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Alleviating Labor Crunch in Singapore's Hospitality Industry

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ALLEVIATING LABOR CRUNCH IN
SINGAPORE'S HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY

By

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Abstract

The acute shortage of manpower in hospitality workforce has been a persistent problem in Singapore throughout these years which adversely affects both the managerial and lower-skilled occupational groups of employees. The pandemic has further accelerated human resource issues across the country in 2020. It particularly hits the hospitality industry hard since hotel businesses are highly human-centric and the unprecedented world event has adversely resulted in severe manpower leakages and a dilution of talent pool. This paper will analyze the reasons, severity and impact of the manpower shortage within the hospitality industry in Singapore, focusing on service quality. Lastly, the author will provide recommendations based on exploratory research to mitigate the labor shortage issue. These recommendations include working with external agencies to equip their organizations with qualified and skilled workers, creating career paths and cross-trainings to retain talents, making training program mandatory, devising job re-creation to assist mature workers, and creating meaningful jobs to retain employees by increasing their satisfaction towards their jobs in the long run.

Keywords: Labor shortages, service quality, COVID-19, Singapore hospitality industry, employee capabilities

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Chapter One

The hospitality and leisure industry has experienced exponential growth since 2009; it is incontestably one of the fastest growing sectors with more than 15.1 million employees working in the industry prior to COVID-19 (Statista, 2022). This favorable outlook for the burgeoning hospitality industry has led hotel operators across the world to seek for increased manpower to cope with pent-up business activities over the years.

In Singapore, the acute shortage of labor becomes exceptionally evident since the emergence of the Integrated Resorts (IRs) including Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) and Marina Bay Sands (MBS) as these IRs have been pumping in investments for new and expanded operations, resulting in an increase of more than 5,000 jobs in its latest developments (Heng, 2019). Major international events such as FORMULA 1™ SingTel Singapore Grand Prix (F1) and Singapore Airshow further warrant the need for more talents to join the booming industry (Krishnasamy, 2022). With this renaissance for high manpower needs, the declining labor supply of up to 2% drop in Singapore's total workforce per year has begun to cause a significant manpower gap in the local hospitality and tourism scene (Tan et al, 2019).

In 2019, COVID-19 further exacerbated the labor situation and caused severe disruptions to businesses that affected service quality in the hospitality industry (Choo, 2022). During the pandemic, authorities implemented several measures that were unfavorable for tourism businesses which include debarring all short-term visitors from entering Singapore and curtailing the entry of foreign workers (Ministry of Health, 2020). These restrictions cause hotel businesses to run on a lower operational capacity and hotel employees were coerced to be retrenched, placed on no-pay leaves, or seconded to other companies (Smruthi, 2020). One largest hotel chain in Singapore, Millennium Hotels and Resorts have released 15% of its workforce, retrenching 159

managerial and lower-occupational employees and leaving behind a lean team to cope with increased responsibilities and workload (Oh, 2020).

The mass retrenchments resulted in severe labor leakages and a dilution of talent pool as the industry is no longer deemed attractive or stable to work for in the long run (Choo, 2022). In addition, approximately 66% of employers say maintaining employee morale has been difficult (Society for Human Resource Management, 2020). Having employees that are fully connected to their job has become a challenge during this crisis. The less ideal work environment, low salary and absence of recognition have also been identified to be part of the reasons which attributed to the low level of manpower (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2018).

Without appropriate strategies for hotel operators to salvage labor shortages in Singapore, it will incessantly compromise service standards. Hospitality business is highly human-centric, and it revolves around employees providing exceptional customer experiences, service standards will be affected when workers are overstretched with immense workload (Choo, 2022). Therefore, it is vital for hotel operators to devise feasible ways to close manpower gaps so that employees can constantly meet the service expectations of guests. Local authorities such as Singapore Tourism Board (STB) has been crowdsourcing for innovative solutions to address manning issues in the lodging industry on a national level (Singapore Tourism Board, 2017).

