

The Great Resignation and Intrapreneurship as a Strategy to Attract and Retain Staff in Services

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Abstract: Many employees from the Millennials and Gen Z cohorts are abandoning the hotel industry after COVID-19. The dissatisfaction of hotel workers with their working conditions has accelerated the Great Resignation, a term used to refer to the higher-than-normal quit rate in an industry. Consequently, the number of unfilled jobs is high, and attraction and retention have become a strategic concern for the hotel industry. Considering that Millennials and Gen Z are entrepreneurial-oriented, in this paper, we study how intrapreneurship, an approach that encourages employees to develop innovative ideas and solutions within a company, is one of the ways hotel companies attract qualified people. The study is qualitative, and data was collected through the recruitment sites of the leading hotel companies worldwide since these websites provide distinct information to potential job candidates beyond the available job descriptions. The hotel industry is highly competitive, with several brands, each with unique characteristics. However, they depend on their employees to materialise their brand's promises. To ensure personal-organisational fit, companies should give the right signals when presenting to potential candidates so that they may decide when receiving and interpreting these signals if they fit the organisation and are aligned with what that company offers and demands. Findings enhance our comprehension of the use by large hotel companies of employees' preference for behaving intrapreneurially as a strategy to attract and retain qualified staff. Results may also guide human resources practices in hotel companies and other service industries that seek to attract and retain talented professionals in an intensely competitive market. In addition, the results may serve as a basis for future studies on intrapreneurship in service companies. In an era when service companies struggle to attract and retain workers, this paper highlights how intrapreneurship may be a solution with a double benefit – staff attraction/retention and innovation. Although the study focuses on hospitality, the contribution is relevant to most services.

Keywords: Intrapreneurship, Intrapreneurial behaviour, Human resources, Attraction and retention, Hotel, Services

1. Introduction

In today's dynamic labour market, new workplace relationships have emerged, challenging traditional conceptions and expectations of work. 'The Great Resignation' was the term used to refer to the higher-than-normal quit rate among American workers since 2021 (Cook, 2021). This trend also reaches many Western European countries (YPulse, 2021), significantly affecting tourism and hospitality (Liu-Lastres, Wen and Huang, 2023). Millennials, Gen Z and female workers in the wake of COVID-19 are abandoning the industry (Croes, Semard and Rivera, 2021). Consequently, the number of unfilled jobs is high, and as the hospitality industry is recovering and taking advantage of the significant growth in demand, attraction and retention have become a strategic concern.

Several studies indicate that hotel employees often face precarious working conditions, including low income and long, irregular shifts (e.g., Karatepe et al., 2014). According to Liu-Lastres, Wen and Huang (2023), the dissatisfaction of hotel workers with their working conditions has accelerated the Great Resignation. The authors suggest how practitioners may deal with these workforce challenges, one of which is that "*Recruitment advertisements should highlight the career path and skillsets that potential employees can gain from the role rather than just listing job responsibilities and financial incentives. (...) employers can briefly describe the opportunities and challenges those potential employees can learn from the job...*" (Liu-Lastres, Wen and Huang, 2023, p. 243).

Considering that Millennials and Gen Z are entrepreneurial-oriented (Dreyer and Stojanová, 2023), we argue that one of the ways hotel companies may attract qualified people is through intrapreneurship. Intrapreneurship is an approach that encourages employees to develop innovative ideas and solutions within a company. Intrapreneurs act as entrepreneurs within the organisation, testing new ideas, experimenting with new processes and projects, and helping the company adapt and grow. This behaviour can particularly benefit service companies (Calisto and Sarkar, 2017a), which must adapt quickly to market changes and customer needs and where employees usually have a strategic role by directly interacting with customers.

This qualitative study aims to analyse the use of intrapreneurship by large hotel companies to attract and retain staff in an era when these companies struggle to do that, especially in countries where the consequences of the so-called Great Resignation are significant. For this purpose, data collected through the recruitment websites of

the leading hotel companies will be used. On recruitment websites, companies provide distinct information to potential job candidates that go beyond the available job descriptions (Baum and Kabst, 2014), presenting their values (Behrend, Baker and Thompson, 2009), vision, mission, internal environment, and culture (Cascio and Graham, 2016). From these websites, the intrapreneurial skills valued by companies were identified. The hotel companies analysed were selected based on their size at the global level.

