they should do in order to access them.

Bianca: And is it working?

HR Specialist: I think so, we only had a few people asking for more information, but it is pretty straight forward.

Bianca: And in case they have inquiries and concerns regarding benefits, how do you handle that and what resources are available to support them?

HR Specialist: They know that they can approach us, at HR, at any time for any inquiry or concern regarding benefits. They have multiple ways of doing it, either sending an email, a message on our internal chat or just pass by the office and have a conversation, we are always open to it. Also, now through the employee engagement survey we are willing to collect their feedback.

Bianca: Sounds good. What about costs? because that's also an important aspect from a company's perspective. How do you manage the cost of employee benefits, and what strategies do you use to keep costs under control?

HR Specialist: Uhm, the group is trying to negotiate the best prices with the insurance providers or any partners, but we are also looking at it as a long-term investment because if we are investing in the well-being of our employees, we will encourage a healthy behavior amongst our employees with can reduce the health costs over time. We are also monitoring the usage of a certain benefit because if one benefit is not used, what is the purpose of having it? So then we are looking for a more cost-effective alternative.

Bianca: That's smart! Are you also conducting cost-benefit analysis, to understand the return on investment of each benefit offered?

HR Specialist: Sort of. We are doing a cost-benefit analysis from time to time to identify which benefits are most valuable to employees and which ones are less cost-effective. This is also something that derives from the monitoring of usage and the survey.

Bianca: Cool. So you are always aware of the value of the offered benefits. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your employee benefits program, and what metrics do you use to measure success?

HR Specialist: Well, we will do this through the employee survey to see what they think about the offered benefits, we also monitor the level of participation in the offered programs, so let's say how many people are actually using the gym, and we also track return on investment of the benefits program by calculating the cost of the program against the benefits it provides, such as increased productivity, reduced healthcare costs, and improved employee engagement.

Bianca: Oh these are good KPIs to measure! because then you can clearly know what is happening and you can address the situation if they still need that benefit or not.

HR Specialist: Exactly. But as we are at the beginning, we haven't done that much, so it's an analysis in progress.

Bianca: Of course, I understand. How do you stay up to date with changes in the legal landscape related to employee benefits, and how do you ensure compliance with these requirements?

HR Specialist: We are subscribing to relevant publications, attending conferences and seminars, and following industry experts and government agencies. We also review and update policies and procedures related to employee benefits regularly to ensure compliance with new legal requirements, and we have legal experts who are advising us. Also, every year we will conduct internal audits to identify areas of non-compliance and address any issues proactively. This year will be the first time for us.

Bianca: Good luck! I hope everything will go smooth!

HR Specialist: Me too.

Bianca: How do you tailor benefits offerings to meet the needs of different employee groups, such as part-time vs. full-time employees, or different age demographics?

HR Specialist: To be honest, that is very difficult because it's hard to comply to everyone's needs. We try to offer flexible benefits that allow employees to choose the benefits that best meet their needs. For example, younger employees may prefer more wellness and fitness benefits, while older employees may be more interested in retirement planning and healthcare benefits. Now we are looking forward to their feedback on benefits offerings to identify areas for improvement and adjust if needed.

Bianca: Yes, I get it. It's impossible to make everyone happy but it's great to find the middle point through flexibility to satisfy the majority.

HR Specialist: Exactly, we are trying our best.

Bianca: I am sure. How do you promote wellness and healthy behaviors among employees, and what role do benefits play in this effort?

HR Specialist: It's crucial to encourage wellness and healthy habits among personnel to improve productivity, foster a positive work environment, and save costs related to health care. We offer wellness benefits, such as gym memberships, mental health support, such as the employee assistance program, to help employees manage stress and improve their overall well-being. Our aim is to create a more positive and productive workplace culture, leading to improved employee satisfaction and organizational success.

Bianca: That is great, because a lot of people are struggling to manage their stress level. According to you, what are the most attractive benefits that employees are looking for?

HR Specialist: I think many are looking for bonuses, of any kind, holiday bonuses, performance bonuses, something that they are rewarded with. Private health insurance I think is also on the list because everybody is thriving for better medical services. Paid time off, such as vacation days, sick days, and personal days, is a popular benefit among employees as it provides flexibility and allows for work-life balance. If we are talking about the young generation, they are thriving for wellness benefits such as gym subscriptions but also socializing such as team buildings, discounts etc. I believe companies may attract and keep top talent and develop a healthy workplace culture that prioritizes the well-being and contentment of its employees by providing a complete benefits package that incorporates these perks.

Bianca: I also agree. I think a complete benefit scheme will increase not only retention but also attraction of new employees.

HR Specialist: Exactly so you should always be driven by that!

Bianca: Do you think monetary or non-monetary incentives are more important? Can you please elaborate why?

HR Specialist: I think they are equally important. Employee motivation and rewards can benefit from both monetary and non-monetary incentives. Employees can be strongly motivated by monetary incentives since they offer concrete financial incentives for good performance, such as bonuses or salary raises but might also be highly motivated by non-cash rewards including professional development opportunities, flexible work schedules, and recognition programs. These rewards can encourage a healthy work atmosphere and demonstrate to employees the importance of their contributions, which will enhance their motivation and job satisfaction. So ideally is to offer both. One doesn't go well without the other.

Bianca: Thank you so much for giving me so many insights into the HR perspective!

HR Specialist: It was a pleasure to speak with you! I hope it was useful.

Bianca: Extremely useful! You've helped me more than you can imagine. Thank you so much. I will just send you a confidentiality form that I will kindly ask you to sign and return it back to me.

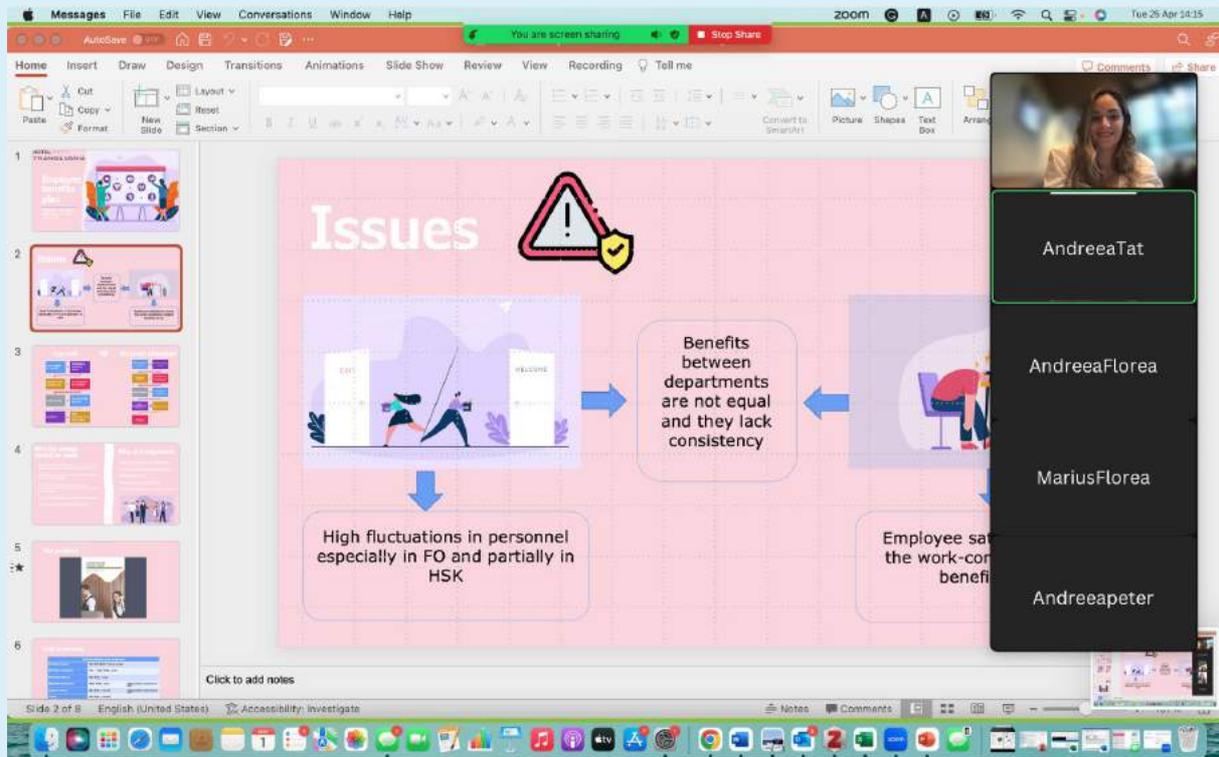
HR Specialist: Of course. I will do it right away while I am at the office. Good luck with your thesis!