Purpose

This study aims to provide recommendations to the hospitality industry to address manning issues on a national industry level and to catalyze manning growth in adherence to the industry's hiring framework. Accordingly, the following research question has been explored:

RQ1: How can hospitality leaders close the industry's manpower gap using well-trained workers?

Conceptual Framework

The labor shortages and the associated variables of the term will be explored to create a conceptual framework. It will develop to help transform manpower scene to attract hospitality industry professionals back to the industry. The research was limited to labor shortages as related to the hospitality sector within Singapore setting. Modifications may be required for different countries with varying labor situations. The chosen articles are from a limited number of research databases including ResearchGate, Hospitality eJournal Collection, Statista. The keywords used to find the articles include “labor shortages”; “pandemic”; “manpower crunch”; and “service standard lapses”.

Problem Statement

The sturdy growth in Singapore’s hospitality businesses has led to an increasing need for manpower since the development of two IRs. The existing pool of workers are unable to fill up the new roles which are spawned by lodging properties to cope with the surge in business activities. Hospitality professionals are attempting to resolve issues caused by labor shortages while navigating uncertainty caused by COVID-19.

This paper will analyze the reasons, impact, and severity of the manpower shortage within the hospitality industry in Singapore. It will address the acute shortage of manpower and recommend viable measures to be taken by hotel operators such as devising strategies and working with external agencies to resolve the pressing labor crunch.

Limitations

There are several limitations associated with this research which include the lack of studies on these solutions and inadequate information for future solutions as some of these innovative solutions are still running on trials in pre-mature stages. Most of the research work

have also been conducted before the pandemic which narrows the scope of searches for the topic. Furthermore, these research information and trends may be generalized across worldwide tourism sector and they may not apply to local context. Another limitation of research in hospitality is having studies related to the broad spectrum of business instead of explicitly offering specific hotel information.

Definitions

This study will use the following terms to support its research purpose:

Ageing workforce - “With persons aged 55 and older, who are currently employed or are actively seeking and available for employment.” (Ministry of Manpower, 2021).

COVID-19 - “A mild to potentially severe respiratory illness caused by a coronavirus and is characterized by fever, coughing, and shortness of breath” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Employee Morale - “Morale is a mental condition or attitude of individuals or groups which determines their willingness to co-operate.” (Sukmaya, 2019).

Foreign workers- “Those who work in a foreign country without initially intending to settle there and without the benefits of citizenship in the host country.” (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

Labor Shortage - “A shortage or insufficiency of qualified candidates for employment (in an economy, country, etc)” (Collins, n.d.).

Chapter Two

Hospitality is the core of tourism industry; it is one of the fastest burgeoning sectors, the hotel industry experiences strong growth before COVID-19 in Singapore (Danganan, 2019). In 2019, the local tourism sector has reached record highs in Tourism Receipts (TR) and International Visitor Arrivals (IVA) as the IVA hit 19.1 million visitors with a 3.3% robust growth and TR attained S\$27.7 billion which registered a 2.8% increase in revenue (Singapore Tourism Board, 2019).

Throughout these booming years, the industry has been daunted with challenges where the shortage of manpower is the top challenge faced (BBC, 2013). Therefore, this section of the paper aims to provide an in-depth analysis of reasons for labor gaps in the hotel sector and highlight the impacts caused by lack of human resources.

The literature review will adopt the problem-cause-solution order in a topical manner. First, the definition of labor shortage will be explicitly explained at the start of this chapter to reinforce readers' understanding of this broadly used term. Then, findings will be presented to provide further insights of the jobs in demand within the local lodging sector and describe the type of workforce crisis faced by hospitality operators. Next, an analysis will be done to understand the main reasons behind the labor shortages in Singapore's hospitality industry.

In addition, the impacts of the manpower shortages focusing on service quality will be reviewed in this chapter. Business solutions as well as cross collaborations with various stakeholders will be proposed to mitigate the manpower crunch in the last chapter.

Definition of Labor Shortage

Before diving further into the topic, it is critical to understand what labor shortage entails in a general context. Manpower or labor shortage has been defined as “a shortage or insufficiency of qualified candidates for employment in an economy or country” (Collins, n.d.). In the hospitality sector, a labor-scarce workforce refers to the number of job opportunities outpacing the available labor supply with an increasingly number of workers leaving lower-paying service jobs (Heyyman, 2019).