Findings enhance our comprehension of the use by large hotel companies of employees' preference for behaving intrapreneurially as a strategy to attract and retain qualified staff. Results may also guide human resources practices in hotel companies and other service industries that seek to attract and retain talented staff in a highly competitive market. In addition, the results may serve as a basis for future studies on intrapreneurship in service companies.

In an era when service companies struggle to attract and retain workers, this paper highlights how intrapreneurship may be a solution with a double benefit – staff attraction/retention and innovation. Although the study focuses on hospitality, the contribution is relevant to most services.

Sections 2 and 3 present a literature review on attracting and retaining employees and intrapreneurship and human resources practices. In section 4, the methodology is presented. Section 5 addresses the results and their discussion. Section 6 presents the conclusions of the paper.

2. Attraction and Retention Of Employees – the Relevance Of Signalling the Person-Organisation fit

According to the resource-based view, intangible resources of high value hold the most significant potential for fostering a competitive edge (Barney, 2001), which has given support to the idea that people are strategically crucial to the company's success and that their attributes (including education, experience, and skills) affect organisational outcomes (Van Esch, Wei and Chiang, 2018). Hotels rely on their employees to create competitive advantages by providing exceptional customer service and identifying opportunities for improvement. Since the product of these organisations is the service experience, employees play a fundamental role in the quality of service and, consequently, in customer loyalty and satisfaction (Baum, 2015). Therefore, human resource management practices are pertinent from a strategic management standpoint due to their significant influence on organisational outcomes by shaping employee behaviours and attitudes (Wood and Menezes 1998).

The hotel industry is highly competitive, with several brands, each with unique characteristics. However, hotel companies all share a common element: the dependence on their employees to materialise the hotel brand's promises (Buil, Martínez and Matute, 2016). If employees do not align completely with the brand's values, customers might perceive employee service as unauthentic (Sirrianni et al., 2013), negatively affecting brand image and reputation (Russell and Brannan, 2016).

In this context, one of the aims of human resource practices is to achieve person-organisation fit – i.e., the compatibility between an employee and a company (Kristof, 1996).

Person-organisation fit (P-O fit) also plays a role in attracting and retaining talent in the hospitality industry. Job seekers are more likely to apply for positions that align with their expectations, contributing to the efficiency of the recruitment and selection process. Furthermore, a strong fit between frontline employees and organisational values enhances dedication, emotional engagement, and vigour, ultimately improving employee retention and performance. Therefore, more than ensuring service quality (Buil, Martínez and Matute, 2016), the match between employer and employee also positively influences employee retention (De Cooman et al., 2009).

According to the signalling theory (Spence, 1973), individuals and organisations are constantly sending and receiving signals, namely verbal. These signals help receivers reduce their knowledge gap about the signaller, leading individuals and organisations to make better-informed decisions. The signalling theory provides a valuable framework for studying companies' communications regarding recruitment (Connelly et al., 2011).

To ensure the P-O fit, firms should give the right signals when presenting to potential candidates (Connelly et al., 2011) so that potential candidates may decide when receiving and interpreting these signals, if they fit the organisation and if they are aligned with what that company offers and demands from employees (Elving et al., 2013). Job candidates are attracted to employers depending on what they believe will be provided (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004) and avoid applying for jobs not in line with their desires (De Cooman et al., 2009).

The match between the organisation's values and the employees also increases employee retention (De Cooman et al., 2009), increasing employees' dedication, emotional engagement, and vigour (Buil, Martínez and Matute, 2016). Therefore, companies should invest in their websites (Cascio and Graham, 2016) to differentiate as employers (Elving et al., 2013), and the human resources department needs to communicate the firm's employment experience so that potential candidates may evaluate if they fit in the firm while retaining current employees (Coaley, 2021).