Bianca: Thank you! Have a great day!

HR Specialist: You too. Bye bye

Bianca: Goodbye!

8.20 Focus group on Zoom



Meeting Minutes:

The presented issues are validated by the 2 departmental managers (F&B + FO)
 The hotel manager and the GM acknowledge the issue and the urgency of tackle it down
 They are wondering why they haven't realized this so far because everything seemed fine
 They seem interested in the change as they claim that they are appreciating their employees and they are extremely important
 The feedback over the benefits guide is very positive, at first it seems many benefits, but they seemed to be understood that this is the key behind retention
 The cost is a very important factor that should be approved by the owners as it is a big increase vs the current offer
 They need time to assimilate the information and to be able to look at the solution as a long-term investment
 It is feasible to implement it through Sodexo as they already offer meal vouchers via Sodexo card so they will only need to discuss the personalization of benefits
 Solution seems feasible and it's in the best interest of the employees, they might be inspired to use some of the suggested benefits for the whole business group

8.21 Before & After Survey



Employee Benefit Plan Survey

As you already know, Hotel Transilvania is aiming to improve its benefit plan offered to you, its employees. Please let us know what you think about the currently offered benefits.

Are you aware of all the employee benefits offered by the company?

- Yes
- No
- Only partially

Do you feel that the benefits offered by the company meet your needs?

- Yes
- No
- Partially

How satisfied are you with the health insurance options provided by the company?

- Very Unsatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 Very Satisfied
-

Are you satisfied with the vacation and paid time off policies?

- Yes
- No

How important is flexibility in your work schedule?

- Not important at all 1 2 3 4 5 Highly Important
-

How does the company's policies on flexible working arrangements align with your needs?

- Badly 1 2 3 Excellent
-

How important is work-life balance to you, and how does the company's policies support it?

Short answer text

Are there any additional benefits you would like to see offered by the company?

Long answer text

How easy is it for you to access information about your employee benefits?

Very easy 1 2 3 4 5 Very difficult

How satisfied are you with the communication about the employee benefit plans?

Not satisfied 1 2 3 Very satisfied

Do you feel that the company is committed to promoting employee well-being and healthy living?

Yes
 No
 Partially

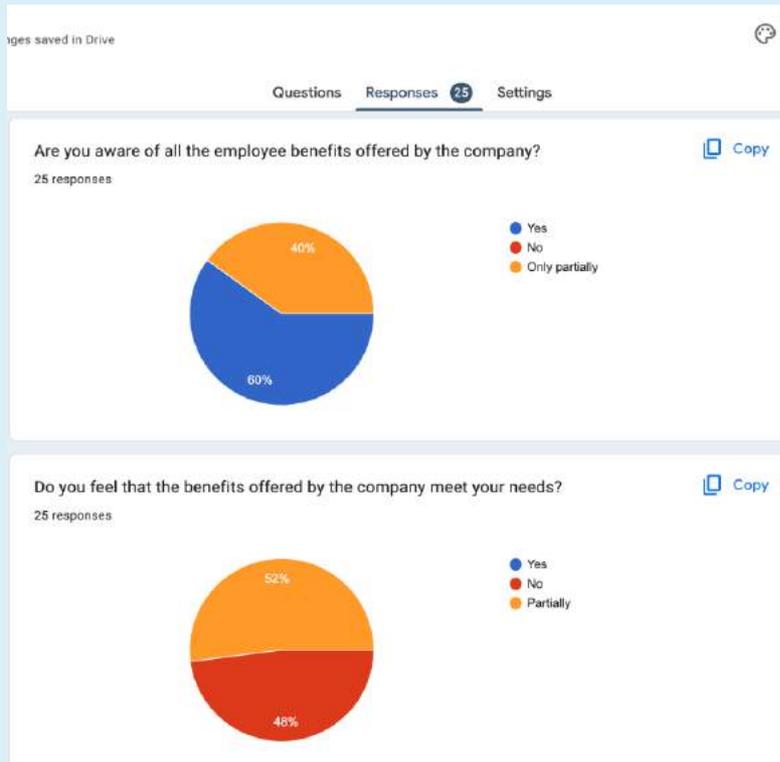
Would you be willing to trade certain benefits for a higher salary, or vice versa?

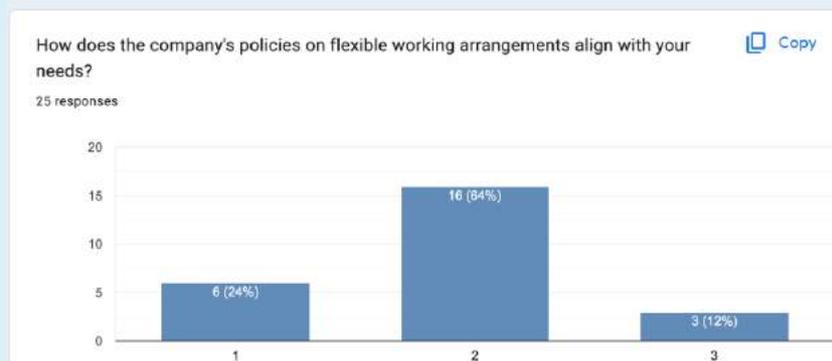
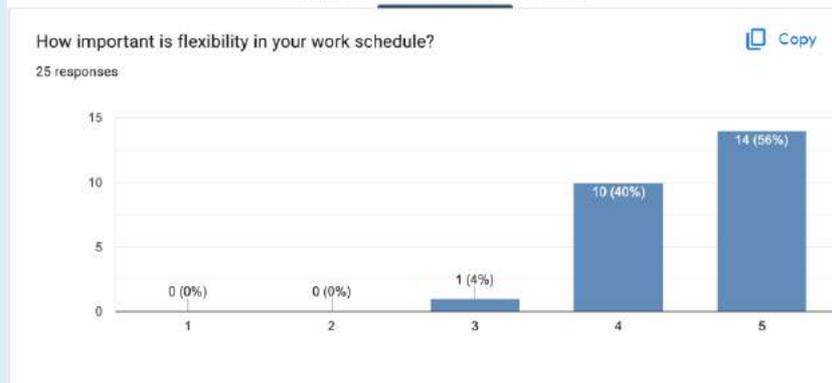
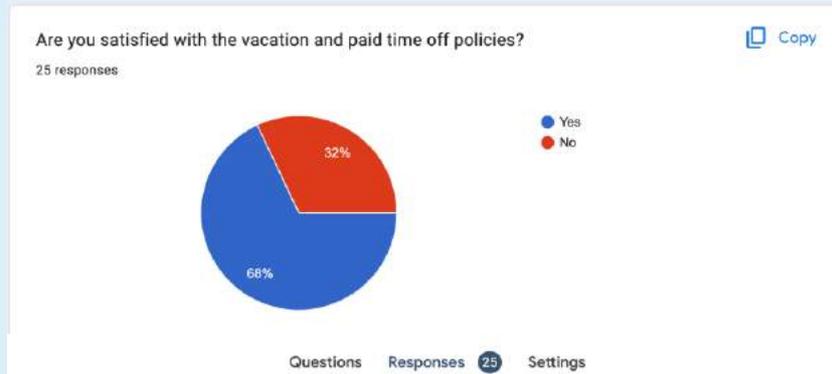
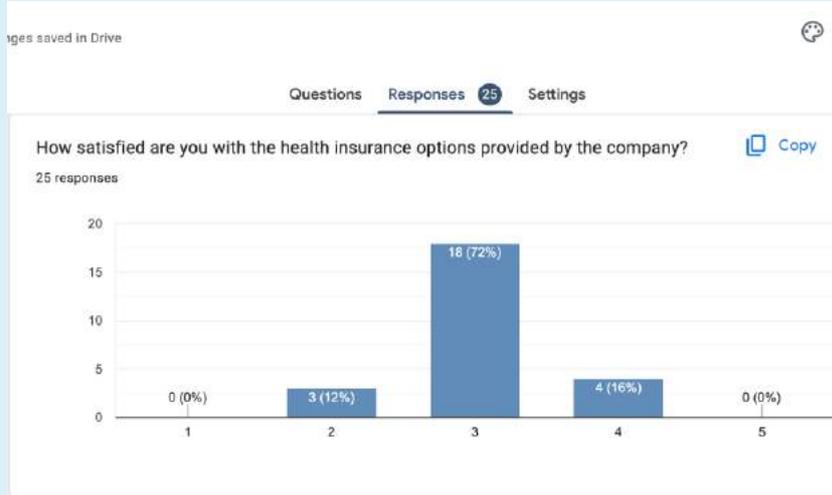
Yes
 No
 Maybe

How likely are you to recommend this company as a great place to work?