Jobs in Demand

Supported by the openings of 15 new hotels which commenced between 2019 and 2020, more than 71,000 rooms have been added to the total nation’s inventory and job vacancies rose sharply (Töre, 2021). Despite the spike in job opportunities, the number of people employed in the accommodation and food services sector in Singapore shows a downward trajectory. Since 2018, an average of 3,000 or 2% of the workforce left the accommodation and food services sector annually in Singapore (Statista, 2022). It is thus evident that the experienced hospitality workforce has been shrinking even before COVID-19 hits the industry.

During the pandemic, the proportion of vacancies unfilled for at least six months increased to 35% in 2021, up from 27% in 2020, according to Ministry of Manpower’s statistical report (Seow, 2022). This impact has been disproportionately more serious for low-income earners as well as service and sales employees due to the high concentration of such employees in the sector (Lim, 2021). Filling up these vacancies in the Singapore’s hotel industry has foreseen to be exceptionally challenging.

Reasons that Influence Labor Shortage

To get into the crux of the manpower issues, it is vital to identify and examine the reasons that resulted in the low manning supply within the nation. The shortage of manpower in hotel positions has been analyzed to be caused by the 1) negative image portrayed by the industry, 2) hotel talents being poached 3) locals avoiding labor-intensive jobs 4) ageing workforce, and 5) low job satisfaction experienced amongst employees.

Negative Image Portrayed by the Industry

One of the core reasons behind the dwindling labor pool is caused by the adverse image portrayed by the industry. With more than four decades of hospitality research, the perennial concerns of less desirable working settings in the hotel sector such as irregular hours, labor intensity and less career assurance have either dissuaded potential candidates from joining the industry or resulted existing employees to leave the sector altogether (Goh & Okumus, 2020).

The ACI Report 2021 has provided a bleak outlook of a hospitality and tourism industry afflicted with job losses and diminished employee confidence (Yue, 2021). 68% of the respondents in the study reported that they have plans to leave their employers or industry within the next 12 months (Yue, 2021). It has become increasingly evident that the workforce is dwindling as more people are less enticed to work in the hospitality and tourism sector.

Impact: Lose Competitiveness in Service Standards

The industry's weak reputation will not only cause the existing skilled workforce to shrink further. The issue will go beyond where Singapore may lose global competitiveness as hotels may even resort to hiring less qualified workers to fill outstanding vacancies in the long run (Today, 2022). Based on the Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG) which was

a national barometer survey conducted by the Institute of Service Excellence (ISES) at Singapore Management University (SMU), the customer satisfaction measured in the tourism sector has declined by 7.3%, scoring 69.1 points out of 100 in 2014 (Kening, 2014).

Director of ISES, Caroline Lim contended that the present labor crunch primarily and higher tourists' expectations led to the decline; Hotel sector has achieved one of the lowest scores as it declined 10.4% to 69.4 points which revealed the poorest performance since 2009 (Ho, 2014). The founder of YTS Hospitality Marketing, Ms Yasemin Tecmen Stubbe further explained that the spike in jobs has not been appropriately matched with the supply of trained labor, henceforth the manpower situation has deteriorated (Ho, 2014). Singapore has plunged from its top spot as the world's most competitive economy to fifth place in 2021 (Tan, 2021). It signals that the hotel sector in Singapore must improve on service standards so that it can remain competitive globally.

Hotel Talents Poached

Another reason for labor gaps is caused by a widely adopted hiring tactic – talent poaching (Seo, 2022). Talent shortage is inevitable in any growing economy, like Singapore and this trend has resulted in aggressive competition within the hospitality industry. According to a survey, Singapore leads the world in the prevalence of talent poaching and it has surpassed the global average of 52% (Singapore Business Review, 2015).