3. Intrapreneurial Behaviour and Human Resource Practices

The most successful firms learn continuously and react rapidly, increasing their capacity to generate innovation. One of the ways for firms to achieve that is through entrepreneurial actions from within, which is more a question of culture and employee behaviour than formal research and development processes (Burgelman, 1983). Employees who exhibit autonomous strategic behaviour are commonly referred to as intrapreneurs. These employees often take the initiative to realise their ideas without managerial stimulus, which Sundbo (1996) calls 'free entrepreneurship'. Some of those ideas might receive formal approval and even integrate the business concept.

Thus, intrapreneurial behaviour (IB) is a discretionary extra-role behaviour from employees to benefit the organisation. An extra-role behaviour differs from in-role performance, which is related to an employee's expected job duties. Extra-role behaviours do not appear in an employee's job description and contribute to the organisation's or its members' well-being. Therefore, intrapreneurs are "employees who proactively engage in actions outside their usual job description with the intention to innovate" (Calisto and Sarkar, 2017b, p. 46). IB may translate into a generalised behaviour across the organisation, a form of 'collective entrepreneurship', according to Ribeiro-Soriano and Urbano (2009).

Intrapreneurs are similar to independent entrepreneurs as far as the activities they develop. However, intrapreneurial behaviour belongs to the domain of 'employee behaviour' since it occurs within an organisational context, facing limitations and opportunities for support from that context. One can find human resources management practices as one of the determinants of intrapreneurial behaviour. These practices may create a supportive climate (Ferris et al., 1998) and shape employee behaviour and attitudes (Whitener, 2001). According to the Job Demand-Resources theory (JD-R) (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014), employees thrive in contexts characterised by demanding jobs (i.e., challenges) as long as they have high job or personal resources available, thus reaching personal and organisational goals and fostering work engagement and increased performance (Bakker et al., 2014). The JD-R theory also postulates that there is a reinforcing cycle of motivation (Bakker and Demerouti, 2014), which may explain why engaging in IB leads to employees' personal growth in self-efficacy, optimism, and resilience (Gawke, Gorgievski and Bakker, 2017), consequently leading to higher IB. When an employee successfully implements an innovative idea, they will feel more efficacious and expect similar IB results in the future (Marvel et al., 2007), contributing to employee retention.

4. Methodology

This study was based on online digital organisational documents (Ventresca and Mohr, 2002) from hotel chains regarding their search for entrepreneurial-oriented candidates. The collected data came from the information posted on the firms' recruiting websites.

Firstly, the hotel companies in the sample were obtained based on a purposive method. Due to the large number of hotel chains globally, for practical reasons, only the ten largest chains globally were selected for this study, considering the number of hotels in the chain. Because large international hotel chains operate in many different contexts, they offer an opportunity to have a global perspective. Table 1 shows the hotel chains considered in this study, and Table 2 presents the URLs to the recruitment websites of these hotel chains.

The recruitment websites were analysed to find words and expressions that suggested that these chains signalled that they searched for candidates with attitudes and behaviours usual in intrapreneurs and offered a culture to which entrepreneurial-oriented candidates would be attracted. The search was restricted to the recruitment websites of these companies, usually identified with the word 'job' or 'career' in the URL. Every time that following a link the website changed to another part of the corporation's website, the search stopped.

Table 1: TOP-10 Hotel Chains, by no. of hotels (2022)

Rank	Chain	No. hotels	Countries	No. rooms
1 st	Wyndham Hotels & Resorts	~ 9 300	75	~ 830 000
2 nd	Marriott International	~ 7 500	131	~ 1 400 000
3 rd	Choice Hotels International	~ 7 100	41	~ 600 000
4 th	Hilton Worldwide Holdings	~ 6 200	118	~ 980 000
5 th	IHG (InterContinental Hotels Group)	~ 5 700	100	~ 880 000
6 th	Accor	~ 4 800	100	~ 700 000
7 th	Best Western Hotels & Resorts	~4 700	90	~ 400 000
8 th	G6 Hospitality	~1 500	2	~ 110 000
9 th	Red Lyon Hotels	~1 400	2	~ 90 000
10 th	Radisson Hotel Group	~1 100	115	~200 000