Very unlikely 1 2 3 4 5 Very likely

8.22 Result of Before implementation benefits survey





Questions Responses **25** Settings

How important is work-life balance to you, and how does the company's policies support it?

25 responses

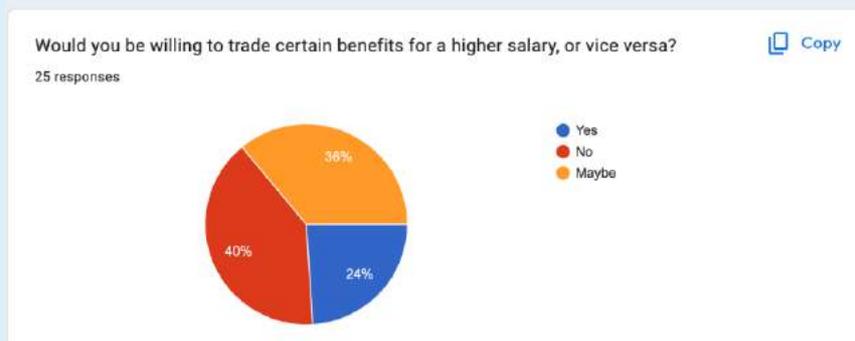
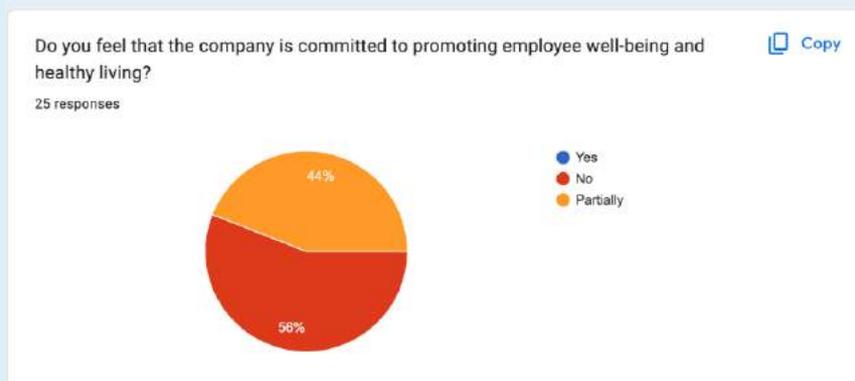
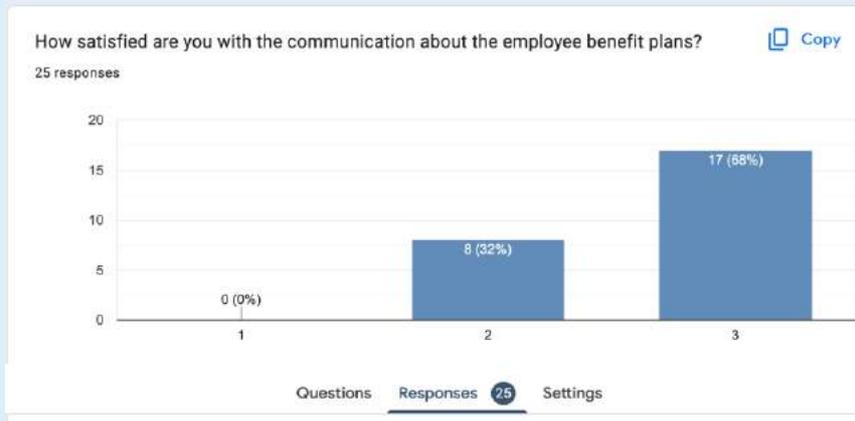
- Is important but sometimes we work a lot of hours
- Very important. Is ok but sometimes the shifts are too long
- it is important but in this industry is hard to have weekends off
- I spend my time mostly at work so I don't have much time for anything else
- very important
- Quite important. I can swap shifts without taking a day off
- Very important, we have the regular number of days off and sometimes during Christmas we are closed to enjoy the holidays
- Important. I don't know
- impoortant and I think through davs off

Questions Responses **25** Settings

Are there any additional benefits you would like to see offered by the company?

25 responses

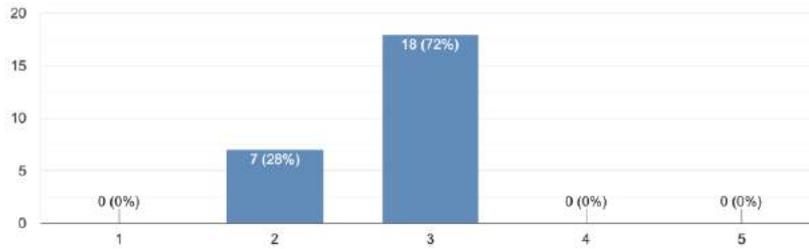
- Paid extra hours, bonuses for Christmas and Easter, holiday vouchers , private medical insurance
- Paid extra hours, transportation, holiday bonus
- Bonuses for holidays, transportation, meal on shift
- More time off, private insurance, bonuses, gym discounts, meals during shift
- paid extra hours
- Bonuses, training , discounts in other restaurants
- Gym subscription, discounts in different places in the city, bonuses
- 1 meal, transportation, bonus
- Bonuses, holiday vouchers, meals on shift



How likely are you to recommend this company as a great place to work?

 Copy

25 responses



8.23 Results obtained during interviews with hotel managers

Questions asked	Key take aways from the answers
Why are employees in the hotel industry keen to switch positions so quickly?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Low salaries → High work volume → Long working hours → Job insecurity during the pandemic → New legislation about declaring the tips for taxes. → No career development
What is your opinion on employee retention in HI? Why do/don't you think it is an issue?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Young employees are harder to retain. → There is nothing you can offer if they are decided to leave. → It is important to keep them because you invest in training
<p>What are the aspects that make them stay?</p> <p>What are some of the key elements that could contribute to keep employees longer in the hotel?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Seriousness from the management/ owner side → Good treatment → Mutual respect → Support and encouragement → Bonuses of any kind (financial) → Attention and appreciation → Acknowledgement of their feelings
To what extent are employee benefits related to employee retention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Strongly related → Enhance loyalty → Hard to retain if they are decided to leave, no benefits will compensate. → Enhance motivation and appreciation through rewards
What kind of benefits are you offering?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Holiday bonuses (Christmas & Easter) → Birthday bonus → Paid extra hours → Night bonuses → Weekend bonuses → Free gym access → Flexible schedule → Attention → Meal tickets → 50% discount to any restaurant item from the menu → Discounts for friends and family for accommodation → Free access to pool → Qualification courses → Uniforms
<p>What is the most appreciated benefit?</p> <p>Between extrinsic (financially related) and intrinsic rewards (empathy related), which one do you think is more important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Financial bonuses → Restaurant discounts → Accommodation discounts → A mix between intrinsic and extrinsic benefits, one does not go without the other for success
Is leadership a contributing factor to employee retention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → It counts how you behave towards the employees. → Impacts the work atmosphere → Your needs are understood.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Makes your job more enjoyable. → Enhances respect
What would be the factors that would attract people to come to work in the industry more than currently?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Salary → Workplace atmosphere → Flexible schedule → Bonuses
What would you say that are the most attractive benefit that employees are looking for?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Financial bonuses → Rewards to show appreciation. → Meal tickets → Private medical insurance → Flexible schedule → Percentage of sales or performance bonus
How would you ensure that at least the majority is satisfied with the offered benefits?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Talk with employees constantly → Random informal checks → Open door policy → Some don't even check for satisfaction. → Employee satisfaction survey planned
if you would have an unlimited budget to offer any kind of benefits, what would you offer?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Bonuses of any kind, performance, birthdays etc → Complex private insurance → Meal tickets with maximum amount