This phenomenon in pursuit of hiring the best service personnel will get worse especially with the developments of expanding new industries and rising hotel growth in Asia (Seo, 2022). Increasingly talents are poached from the local hotel industry which caused the scarcity of manpower in hotel positions (Singapore Business Review, 2015).

Impact: Diluted Local Talent Pool

Hospitality companies in general are finding difficult to develop the younger generation to take over leadership roles as job-hopping and poaching becomes obvious (Seo, 2022). This trend is also apparent in the Singapore hotel industry where talents are being poached (Hook, 2016). The transfer of knowledge and skills from senior experienced workers to the newly joined industry workers has been short-circuited and the demand for talents has far outstripped supply (Arora, 2022). It also reveals that younger generations are unable to develop their leadership capabilities with short stints at each employment, thus diluting the local talent pool. Service standards have been subsequently affected by the loss of outstanding hospitality performers (Choo, 2022).

Locals Avoid Labor-Intensive Jobs

The other reason behind low labor supply globally is a consequence of social stigma that hospitality jobs are labor-intensive leading to the propensity for qualified employees not taking up hospitality roles (Liu-Lastres et. al, 2022). In Singapore, foreign workers fill low-wage, labor-intensive jobs that Singaporeans are unwilling to do areas such as cleaning, service, and security (Phua, 2020). The locals' typical behavior of avoiding manure jobs has resulted foreigners in taking up unfilled service positions that are low-skilled and labor-intensive. Singapore Hotel Association (SHA) has estimated that 40% of local hospitality workforce constitutes of foreigners prior to the pandemic (Koh, 2015).

A report from the Singapore Ministry of Manpower also shows that there are 11,200 job openings in the accommodation, food and services sector in the second quarter of 2022 (Ministry of Manpower, 2022). More than 80% of these jobs fall under the labor-intensive and service

categories (Ministry of Manpower, 2022). Hospitality operators had to rely on foreign workers for labor-intensive roles or less attractive service jobs (Choo, 2022). The local hotel industry shall face challenges in the provision of service quality when hiring foreign labor to fill up these vacancies.

Impact: Hiring Foreign Workers, Low English Proficiency

The ability to communicate effectively in English is especially important for a country like Singapore, which is primarily an English-speaking nation (Ang, 2020). When hiring foreign workers come from non-English speaking countries, the language barrier becomes challenging for hotel operators to be consistent in upholding service quality and meeting guests' service expectations (Krouse, 2022). Service quality can be affected by poor communications, resulting in unsatisfied hotel customers (Sayin, 2019). Solution will be proposed in Chapter Three to mitigate this lapse in service delivery.

Ageing Workforce

Developed countries across the world are facing issues caused by an ageing population (Heng, 2020). Ageing workforce is a concern for the hospitality industry where 9% of Human Resource (HR) professionals consider it a crisis and 29% recognize that it will be a problem in the next 11 to 20 years. (Society for Human Resource Management, 2016).

According to the Ministry of Social and Family Development (2022), this trend will surface as a bigger problem because more retirees will be expected 8 years from now, with more than one in five Singaporeans will be 65 years older. This also reflects challenges for hotel operators when employees gradually age and lesser younger employees are enticed to stay in the industry to replace them.

Impact: Using Infocomm Technology (IT), Lost of Personal Touch

A growing manpower gap will impact the hotel industry in Singapore because of the ageing workforce. To reduce this gap, hotels have leveraged technology to replace labor to boost efficiency (Heng, 2020). However, technology can never replace human services provided by hotel staffs which enable guests to experience genuine hospitality and make them feel at home (Sayin, 2019). Personalizing services help to ensure customer satisfaction and loyalty, thus filling manpower gaps and retaining experienced older workers remain vital.

Low Job Satisfaction

The last identified reason that continuedly lead to the shortfall of labor is the low job satisfaction experienced by employees in Singapore (Danganan, 2019). Herzberg Two Factor Theory is used to explore employees' motivation and its relationship with job satisfaction in the hotel industry which are critical to job retention (Dogonyaro, 2021). Employees who develop motivation and job satisfaction tend to have better work performances and commitment which significantly reduces staff turnover in an organization (Huffman et al., 2014). According to the theory, hygiene factors including wages, working conditions, working relationships with co-workers and superiors will affect an individual's satisfaction (Dogonyaro, 2021).