Source: <https://www.tbsnews.net/features/explorer/10-biggest-hotel-chains-world-303262> and <https://www.alltopeverything.com/top-10-largest-hotel-chains-in-the-world/>

The search words used were based on Neessen et al. (2019). According to Neessen et al. (2019), intrapreneurs are characterised by the following behaviours: innovativeness/creativity, proactiveness, opportunity recognition/exploitation, risk-taking /tolerance for failure, and networking. However, during the search process, other behaviours that have been associated with intrapreneurs in the literature have been found, such as leadership (Mohedano-Suanes and Benítez, 2018), initiative (Timmons and Spinelli, 2004), communication skills (Farrington, Louw and Venter, 2012), and voice behaviour (Wennekers and De Jong, 2008).

Table 2: TOP-10 Hotel Chains' recruitment websites

Chain	URL
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts	https://careers.wyndhamhotels.com/
Marriott International	https://careers.marriott.com/en-GB/
Choice Hotels International	https://careers.choicehotels.com/
Hilton Worldwide Holdings	https://jobs.hilton.com/emea/en
IHG (InterContinental Hotels Group)	https://careers.ihg.com/en/
Accor	https://careers.accor.com/global/en
Best Western Hotels & Resorts	https://jobs.bestwestern.com/
Red Lyon Hotels / Sonesta group	https://careers.sonesta.com/us/en/home
Radisson Hotel Group	https://www.radissonhotels.com/en-us/corporate/careers

5. Findings and Discussion

Results reveal that the major hotel chains in the world signal they are looking for candidates with a propensity to behave intrapreneurially. Figure 1 shows the number of occurrences in the studied websites for each term (or similar), revealing that the top 10 hotel companies, as a whole, are looking for 11 skills usually associated with intrapreneurs. The most sought-after skills are leadership, networking, innovation, and voice. According to Mohedano-Suanes and Benítez (2018), intrapreneurs can lead and are viewed by others as leaders "not by what they say, but what they do" and "they are change agents driving innovations" (p. 117). Networking is also essential to be intrapreneurial (Razavi and Ab Aziz, 2017). Voice is a promotive behaviour that expresses constructive challenge to improve things rather than criticise (Wennekers and De Jong, 2008).