8.24 Other results from experts

if you would have a no limited budget for offering any kind of benefits to the employees, what would be the top five benefits that you would offer to them?	<p>13th salary or incentive payment Extra payment for results Mix between verbal recognition and economic recognition. Career plan Discounts in other hotels around the world</p>
How do you determine which benefits to offer, and how do you ensure they are competitive in the market?	<p>Based on the market needs in your geographical area Comparison with the offer of CS</p>
How do you communicate benefits to employees and ensure they understand the value of the benefits offered?	<p>Digital channels (email and the company intranet) We divided the benefits on 3 categories (financial well-being, physical well-being, and social well-being)</p>
How do you handle employee inquiries and concerns regarding benefits, and what resources are available to support them?	<p>Face-to-face approach Emails Messages on internal chat Employee engagement survey</p>
How do you stay up to date on changes in the legal and regulatory landscape related to employee benefits, and how do you ensure compliance with these requirements?	<p>Subscribing to relevant publications Attending conferences and seminars Following industry experts and government agencies Review and update policies and procedures regularly Yearly internal audits to identify areas of non-compliance and address any issues proactively.</p>
How do you tailor benefits offerings to meet the needs of different employee groups, such as part-	<p>Flexible benefits that allow employees to choose</p>

time vs. full-time employees, or different age demographics?

8.25 Client Evaluation Form



Evaluation Form Company Project/Research
(EVALUATION FORM OF ALL CLIENTS AND ON ALL DELIVERABLES IS COMPULSORY, FORMAT IS NOT)

Name of student:	Blanca Popa	Student number:	781602
Name of company/organisation:	Florea Grup SRL (Hotel Transilvania)	Department:	Front Office
Name of company tutor/research commissioner:	Andreea Tat	Position of company tutor/commissioner (if applicable):	Front Office Manager
Project and/or Deliverable: (please specify)	Company Project report under the form of Strategy outline -> Employee Benefit Guide		

During the first (unofficial) evaluation the set-up for the project and end deliverable(s) is discussed. For this final evaluation the project has been delivered by the student and is thus evaluated. This is taken into consideration for the final assessment of the student.

During the initial discussion, the deliverable as Company Project under the form of Strategy Outline was presented. After other conversations describing the implementation plan along with an attractive brochure was also visual appealing.

Page 1 of 3

CATEGORY 1: EXPERTISE/KNOWLEDGE OF THE FIELD

Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Excellent	In-depth use of relevant literature and knowledge of the field. The deliverable shows excellent thinking capacity of the student (considering all significant factors and looking from all different perspectives)	Use of relevant literature and knowledge of the field. The deliverable shows mostly intellectual depth (considering significant factors and looking from different perspectives)	No or incorrect use of literature and knowledge of the field. The deliverable lacks intellectual depth	Blanca explained what she needs on a daily and other activities which showed that she has good knowledge within the field.

CATEGORY 2: KNOWLEDGE APPLICATIONS/SOLVING PROBLEMS

Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Excellent	The theories and models are skilfully applied and the student can translate this in a unique solution and implementation. The student can relate situations to concepts that results into a solution that adds great value to the company's overall strategy. The creative solution is can be implemented and evaluated and is solving the problem.	The student uses theory, models, and shows understanding of the issues at hand. The solution is realistic and implementable for the company. The solution is can be implemented and evaluated.	Mentioning theory and models, but not using them in the correct way. The student cannot convince of the possibilities to implement and evaluate. It is not solving the problem.	The brochure she created was very unique and outstanding. We were very surprised to see and the management is now looking at the implementation with interest as we already have great results from them. Great project! very good job!

Page 2 of 3

CATEGORY 3: INFORMED JUDGEMENTS				
Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Excellent	The research process is done and explained in an excellent way. All statements, conclusions and recommendations are underpinned with the data collected by the student and/or referencing. The analysis is very substantial.	The research process is done and explained well. Most statements, conclusions and recommendations are underpinned with the data collected by the student and/or referencing. The analysis is substantial.	Weak problem analysis, research question not clear enough. Data collection and/or methodology is insufficient. Weak analysis, use of data from one dimension and not backed up.	With all the suggestions that she made, there was data about it so the solution was supported by information gathered here in the hotel.
CATEGORY 4: COMMUNICATION AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE				
Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Excellent	Excellent ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to all stakeholders involved. The deliverable adds great value to the main stakeholders. Initial and creative channels have been actively used to share outputs and knowledge.	Good ability to communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to stakeholders. The deliverable adds value to the company. Existing channels have been used to share knowledge.	The deliverable could have been better delivered to the stakeholders. The deliverable could have added more value, if better delivered. No active communication of outputs and knowledge.	Bianca always informed us about the study and she made the problems very clear for the manager as they were not aware of how we actually felt.
CATEGORY 5: INTERCULTURAL HOSPITALITY LEADERSHIP				
Rating	Excellent	Good	Room for improvement	Comments
Excellent	Student can lead the project by themselves. Student is self-critical towards improvement and takes feedback to heart. Student deals with a diversity of stakeholders in an intercultural competent way. Hospitality mindset is seen in project or work in a very distinct way.	Student can lead the project with little help. Student is critical towards improvement and listens to feedback. Student deals with different stakeholders. Hospitality mindset can be seen.	Tasks performed are described and not critically analyzed. Student is not too critical towards own learning and can listen better to feedback. Student does not know how to deal with differences in stakeholders. Hospitality can be improved.	Bianca implemented all feedback given and she is focused always on the interests of employees. She didn't moody help during the project.
OVERALL COMMENTS: Bianca did a great job and she really cares about the employees. Her solution is supporting all their needs and 3 colleagues from FO mentioned that if she would have a hotel they would work there.				
STUDENTS' COMMENTS: Comments on evaluation: Thank you so much for the feedback and for giving me the chance to research this subject within your company.				
DATE & STUDENT'S SIGNATURE:		COMPANY SUPERVISOR'S/RESEARCH COMMISSIONER'S SIGNATURE:		
03.05.2023 		 Andressa Tiel - FO Manager		

THE COMPLETED FORMS (ON ALL DELIVERABLES AND PERFORMANCE) NEED TO BE EMAILED TO THE LYCAR COACH AND PUT IN THE APPENDICES OF THE CAREER PORTFOLIO

8.26 Proof of agreements

AGREEMENT ON THE EXECUTION OF A RESEARCH ASSIGNMENT

I. BLANCA HERRERA ROSA
hereafter referred to as THE STUDENT, and

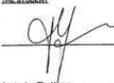
II. Commissioning company FLOREA GRUP SRL
Address: 06 HOREA NR. 2 MISA
represented by
TAT ANDREEA DANAI (name)
SECRET OFFICE MANAGER (position)
hereafter referred to as THE CLIENT, and

III. Hotelschool The Hague, Binnenschiedse 2, 2587 AH Den Haag
Launching Your Career/LYCar course
represented by
Tobias Fagel
hereafter referred to as the LYCar Coach

herby enter into a project contract under the following conditions:

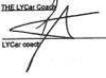
- Context**
Under the supervision of the LYCar coach appointed by Hotelschool The Hague, students are to carry out a research assignment for a commission. The commission is the LYCar student's client. The research assignment for the student is defined in line with the student's focus and development goals in LYCar. The approval of this agreement by all parties included in I, II and III confers their alignment and consent on the assignment as detailed in the Student's Proposal for LYCar. Should the client, coach and/or student need support in evaluating the assignment, then the parties can contact the Research Projects Team on researchprojects@hbschool.nl.
- Project specifications**
The Student's assignment is formulated as follows:
The project title will be: RETENTION, EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
The type of and deliverables (i.e. 'professional product' for LYCar) as requested by the client, that will create value for the client:
written assignment: peer / strategy critique
- Timeline/Deadline**
The project will start 16.11.2022 and will be completed before 05.06.2023.
Structure, reporting and support throughout the research project and the student's assignment must in particular the following milestones apply:
- Week 1: signing of the context agreement on reason for research and aim of the study
- Week 4: presentation and approval of plan (includes context analysis, aim and research questions, theory and methods)
- Week 10: presentation of research project (includes results, conclusions and recommendations)
- Professional standards**
The project is part of the research program of Hotelschool The Hague. The external responsibilities of Hotelschool The Hague require professionalism in the delivery of research projects. The student agrees to professional standards in project communication, timeliness, technical preparation of its behavior and deliverables as agreed upon and contact with external partners. The student commits themselves to a performance effort in research quality, under the guidance of the LYCar coach and support from the client.