However, employers have been unsuccessful in improving employees' job satisfaction level through the provision of better compensation in the past years (Cheng, 2022). Though higher salaries are offered to local employees; they continue to shun jobs in the hospitality sector (Cheng, 2022). According to a report, workers who are paid under \$30,000 per annum rated their job satisfaction at 48% which is only 2% lower than highflyers who earned \$130,000 or above (Danganan, 2019). Hooi and Leong (2015) posited that provision of competitive salary is not an

effective retainment strategy. It is critical to enhance working conditions through job re-design and improve employees' working relationships with co-workers which is covered in Chapter 3.

Impact: High Turnover Rate

Job dissatisfaction leads to high employee turnover rate in an organization which has been one of the most severe issues in the hospitality industry (Santhanam et al., 2017). It is a result of low salary, long hours, and inadequate work-life balance (Brown et al., 2015). It contributes to the low satisfactory level of hospitality jobs that coerced employees to leave their jobs as more than 640,000 hotel workers resign from their jobs with resignation rate hitting 54% annually (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). In Singapore, there more than half of respondents consider leaving their organizations or industry within the next year (Yue, 2021).

Summary

This chapter covers the theory of manpower shortage, key findings for jobs in demand and critical reasons behind manpower crunch in the Singapore's hospitality industry. Before hotel operators can implement feasible strategies to tighten the manpower gap within their lodging properties, it is of paramount importance to understand the reasons behind the shortage of labor within the industry. These reasons including the negative image portrayed by the hotel industry, talents being poached, locals avoiding labor-intensive jobs, ageing workforce and low job satisfaction have been discussed under this chapter.

Impacts of manpower crunch has also been iterated which include causing the hotel industry to lose competitiveness in service standards, diluting local talent pool, hiring foreign workers with low English proficiency, leveraging on IT solutions to replace labor, and high turnover trend may result in a severe loss of hospitality talents in the long run.

Chapter Three

Chapter three will provide a suite of viable solutions to assist hotel operators in overcoming labor shortages caused by inflated job demands led by negative hotel image, talents being poached, locals avoiding labor-intensive jobs, ageing workforce, and low satisfaction level for hospitality jobs. On a national level, hospitality organization working with external agencies such as the government and institutes to resolve labor shortage. On an organization level, hospitality professionals are recommended to work the provision of incentives, create career path, cross-trainings as well as introducing WSQ training programs, re-creating jobs and design meaningful careers for hospitality professionals.

The negative image portrayed by the hotel industry can be reversed by collaborating with government and trade bodies such as institutes to enhance prospects of hospitality careers and attract talents (Yue, 2022). With talents being poached, managers should adopt hiring practices that provide incentives, create career path and cross-trainings (Ong, 2021). As for locals avoiding labor-intensive jobs that leads to mass hiring of foreigners, employers could make it mandatory for foreign workers to take up WSQ training programs that improve language proficiencies and uplift service standards (Ministry of Manpower, 2010). Additionally, employers could re-design jobs to help senior workers work more effectively and extend their tenure as the industry grapples with an ageing workforce (Tan, 2018). Lastly, organizations could design meaningful careers that aim to increase job satisfaction amongst employees (Menon, 2021).

Solution: Working with External Agencies - Government

To feed skilled manpower into the burgeoning hotel industry and raise the level of competency among employees, hotels should collaborate with external agencies including the government and institutes. Working with government bodies allow hotel operators to leverage on future manning blueprints and labor plans developed for the nation to minimize the manpower gap (Singapore Tourism Board, 2015).

Sectoral Manpower Plan (SMP): Equip Manpower with Capabilities

To supplement manpower with specialized capabilities, a Sectoral Manpower Plan (SMP) was launched in 2015 by Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) and STB. According to Lionel Yeo, the Chief Executive of STB, it is a blueprint that essentially attract and retain talents to support industry's transformative manning growth (Singapore Tourism Board, 2015). This plan raises workers' competencies through education and training to qualify them for occupations in the hotels (Koh, 2015).