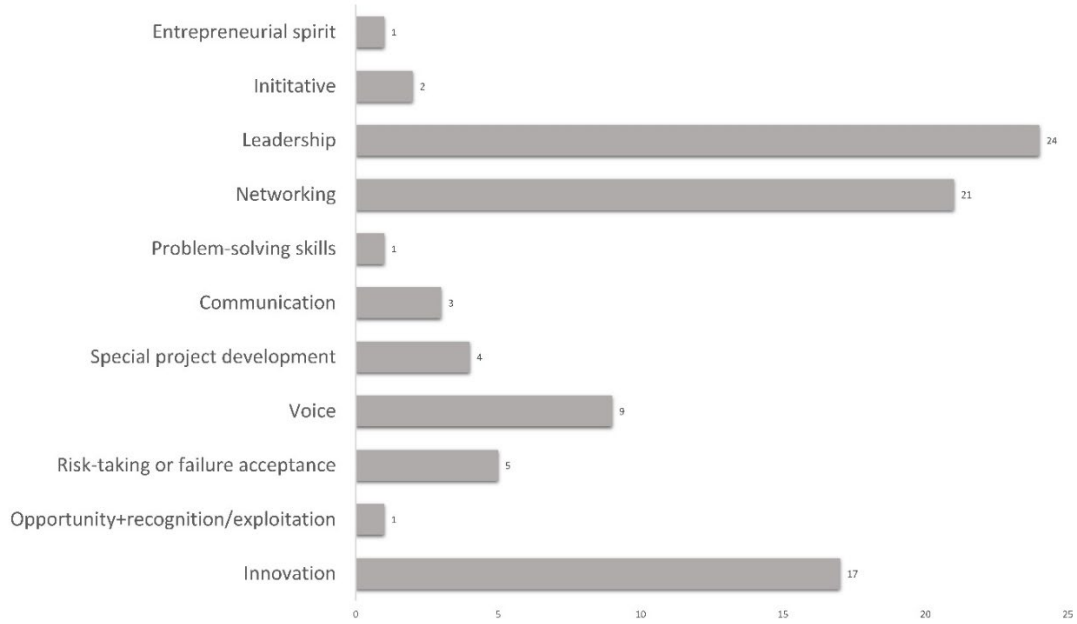


Figure 1: Number of occurrences for each term in the ten websites as a whole

There are, however, differences between companies. Wyndham Hotels & Resorts (rank 1st), Choice Hotels International (rank 3rd), Accor (rank 6th), and G6 Hospitality (rank 8th) seem more interested than other companies in attracting entrepreneurial-oriented employees (Figure 2).

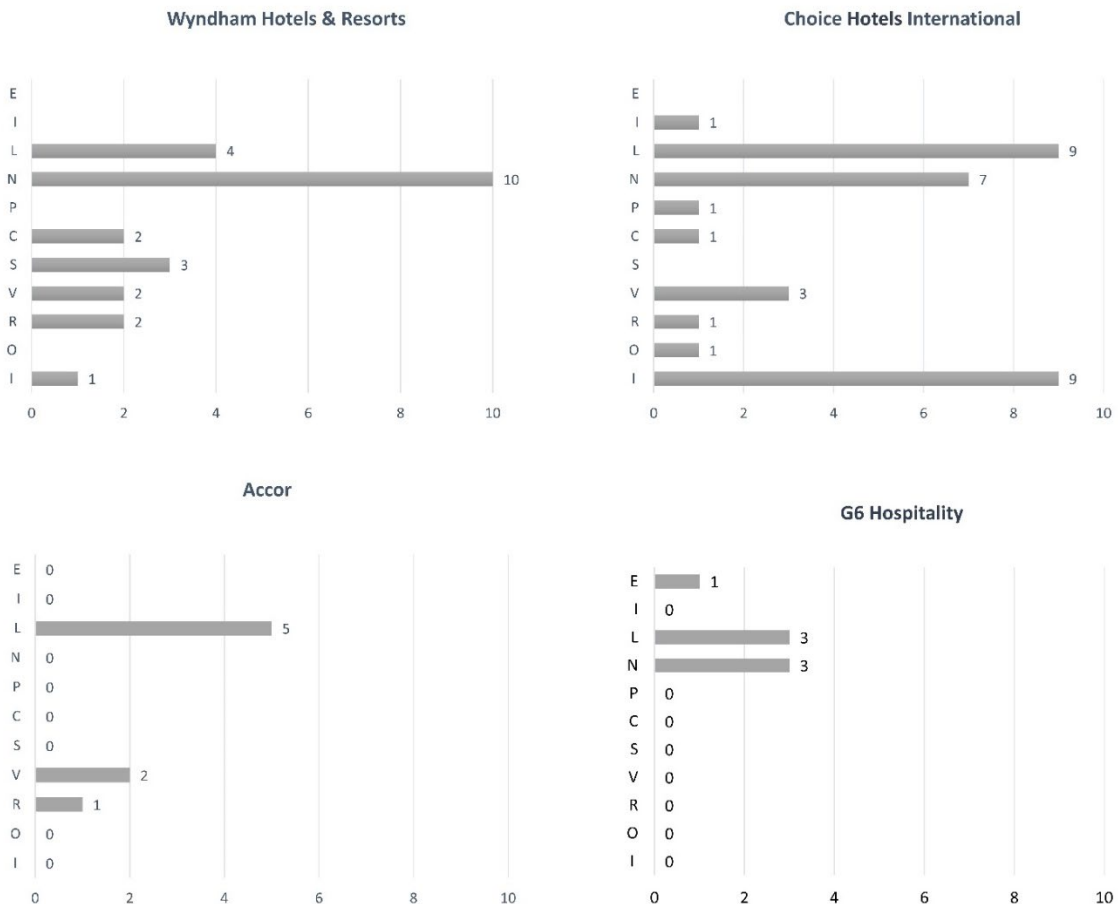


Figure 2: The top four hotel chains on intrapreneurial skills requirements

Wyndham Hotels & Resort claims that it provides "...an environment that acknowledges and leverages (...) leadership..." and that they "...invite team members to (...) take on leadership roles...". The company also offers "access" and "exposure" to "networking opportunities", and they "...invite team members to engage with (...) diverse partners".