- Responsibilities**
Once agreed by all parties, the student may not modify the project description or planning without prior written consent by the client and the LYCar coach. The student may not abandon the project and/or accept a different LYCar assignment without prior written consent by the client and the LYCar coach. The student takes full responsibility of delivering the work and deliverables for the client and for the LYCar as agreed upon in the approved research plan. Any possible major deviation must be officially approved by all parties before execution.
- Reporting and consequences delays**
If a delay in the execution of the project occurs because of complications derived from the research activity such as data availability, resource constraints, software availability etc., or because of force majeure, the student shall immediately report the cause and expected length of the delay to the client. If a delay remains uncorrected or occurs because of other causes, this will be considered as an abandonment of the project by the client. This also means that the project assigned to the student may be declared invalid and will not be assessed as part of the LYCar (to be confirmed and decided by the LYCar coach).
- Deliverables and client evaluation**
As completion of the project the student can deliver the following to the client (applicable with the client):
(1) An electronic (Word) version of the professional product(s) in the context of the research assignment as agreed upon.
(2) A research report to underpin the deliverables.
(3) Any data collected for the project (open files only, not in PDF).
(4) PDF files of important (academic) articles used in the report.
The student will only be allowed to defend his final deliverables as long as the research assignment has been completed and the materials under 1,2,3 and 4 have been delivered and accepted by the client.
A final client evaluation will always be provided by the client, valuating the value of the deliverables for the client. This evaluation is important for the student's final LYCar assessment. The student will submit the client evaluation, in line with the requirements in LYCar, e.g. send in LYCar coach and on the client (for details, see LYCar syllabus).
- Publications and data**
Unless otherwise agreed, all research findings will be made publicly accessible through the usual channels of the client and of Hotelschool The Hague. If an opportunity arises to publish a version of the LYCar paper, this will be discussed with the student, for which reason the student is requested to make contact data after graduation available to the client. The student fills in a data management form and adheres to the principles of ethics and research integrity.
- Project expenses**
Project expenses incurred by the student can only be reimbursed by Hotelschool The Hague and/or student if agreed with and approved by the client beforehand and after completion of the project.
RESEARCH

THE STUDENT

Amsterdam/The Hague (city), 17.11.2022 (date)

THE CLIENT

Amsterdam/The Hague (city), 17.11.2022 (date)

THE LYCar Coach

LYCar coach
Amsterdam/The Hague (city), 21-11-2022 (date)

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Figure 28 - Agreement on the execution of the research assignment


**Declaration relating to confidentiality concerning research data
in Launching Your CAREER (LYCAR) programme**

The undersigned DIANA-MIRAZA POPA (hereafter referred to as the Student) residing at STR. CALCEA MILCOVICI NR. 24X-HAVEST, ROMANIA (hereafter referred to as the Client) residing at FLOREA GRUP SRL
OB. HICOP NR. 22 ALBA

Whereas:

- the Student shall, in the context of his or her LYCAR research, gain access to confidential information;
- the Client shall, where appropriate, demand a signed declaration relating to secrecy and confidentiality concerning the information provided in this context;
- this non-disclosure agreement shall, in the event of any discrepancies, take precedence over other contracts or agreements which have been or will be concluded or made between the Student and the Client.

Declares as follows:

1. The Student shall keep confidential any information which the Client or any other party involved in the LYCAR research provides under this contract, and shall not further disclose such information in any way, except insofar as the Student is obliged to disclose it by virtue of any legal requirement or irrevocable decision of a judge.
2. Information, as referred to under 1, refers to all information, including written, verbal, graphic and digital information, or information in any other form, which comes to the knowledge of the Student during the research period and which the Student knows, or can reasonably be expected to know, is of a confidential nature.
3. The Student shall not, without the prior written consent of the Client, disclose any confidential information to third parties or contribute to the publication of confidential information. The Student shall submit the thesis to the supervisor for approval from the Client in respect of confidential information, before making such information available to his examiner(s) at Hotelschool The Hague.
4. This non-disclosure agreement shall be in force for an indefinite period / The Student shall be bound to this obligation of secrecy for five (5) years after signing this declaration.
(CHOOSE BY CONSULTATION WITH CLIENT)

This declared and signed by

Name: DIANA-MIRAZA POPA Date: 17/11/2022

Place: ALBA IULIA, RO Student number: 901602

Signature: 

Figure 29 - Declaration of confidentiality

Informed Consent Form

FOURTEEN DAY: A study about how 4-5 star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits

I, the intended research participant, have read the information for this project. I was given the opportunity to ask additional questions. If I had any questions these have been answered to my satisfaction. I have had enough time to decide whether or not I wish to participate.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I understand that some people have access to my personal details. These people have been mentioned (in the information etc).

I consent to the use of my details, for the purposes that have been mentioned in the information/information letter.

I consent to my details being kept for further analysis (if applicable) for a maximum of 15 years after this research project has ended.

I hereby give my informed consent to take part in this research project.

Name of participant: Former FO employee
Signature:  Date: 18/11/2022

I, the researcher, confirm that I have fully informed this participant about the above research project.

If any new information arises in the duration of the research project that could potentially influence the participant's consent, I will inform the research participant.

Name of researcher (or his/her representative): Diana-Miraza Popa
Signature:  Date: 18/11/2022

Additional information has been provided by (if applicable):
Name: _____
Occupation: _____
Signature: _____ Date: / /

Figure 30 - Former employee consent form

Informed Consent Form

FlyOUT or StayIN: A study about how 4-5 star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits

I, the intended research participant, have read the information for this project. I was given the opportunity to ask additional questions. If I had any questions these have been answered to my satisfaction. I have had enough time to decide whether or not I wish to participate.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I understand that some people have access to my personal details. These people have been mentioned (in the information etc.).

I consent to the use of my details, for the purposes that have been mentioned in the information/information letter.

I consent to my details being kept for further analysis (if applicable) for a maximum of 15 years after this research project has ended.

I hereby give my informed consent to take part in this research project.

Name of participant: Dori Rueda HR Manager La Meridien

Signature:  Date :13/01/23

I, the researcher, confirm that I have fully informed this participant about the above research project.

If any new information arises in the duration of the research project that could potentially influence the participant's consent, I will inform the research participant.

Name of researcher (or his/her representative): Bianca-Mihaela Popa

Signature:  Date: 13/01 / 2023

Additional information has been provided by (if applicable):

Name:

Occupation:

Signature: _____ Date: __/__/__

Figure 31 - HR Specialist consent form

Informed Consent Form

FlyOUT or StayIN: A study about how 4-star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits.

I, the intended research participant, have read the information for this project. I was given the opportunity to ask additional questions. If I had any questions these have been answered to my satisfaction. I have had enough time to decide whether or not I wish to participate.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I understand that some people have access to my personal details. These people have been mentioned (in the information etc.).

I consent to the use of my details, for the purposes that have been mentioned in the information/information letter.

I consent to my details being kept for further analysis (if applicable) for a maximum of 15 years after this research project has ended.