Hotel SMP comprises of several initiatives that target at easing manpower crunch in a holistic manner; it includes a) enhancing internship experience by granting monetary allowances for prospective students, b) providing SkillsFuture Earn and Learn Programme to develop graduates' skill sets, c) offering SkillsFuture Leadership Development Initiative to customise HR trainings to develop hotelier's capabilities and d) giving \$5000 SkillsFuture Study Awards to mid-career professionals to join the industry (Singapore Tourism Board, 2015). These initiatives can effectively help hotel employees to deepen their skills to take on significant leadership roles within the organization and bring up the service standards within the industry, assist hiring managers to retain existing employees and widen their search for potential talent from other

industries and institutions (Koh, 2015). Henceforth, hotel's hiring team can tap on these additional government initiatives to revolutionize internal hiring and retention strategies that eases labor shortage within the organization.

Singapore Skills Framework: Galvanizing Interest and Rebuilding Hotel's Image

Collaborating with the government also aids the industry to revamp its image at a macro-level and hiring managers to find suitable candidates for unfilled vacancies. Under the Singapore Skills Framework, tourism authorities encourage hotel players to partner with them on marketing campaigns to galvanize views on the career development and supply of good jobs in the hospitality sector (Singapore Tourism Board, 2019). STB launched a series of campaigns or roadshows to rebuild hotel image. One renowned campaign, Tourism: A Journey of Discovery, was introduced to enhance the positive image and attractiveness of tourism and hospitality careers (Singapore Tourism Board, n.d.). This solution aims to draw potential talents with the right skills to the industry by revitalizing its image. Participating in campaigns/roadshows will become one of the effective measures to re-build people's perceptions of the hotel industry and motivate qualified employees in joining the industry to the tight manpower situation.

Solution: Working with External Agencies - Institutes

According to Minister for Education – Mr. Chan Chun Seng, strengthening the nexus between institutes and hospitality industry will aid in developing a well-skilled talent pool to meet the demands of increasingly fast-evolving work scopes and facilitate closing the present manpower gap (Ministry of Education, 2022).

Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne (EHL): New Degrees to Train Hospitality Professionals

One of the world's renowned hotel institutes, Ecole Hoteliere de Lausanne (EHL) has set up its first hospitality business campus out of Switzerland to meet the burgeoning demand for hospitality professionals in Asia. EHL Singapore's campus is established in 2021 and it will provide a recognized degree in the field of hospitality akin to the international degree in Lausanne campus (Stewart, 2021). Students will benefit from an international curriculum quality, content, and recognition of their degree which prepare students for professionalism in the industry. Advanced tertiary programs shall also equip students with technical and theoretical skills to manage complex demands from guests and thus helping to uplift service standards (Goh & King, 2019).

During the first batch intake, more than 200 students from over 30 nationalities have enrolled in the degree courses at EHL Singapore. They will be joining the network of alumni comprising more than 30,000 professionals across 150 countries, including 150 individuals living in Singapore upon the completion of their course (Aggarwal, 2022). The hospitality institute also pledges to host at least two career fairs every year to match these young graduates, students, and experienced alumni to potential employers (Stewart, 2021). Hotel professionals can utilize this channel to find qualified manpower with right competencies and potentially easing the tight manpower situation within their organizations.

Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs): Scholarship program to groom talents

Six Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) including Temasek Polytechnic, Ngee Ann Polytechnic Nanyang Polytechnic, Singapore Polytechnic, Republic Polytechnic, and the Singapore Institute of Technology in Singapore will collaborate with industry players such as

Marina Bay Sands (MBS) to help students pursue scholarships program in tourism or hospitality-related courses of study. MBS has established a bond-free scholarship program costing S\$1.4 million to develop a pipeline of new talent for the hotel industry in the country through one of its engagement programs (Cision, 2022). This program aims to accelerate the growth of local hospitality professionals to manage the strong projected growth for tourism in the next few years. It will commence in 2023 as the management aspires to attract the region's top talents to embark their careers in the hotel industry through this scheme.