Choice Hotels International signals that they are developing the "...next generation of (...) leaders", that they "...empower individuals to become more effective (...) leaders", and that they seek candidates that "...focuses on leading yourself and others...". They also claim that "...support individuals as they manage numerous changes" and tap "...into the diversity (..) to ideate (...) on enterprise projects or business challenges.". They even offer interns the possibility to "...work on projects that will shape the future of hospitality." Choice also provides "...a culture where (...) sharing ideas is constant" and is trying to attract candidates that "...embody a commitment to connect...people...".

Accor offers the candidates a "...strength-based leadership culture" and "leadership training" and states they "value all voices" and seek candidates that "dare to challenge the status quo!".

G6 Hospitality claims they provide "...team members [with] leadership coaching..." and "...enhance the leadership capabilities". They also seek candidates who can "connect with the community, team members and leadership."

One of the reasons why these leading hotel companies may be seeking entrepreneurial-oriented candidates is because intrapreneurial behaviour is positively related to commitment to the workplace (Holt et al., 2007), which promotes motivation and job performance (Ahmad, Wasay and Ullah, 2012), but also employee retention. Additionally, Calisto and Sarkar (2023) found that the intrapreneurial activities of T&H employees do not conflict with their in-role tasks; T&H intrapreneurs are good job performers who can adequately balance extra-role and in-role tasks. In fact, according to the authors, the higher the level of IB, the higher the in-role job performance of T&H employees.

Another reason is that the latest generations are one of the best-educated cohorts in the workplace, who are technologically savvy, prefer to work collaboratively, and believe in solving problems with specific expertise (Ferri-Reed, 2010).

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we aimed to analyse the use of intrapreneurship by large hotel companies to attract and retain staff.

Results reveal that the top 10 hotel companies, as a whole, are looking for 11 skills usually associated with intrapreneurs. Leadership, networking, innovation, and voice are the most sought-after skills. Results also show differences between companies, with four more interested than the other companies in attracting entrepreneurial-oriented employees.

This paper enriches the literature by bringing attention to the fact that leading hotel companies aim to attract and retain employees who are change agents, able to voice the need to change, mobilise their networks and lead others to achieve the needed change. Further studies are required to understand how this is generalisable to the industry for smaller chains and independent hotels.

The paper also draws the attention of hotel and human resources managers to how the company's career website plays a role in attracting suitable candidates and thus increases the chances of retaining them. Hospitality career websites serve as vital platforms connecting job seekers with employers in the industry. These websites facilitate the exploration of diverse career opportunities and allow companies to showcase their unique selling points, company culture, and growth prospects.

Organisations must effectively communicate their employment experience internally and externally to attract and retain top talent. Clear and consistent messaging regarding organisational values, career development opportunities, and work-life balance is crucial for potential candidates to evaluate their fit within the company. Additionally, effective communication aids in retaining current employees since it reinforces the organisation's commitment to their growth and well-being.

Finally, managers must consider that an entrepreneurial-oriented culture, beyond attracting younger candidates, also contributes to retention. Employees encouraged to develop innovative ideas and projects within the company may feel more engaged and motivated, leading to increased job satisfaction. In addition,

intrapreneurship can offer employees opportunities for professional growth and development, making the company a more attractive workplace.

This study did not consider other website employment data, namely specific job advertisements, which might generate additional insights. Future studies should incorporate job advertisements to highlight differences across jobs.

Since the study was based on secondary data, some aspects of recruitment practices may not have been not fully understood. Future research should interview human resource managers and other hotel managers. Additionally, the hotel chain selection was based on the number of hotels. Distinct criteria could generate different results.

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