I hereby give my informed consent to take part in this research project.

Name of participant: FO employee Hotel Transilvania
Signature:  Date :15 / 03 / 2023

I, the researcher, confirm that I have fully informed this participant about the above research project.

If any new information arises in the duration of the research project that could potentially influence the participant's consent, I will inform the research participant.

Name of researcher (or his/her representative): Bianca-Mihaela Popa
Signature:  Date:15/ 03 / 2023

Additional information has been provided by (if applicable):
Name:
Occupation:
Signature: Date: __ / __ / __

Figure 32 - FO Employee consent form

Informed Consent Form

FlyOUT or StayIN: A study about how 4- star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits.

I, the intended research participant, have read the information for this project. I was given the opportunity to ask additional questions. If I had any questions these have been answered to my satisfaction. I have had enough time to decide whether or not I wish to participate.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I understand that some people have access to my personal details. These people have been mentioned (in the information etc.).

I consent to the use of my details, for the purposes that have been mentioned in the information/information letter.

I consent to my details being kept for further analysis (if applicable) for a maximum of 15 years after this research project has ended.

I hereby give my informed consent to take part in this research project.

Name of participant: FO employee Hotel Transilvania
Signature:  Date: 18 / 03 / 2023

I, the researcher, confirm that I have fully informed this participant about the above research project.

If any new information arises in the duration of the research project that could potentially influence the participant's consent, I will inform the research participant.

Name of researcher (or his/her representative): Bianca-Mihaela Popa
Signature:  Date: 18 / 03 / 2023

Additional information has been provided by (if applicable):
Name:
Occupation:
Signature: _____ Date: __/__/__

Figure 33 - FO Employee consent form

Informed Consent Form

FlyOUT or StayIN: A study about how 4-star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits.

I, the intended research participant, have read the information for this project. I was given the opportunity to ask additional questions. If I had any questions these have been answered to my satisfaction. I have had enough time to decide whether or not I wish to participate.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I understand that some people have access to my personal details. These people have been mentioned (in the information etc.).

I consent to the use of my details, for the purposes that have been mentioned in the information/information letter.

I consent to my details being kept for further analysis (if applicable) for a maximum of 15 years after this research project has ended.

I hereby give my informed consent to take part in this research project.

Name of participant: FO employee Hotel Transilvania
Signature:  Date: 19 / 03 / 2023

I, the researcher, confirm that I have fully informed this participant about the above research project.

If any new information arises in the duration of the research project that could potentially influence the participant's consent, I will inform the research participant.

Name of researcher (or his/her representative): Bianca-Mihaela Popa
Signature:  Date: 19 / 03 / 2023

Additional information has been provided by (if applicable):
Name:
Occupation:
Signature: _____ Date: __/__/__

Figure 34 - FO Employee consent form

Informed Consent Form

FlyOUT or StayIN: A study about how 4-star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits.

I, the intended research participant, have read the information for this project. I was given the opportunity to ask additional questions. If I had any questions these have been answered to my satisfaction. I have had enough time to decide whether or not I wish to participate.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I understand that some people have access to my personal details. These people have been mentioned (in the information etc.).

I consent to the use of my details, for the purposes that have been mentioned in the information/information letter.

I consent to my details being kept for further analysis (if applicable) for a maximum of 15 years after this research project has ended.

I hereby give my informed consent to take part in this research project.

Name of participant: F&B Employee Phoenixia Grand Hotel
Signature:  Date: 20/ 03 / 2023

I, the researcher, confirm that I have fully informed this participant about the above research project.

If any new information arises in the duration of the research project that could potentially influence the participant's consent, I will inform the research participant.

Name of researcher (or his/her representative): Bianca-Mihaela Popa
Signature:  Date: 20 / 03 / 2023

Additional information has been provided by (if applicable):
Name:
Occupation:
Signature: _____ Date: _ / _ / _

Figure 35 - F&B Employee Phoenixia consent form

Informed Consent Form

FlyOUT or StayIN: A study about how 4-5 star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits

I, the intended research participant, have read the information for this project. I was given the opportunity to ask additional questions. If I had any questions these have been answered to my satisfaction. I have had enough time to decide whether or not I wish to participate.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I understand that some people have access to my personal details. These people have been mentioned (in the information etc.).

I consent to the use of my details, for the purposes that have been mentioned in the information/information letter.

I consent to my details being kept for further analysis (if applicable) for a maximum of 15 years after this research project has ended.

I hereby give my informed consent to take part in this research project.

Name of participant: FO employee Hotel Rozmarin Predeal

Signature:  Date: 22/ 03 / 2023

I, the researcher, confirm that I have fully informed this participant about the above research project.

If any new information arises in the duration of the research project that could potentially influence the participant's consent, I will inform the research participant.

Name of researcher (or his/her representative): Bianca-Mihaela Popa

Signature:  Date: 22/ 03 / 2023

Additional information has been provided by (if applicable):

Name:

Occupation:

Signature: Date: __ / __ / __

Figure 36 - FO Employee Hotel Rozmarin Predeal consent form

Informed Consent Form

FlyOUT or StayIN: A study about how 4-5 star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits

I, the intended research participant, have read the information for this project. I was given the opportunity to ask additional questions. If I had any questions these have been answered to my satisfaction. I have had enough time to decide whether or not I wish to participate.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I understand that some people have access to my personal details. These people have been mentioned (in the information etc.).

I consent to the use of my details, for the purposes that have been mentioned in the information/information letter.

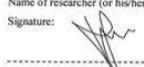
I consent to my details being kept for further analysis (if applicable) for a maximum of 15 years after this research project has ended.

I hereby give my informed consent to take part in this research project.

Name of participant: Manager Hotel Rozmarin Predeal
Signature:  Date: 28/ 03 / 2023

I, the researcher, confirm that I have fully informed this participant about the above research project.

If any new information arises in the duration of the research project that could potentially influence the participant's consent, I will inform the research participant.

Name of researcher (or his/her representative): Bianca-Mihaela Popa
Signature:  Date: 28 / 03 / 2023

Additional information has been provided by (if applicable):
Name: ALEXANDRA OCSANBURA
Occupation: MANAGER
Signature:  Date: 28/03/2023

Figure 37 - Manager Hotel Rozmarin Predeal consent form

Informed Consent Form

FlyOUT or StayIN: A study about how 4-star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits.

I, the intended research participant, have read the information for this project. I was given the opportunity to ask additional questions. If I had any questions these have been answered to my satisfaction. I have had enough time to decide whether or not I wish to participate.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I understand that some people have access to my personal details. These people have been mentioned (in the information etc.).

I consent to the use of my details, for the purposes that have been mentioned in the information/information letter.

I consent to my details being kept for further analysis (if applicable) for a maximum of 15 years after this research project has ended.

I hereby give my informed consent to take part in this research project.

Name of participant: Manager Nova Restaurant & Hotel Aura Unirii
Signature:  Date: 23 / 03 / 2023

I, the researcher, confirm that I have fully informed this participant about the above research project.

If any new information arises in the duration of the research project that could potentially influence the participant's consent, I will inform the research participant.

Name of researcher (or his/her representative): Bianca-Mihaela Popa
Signature:  Date: 23 / 03 / 2023

Additional information has been provided by (if applicable):
Name:
Occupation:
Signature: _____ Date: __/__/__

Figure 38 - Manager Aura Unirii consent form

Informed Consent Form

FlyOUT or StayIN: A study about how 4-star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits.

I, the intended research participant, have read the information for this project. I was given the opportunity to ask additional questions. If I had any questions these have been answered to my satisfaction. I have had enough time to decide whether or not I wish to participate.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I understand that some people have access to my personal details. These people have been mentioned (in the information etc.).

I consent to the use of my details, for the purposes that have been mentioned in the information/information letter.

I consent to my details being kept for further analysis (if applicable) for a maximum of 15 years after this research project has ended.

I hereby give my informed consent to take part in this research project.

Name of participant: HR Manager Radisson Blu
Signature:  Date: 27 / 03 / 2023

I, the researcher, confirm that I have fully informed this participant about the above research project.