The Sands Hospitality Scholarship Program will benefit more than 100 Singaporean student and help retain talents in the industry as it aspires to fulfil a longstanding commitment to support Singapore's tourism and economic goals (Lee, 2022). This program will also narrow the manpower gap specifically effective in filling up the managerial positions which are in high demand next to low-skilled job positions. Henceforth, hotels should adopt similar strategy by working with educational institutions or developing a scholarship program that shall equip the hotel workforce with trained service-personnel of necessary capabilities to provide quality services and ensure service competitiveness of the industry in the long run

Solution: Provide Incentives, Create Career Path and Cross-Trainings

Another feasible solution to ease labor crunch is for hotel establishments to look into the provision of incentives, create career path and cross-trainings (Ong, 2021).

Local hotel workers do not seem to be enticed by a hike in wages as other industries are offering more lucrative salaries (Cheng, 2022). To retain or attract talents, hotel properties could offer incentives along with attractive pay. For example, Accors International has implemented an employee incentive program that includes attractive rates on accommodation, dining and

recreation experiences at any properties within its group (McPherson, 2022). This measure may help in the retention of outstanding performers who are seeking more than salary gains.

When employees are unable to visualize their career paths with an organization, they form higher propensities to leave the employer (Reilly, 2018). By building attractive and visual career pathways within the hotel establishment, outstanding hoteliers see employment as a professional development opportunity with potential for advancement (Goh & Okumus, 2020). This will satisfy their intrinsic need for self-progress within the organization, hence not easily enticed by other job offers. For example, Toga Hotels under Far East Hospitality Group in Singapore provides employees leadership program such “Hotel future leaders’ course” to advance their careers within the organization (TFE Hotels, n.d.). Past studies reported that meaningful career planning will favorably result in long-term job engagement and career trajectory for employees (McGuire et. al, 2017).

Cross-training across departments or properties under the same hotel chain are also effective in retaining talents to fill in the managerial roles because it aids employees who seek for career development opportunities (Hotel Business, 2018). One good example includes the Early Career program implemented by Intercontinental Hotels Group which lists all job vacancies across the hotels under the same chain, and employees could apply for interested positions (Intercontinental Hotels Group, n.d.). Internal candidates are given priority consideration as they are given opportunities to be trained in a different job function for up to five working days per calendar year which allows staffs to upgrade their skills for versatility in career development (Human Resources Online, 2018). This initiative could help to secure local hotel players and minimize the leakage of talented staffs.

Solution: WSQ Training Programs

With relaxation of border restrictions, Singapore's total employment spiked by 42,000 and 85% increase came from non-residents (Bala, 2022). The tourism industry is permitted by authorities to hire more foreign workers to alleviate the pressing issue of manpower shortage within the nation (Leow, 2022). While it relieves labor shortage from lower-skilled occupational group, the service standard provided by foreign workers remains a concern (Choo, 2022).

To address this issue, the Workforce Singapore (WSG) coordinates the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) training program comprising of the "Workplace Literacy" (WPL) which helps to improve foreign workers' language proficiency (Ministry of Manpower, 2010). The Ministry has appointed WSG to administer English language proficiency tests to foreign hotel workers. In addition, there are programs promote employees' upskilling and encouraging them to take on higher value-added roles (Workforce Singapore, 2021). By implementing these programs and proficiency tests in Singapore, Singapore looks to improve the quality of the foreign workforce, increase productivity levels and overall service standards.

Solution: Re-Design Jobs

Re-designing jobs help hotel professionals to improve the working environment and retain mature workers as well as opening labor-intensive jobs to them (Tan, 2018). For instance, Grand Hyatt Singapore taps robots for smarter F&B service (Frontier Enterprise, 2022). With the help of a robot, older workers were able to transport used operating equipment to back-of-house stewarding areas easily.