If any new information arises in the duration of the research project that could potentially influence the participant's consent, I will inform the research participant.

Name of researcher (or his/her representative): Bianca-Mihaela Popa
Signature:  Date: 27 / 03 / 2023

Additional information has been provided by (if applicable):
Name:
Occupation:
Signature: _____ Date: __/__/__

Figure 39 - HR Manager Radisson Blu

Informed Consent Form

Fly-OUT or Stay-IN: A study about how 4-star hotels from Romania can improve employee retention through competitive benefits.

I, the intended research participant, have read the information for this project. I was given the opportunity to ask additional questions. If I had any questions these have been answered to my satisfaction. I have had enough time to decide whether or not I wish to participate.

I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I understand that some people have access to my personal details. These people have been mentioned (in the information etc.).

I consent to the use of my details, for the purposes that have been mentioned in the information/information letter.

I consent to my details being kept for further analysis (if applicable) for a maximum of 15 years after this research project has ended.

I hereby give my informed consent to take part in this research project.

Name of participant: F&B employee Hotel Transilvania
Signature:  Date: 20 / 01 / 2023

I, the researcher, confirm that I have fully informed this participant about the above research project.

If any new information arises in the duration of the research project that could potentially influence the participant's consent, I will inform the research participant.

Name of researcher (or his/her representative): Bianca-Mihaela Popa
Signature:  Date: 19 / 03 / 2023

Additional information has been provided by (if applicable):
Name:
Occupation:
Signature: Date: _ / _ / _

Figure 40 - F&B employee Hotel Transilvania

8.27 Assessment & Feedback from approved Proposal

LYCar Proposal Grading Rubric			
U.1.1 (Version LYCar 2020; 16 February, 2021)			
Student Name:	<input type="text" value="Bianca Popa"/>	LYCar Coach:	<input type="text" value="Fabian Fagel"/>
Student Number:	<input type="text" value="791602"/>	Primary PLO:	<input type="text" value="6"/>
Date Submitted:	<input type="text" value="09/02/2023"/>	Secondary PLO(s):	<input type="text" value="8"/>
<i>Note: All boxes with red border to be filled by student</i>			
Preconditions (required for assessment)	Yes	No	Comments
Checks content and completeness			
Executive Summary is present, concise, can be read independently, contains information about process and content, focuses on results and outcomes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
LYCar Proposal meets formal reporting criteria (according to e.g., LYCar Reading & Writing Guide)			
LYCar Proposal is written in English and is professional, including common basic components such as Intro, ToC, Conclusion etc.- see Reading & Writing Guide	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
LYCar Proposal is max. 5.000 words (counting after Table of Content, incl. text in tables) - visual proof of wordcount is included in Appendices.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4962

Harvard Referencing Style is used consistently, referencing to primary sources only, List of References is well presented



Check (technical) formalities and submissions

Ephorus upload



LYCar Proposal incl. Appendices are uploaded in Osiris



Ethics and data management

Ethical, integrity and data management requirements



Entitled to assessment? (All yes above required):



DD1: The student has demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that is supported by advanced textbooks

	Excellent	Pass	No Go
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1.1 Use of literature and knowledge of the field

Student uses in-depth literature and knowledge of the field throughout the report. The report contains no mistakes and factual incorrectness.

Student uses in most cases literature and knowledge of the field in the report. The report contains some mistakes and factual incorrectness in a limited part of the report.

No sufficient or correct use of literature and knowledge of the field in the report. The report contains mistakes and factual incorrectness.

1.2 Intellectual depth and abstract thinking

Student takes all significant factors into account and looks from different perspectives, sees patterns, relates situations to concepts in order to solve larger problems. The reports show excellent thinking capacity of the student. New unique insights presented in the topic and depth of understanding displayed. Excellent linking between the elements and the underlying issues within the case situation.

Student takes different perspectives into account. The report shows intellectual depth (taking into account all significant factors and looking from different perspectives) in most parts of the report. Some patterns are clear. Some links have been made.

The report lacks intellectual depth (superficial and merely descriptive) in some parts of the report. Patterns are not sufficiently made clear.

Student Feedback:

Pass



Not Yet



The report contains in-depth information gathered from the literature review but also from field observations. The facts are clearly presented and validated through sources. The different aspects together revealed the root cause of the problem and different concepts are analyzed to identify a feasible solution. All the elements are linked to the underlying issue of the study and are inter-related with the proposed solution.

Assessor Feedback:

Pass



Not Yet



Try not to mix information from literature and interviews in your literature review yet. save that for conclusion

DD2: The student can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and has competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining feedback and solving problems within their field of study

	Excellent	Pass	No Go
2.1 Application of theories/models to situations at hand	Student uses a range of theories/models appropriate to the problems in the case skilfully and able to add their own unique perspective and insight. They own the model(s).	Student mentions a range of theories/models appropriate to the problems in the case and applying some of them in the correct way.	Mentioning models and theories but not using them in a correct way.
2.2 Possible impact and meaning of own work - dissemination of research	Student plans evaluation of impact and meaning of own work in relation to business and industry with sound underpinning. Identification of all stakeholders and acts of dissemination. Plan on how to effectively disseminate knowledge through different channels fitted for a variety of audiences is also presented.	Student formulates criteria for evaluation. Student describes possible impact and meaning of own work. Identification of stakeholders and planning of dissemination through at least one valuable channel with an audience is presented.	Student fails to describe criteria how to evaluate impact. No identification of stakeholders or realistic plan on dissemination of knowledge through at least one valuable channel with an audience.
Student Feedback:	Pass <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Yet <input type="checkbox"/>	The range of different models and theories is used to combine the most relevant ones in the design of the solution. Identification of all stakeholders is presented and clearly linked to the 2 acts of dissemination. The plan of dissemination is clearly described and different audiences are targeted through different channels.	
Assessor Feedback:	Pass <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Yet <input type="checkbox"/>	Good use of theories. Show how you use the theories in your methodology. Are you not using any sub-questions? If outcome usefulefor entire Romanian 4-5 star hotels, how reliable is your rresearch?	

DD3: the student has the ability to devise data gathering events, gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues

	Excellent	Pass	No Go
3.1 The Design Based Research Process	Student sets the research process up in a systematic and well organised way. Student makes sense of a problem mess, analyses a (complex) problem and formulates feasible solutions by using a design-based research approach. Logical flow from Problem definition to Analysis to Solutions Design/methods are well chosen and motivated,	Student analyses the problem, and formulates possible solutions underpinned by literature using a design-based research approach. Methods motivated and mostly logically chosen	Insufficient problem analysis and methodology, research cycle not used.
3.2 Analysis and evaluation of data	Student plans analysis and evaluation of data/information well using appropriate (digital) tools and makes data-driven decisions. All statements are underpinned with facts and figures and/or referencing. The appropriate tools are used in all steps. Analysis is sufficiently complex with use of information from more than 2 different dimensions (practioners, scientific literature, the organization and stakeholders).	Student plans analysis and evaluation of solutions clearly, with some flaws or unclarities. Some statements are underpinned with facts and figures and/or referencing, some lacking underpinning. Analysis is sufficiently complex using data from at least one dimension and sufficiently backed up with literature.	Plan of analysis and evaluation of solutions is not clear. Statements are mostly not underpinned with facts and figures and/or referencing; some are contradicting. No tools are used. Lacking or no analysis and not backed up with literature.
Student Feedback:	Pass <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Yet <input type="checkbox"/>	The research process is well organized and each method is clearly underpinned. There is a logical flow from the analysis to the solution design and the methodology is chosen accordingly to the subject of interest. The analysis and evaluation part is set-up and information is analysed as a preliminary data from all 4 types of sources.	
Assessor Feedback:	Pass <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Yet <input type="checkbox"/>	research process is set up in a systematic and well organized way, clear ideas about possible solutions. explain what will still be done in the execution.How will you link all the information together to answer your research question?	

DD5: the student has developed those learning skills necessary to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy

	Excellent	Pass	No Go
5.1 Plan on IQ development in PLO: Reflection on product(s)	Student has clear plans on what will be delivered and uses different relevant theory to underpin own work and reflect on it.	Student has a plan on what will be delivered and uses theory to underpin planned own work and reflect on it.	No clear deliverables mentioned and almost no theory to underpin own work and reflection.
5.2 Plan on AQ & EQ Self development	Student devises excellent ability to critically reflect on own developmental goals and demonstrates real growth mindset for life-long learning. Student proposes a demonstration of being able to self-direct, taking initiative in unpredictable situations. Student shows different metrics that can demonstrate development in terms of their EQ/AQ.	Student shows developmental goals and demonstrates growth mindset. There is a plan on how to reflect on values, attitudes and behaviour. Starting levels and desired end levels are described and measurements are provided.	Developmental goals are not concrete, there is no demonstration of growth mindset. Plan on how to reflect is vague and does not give enough substantiation to show growth.
5.3 Plan on EQ Social development	Student provides a plan on how to construct a multitude of proof that shows development as an Intercultural Hospitality Leader. Excellent ability to contribute to the global society/local community as a responsible citizen. Excellent analysis of diversity of people the student will deal with. Possible effective collaboration with all stakeholders in different cultural settings. Hospitality is key to the project or work the student does.	Student provides a plan on how to prove development as an Intercultural Hospitality Leader. Plan on how to contribute to the global society/local community as a responsible citizen. Proposing ideas on how to collaborate with different stakeholders in different cultural settings. Hospitality is a differentiator in the students' project or work.	No clear plan on development as an Intercultural Hospitality Leader. Plan on how to contribute to global society/local community is missing. Ideas proposed on collaboration or hospitality are not sufficient.

Student Feedback:

Pass

Not Yet

The future plans regarding personal and career development are well-defined and a comparison between the current and the desired state is displayed. This overview suggests a critical reflection of the current behavior and the future steps that are required for the development. A plan about the "how" is presented to reach the pre-defined goals.

Assessor Feedback:

Excellent

Pass

Not Yet

Clear goals, in portfolio make sure the information is in the report and not in the appendices.

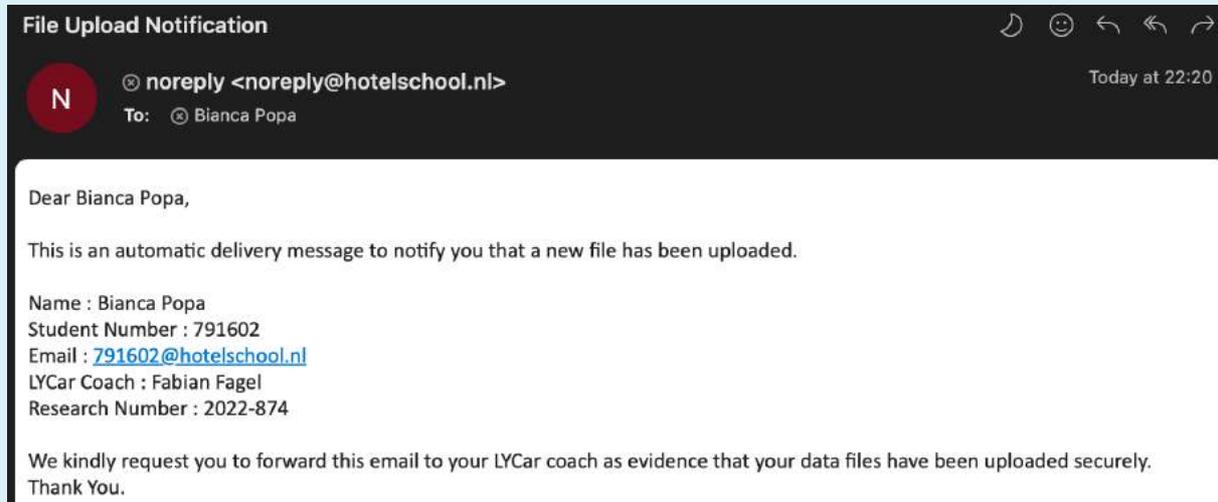
Overall Assessor Feedback

Well written proposal, needs some fine tuning, but this can be done in writing the execution report and the portfolio

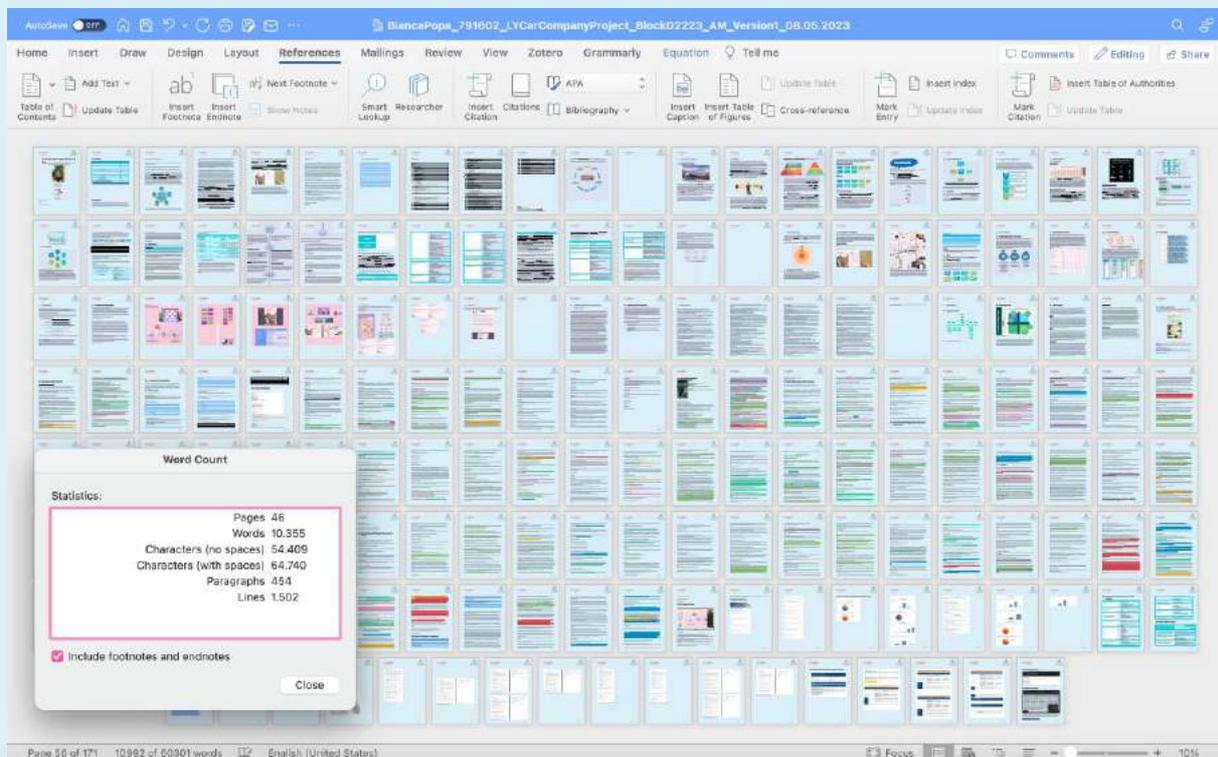
LYCar Proposal Outcome

- Pass All qualitative criteria awarded a "Pass". "P" registered in Osiris. Student can continue with LYCar execution.
- No Go One or more qualitative criteria graded as "Not Yet". "F" registered in Osiris. Student re-writes LYCar Proposal with incorporated feedback.
- Pre-Condition NY Pre-conditions not met. Student resubmits LYCar Proposal. No grade or feedback provided to the student.

8.28 Proof of data upload



8.29 Proof of word count



Words: 10.355

Text in figures: fig 3 (44 words) + fig 4 (30 words) + fig. 5 (22 words) + fig 6 (24 words) + fig 7 (14 words) + fig 8 (12 words) + fig 11 (54 words) + fig 12 (11 words) + fig 14 (14 words) + fig 15 (52 words) + fig 16 (79 words) + fig 19 (30 words) + fig 20 (83 words) = 469 words

TOTAL WORD COUNT: 10.355 + 469 = 10.824 words