Another example from Capri by Fraser, China Square (Singapore Hotel Association, 2020); Using RFID technology, the hotel introduces a uniform and linen tracking system that

helps housekeeping employees reduce their manual time and effort spent tracking linen counts, encouraging them to focus on more important tasks. Leveraging on technology that streamline processes will enable mature workers to perform strenuous tasks with minimal effort and achieve operational efficiency (Tan, 2018).

Solution: Create Meaningful Careers to Enhance Job Satisfaction

Creating meaningful careers by incorporating motivating factors will help employees to develop a sense of job satisfaction (Dogonyaro, 2021). Job satisfaction aid companies in achieving strong organizational attachment and increase worker's intention to remain within an organization (Kong et al., 2018). Studies have revealed that meaningful work brings more valence than job rewards as employees strive to fulfil a need for self-actualization and growth under the Maslow's hierarchy (Tan et al., 2019). However, it has been challenging for scholars to design a holistic instrument to allow different individuals to express their understanding of meaningful work as every individual defines meaning in a different manner (Steger, 2017). Relatedly, Table 1 illustrates the different definitions of meaningful work from various authors.

Table 1
Definitions of Meaningful Work

Author(s)	Definition(s)
Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012)	"There are four dimensions of meaningful work; These are developing the inner self, unity with others, service to others, and expressing full potential" (p. 660)
Schnell, Höge, & Pollet (2013)	"Fulfilling, significant, directed, coherent with life goals, and contributing to a sense of belonging" (p. 548)

May et al. (2014)	"Meaningful work design is defined as involving physical welfare, complex work that provides opportunities for growth and self-expression, emotional engagement, and financial security" (p. 652)
Asik-Dizdar and Esen (2016)	"The meaning of work can be identified as positive associations between work individuals engage in and the rewarding outcomes they receive such as happiness, efficacy, satisfaction, among others" (p. 5)

A common trait amongst these definitions will be the social requirements; Positive workplace relationships have been identified to be significant for meaningful work (Bailey et al., 2019). Job satisfaction is influenced by the quality of interpersonal relationships with leaders and co-workers (Danganan, 2019). Fun activities could help to foster cohesive interpersonal relationships amongst employees (Becker & Tews, 2016).

It has also discovered that one of the main job satisfiers include working in a pleasant environment based on 155 academical research released between 1920 and 1954 (Herzberg, 1959). To create a pleasant work environment, emphasizing the fun aspect of working in a hospitality firm is critical in contributing to organizational commitment (Becker & Tews, 2016). A meta-analysis of 143 hospitality research studies revealed that 10% of surveyed employees prioritized the importance of a fun workplace as a determinant of satisfaction (Kong, Jiang, Chan & Zhou, 2018). A fun workplace can be measured by various types of fun activities which include the sharing of food at work, celebrations of work achievements, social gathering, and holiday gift exchanges (Becker & Tews, 2016). Creating a positive environment that develops work meaningfulness will motivate employees to go beyond their core job responsibilities and increase intentions to stay within the organization in the long run.

Limitations

One main limitation that researchers must cogitate includes limiting the literature study within English publications and forgoing publications in other languages, hence it may produce divergent outcomes. The study has also only considered peer-reviewed journal articles, news and authorities reports due to the limited literature research that has been done in Asia. Future researchers may use sources from other countries to cover a more holistic scope of study

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are five factors causing the manpower gap; the negative image of hotel industry, talents being poached result in the insufficient manpower in hotel managerial positions, locals shunning labor-intensive jobs, ageing workforce widens manpower gap in the lower-skilled occupational positions, and low job satisfaction that results in jobs turnover. Impacts of the manpower crunch have also been identified and the severity of the issue has been studied.

Adopting multi-prong measures can be highly useful and viable to deal with the challenge in labor shortages. Hotels can attempt working with external agencies including government and institutions to equip their organizations with qualified and skilled workers. The hospitality industry can also create career paths and cross-trainings to retain talents. Hospitality managers should also make WSQ training program mandatory for foreign workers to improve the language proficiency. In addition, the industry should devise job re-creation to assist mature workers in managing their work effectively. Lastly, it is imperative for employers to create meaningful jobs can also retain employees by increasing their satisfaction towards their jobs in the long run.

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