

Job Perceptions of Generation Z Hotel Employees Towards Working in COVID-19

Quarantine Hotels: The role of Meaningful Work

Abstract

Purpose – The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a growing emergence of “quarantine hotels” that provide accommodation to guests who are mandated to self-isolate for 14 days upon entry to a country to prevent the spread of virus. Why are young hotel workers willing to endure the poor working conditions and expose themselves to dangerous COVID-19 workplace environments? Perhaps, the opportunity to participate in meaningful work is the prime motivator for hotel workers who choose to work in quarantine hotels. This study investigated the motivations hotel employees hold towards working in a dangerous hotel workplace.

Design / methodology / approach – Using personal interviews, this research explored the antecedents behind Generation Z employees’ (n=42) actual behaviour towards working in quarantine hotels through the lens of the extended TPB model (attitudes, subjective norms, perceived difficulties, and meaningful work).

Findings – Results revealed that meaningful work such as making the world safer and going beyond the call of duty was a key motivating factor behind a willingness to work in quarantine hotels. Hotel employees also viewed working in quarantine hotels as exciting but dangerous, and the support from their family nuclei was seen as a key underlying motivator.

Originality/value – This is the first paper to examine the Generation Z hotel workers’ motivations to work in quarantine hotels. A key theoretical contribution to the body of

knowledge is the extension of the TPB framework with the additional meaningful work variable.

Keywords: quarantine hotels; self-isolating guests; meaningful work; theory of planned behaviour

Introduction

The hospitality industry has a perennial stigma as a low remunerated (Baum, Mooney, Robinson & Solnet, 2020), labour intensive (Solnet, Baum, Robinson & Lockstone-Binney, 2016), limited career progression (Richardson, 2009), emotionally demanding (Goh & Lee, 2018), and long odd working hours (Robinson, Kralj, Solnet, Goh & Callan, 2016) industry. Therefore, many young workers view hospitality work as temporary job fillers during their career transition period after graduation to finding a real job. Studies have reported alarming hospitality turnover figures of 10% to 32% (Wu, Morrison, Yang, Zhou, & Cong, 2014; Lu and Adler, 2009) and up to 75% of annual attrition (Ann & Blum, 2019).

The reality is that precariousness and the turnover situation in hospitality have been exacerbated as a consequence of the impact of COVID-19 affecting global hospitality operations (Baum, Mooney, Robinson & Solnet, 2020). Travel bans, restrictions, social distancing and other pandemic control measures have silenced airports, hotels, restaurants, casinos, pubs, and leisure facilities. Without customers, hospitality companies have been forced to lay off workers in the hundreds of thousands and millions. For example, COVID-19 related employment casualties have seen 120,000 hospitality workers being laid off in Ireland (RTE, 2020), 290,000 in Australia (Johnson, 2020), and 8 million in US (Reynolds, 2020).

Innovative strategies that hotels have adopted to increase occupancy during the pandemic include catering to new segments of customers including those who are mandated to self-isolate for 14 days by governments such as Australia when returning from overseas (Australia Government, 2020) Such hotels are known as “quarantine hotels” which are obligated to provide accommodation support through State Emergency legislations such as the Western Australia Emergency Management Act (Government of Western Australia, 2020). An estimated 63,000 travellers have stayed in quarantine hotels in Australia since the pandemic, which has cost the Australian government an estimated \$118m (Ayling, 2020). Other examples

of such innovative responses are hotels which provided services, often complementary, to frontline health workers in cities such as New York and London (Hardingham-Gill, 2020).

These opportunities have forced hotels to alter their service delivery standards to become more contactless and to ensure increased hygiene control measures to help provide a safe working environment for their employees and guests. Nevertheless, working in quarantine hotels expose workers to COVID-19 transmission from quarantine guests to employees who share the same hotel building. This risky work environment has seen the spread of positive COVID-19 cases being transmitted to hotel workers from single isolated cases to multiple cases (Silva & Clure, 2020; Zimmerman & Law, 2020). In June 2020, 20 hotel employees working in a Melbourne, Victoria quarantine hotel in Australia unknowingly contracted the virus while working, which subsequently was associated with 90% of the state's second wave of COVID-19 cases (Silva & Clure, 2020).

This new norm presents a dangerous hospitality working environment for those with limited formal training in this regard and challenges the traditional meaning of work among hospitality employees. Important questions arise. Why are hotel workers willing to put their lives at risk in the line of duty? Do they perceive a special meaning in the new working environment? Is providing hospitality service to potential COVID-19 guests a form of meaningful work? Is the role of meaningful work being an important proposition that could outweigh the dangerous working environment if hotel workers find meaningfulness in providing frontline services to quarantine guests? The meaningfulness of providing service and care to guests in a pandemic environment can be juxtaposed against meaningful work by nurses to look after the sick (Beukes & Botha, 2013) or soldiers' display of courage during stressful events (Britt, Adler & Bartone, 2001). Within the limited range of hospitality studies which have examined the role of meaningful work, the consensus is that meaningful work leads to

job satisfaction (Raub & Blunschi, 2014), job engagement and organisation commitment (Jung & Yoon, 2016), which ultimately equates with lower staff turnover (Tan, Lew & Sim, 2019).

Although some previous hospitality studies have investigated meaningful work, these were restricted to understanding meaningful work within a single department such as food and beverage workers (Jung & Yoon, 2016), which may not necessarily translate across all areas of work in the hospitality sector. Second, studies (e.g. Supanti & Butcher, 2019) have attempted to understand hospitality workers' meaningful work attributes through quantitative measurement scales borrowed from other disciplines. This may not directly measure true representations of meaningful work among hospitality workers and may restrict the elicitation of the rich attitudinal data that are much needed in this area. Third, no studies have examined the role of meaningful work in relation to Generation Z workers (15-24 years of age) despite this being the largest workforce cohort (43%) in the hospitality industry (Australia Department of Employment, 2014). Approximately 30% of this age group leave the industry within 10 years (Brown, Arendt and Bosselman, 2014). Past studies have also reported younger employees find hospitality work less meaningful and less attractive for them to remain within in the hotel industry as compared to older workers (Park & Gursoy, 2012). Fourth, there is a paucity of hospitality workforce-related research, where only 7.1% (458 out of 6449) of journal articles published in the top eight hospitality and tourism journals are workforce related, and less than 1% (40 out of 6449) focus on young workers (Baum, Kralj, Robinson & Solnet, 2016). Lastly, younger hospitality employees have been reported to be more vulnerable and willing to take the risk of going to work in COVID-19 environments for fear of losing their jobs and willing to do whatever it takes to prove loyalty and dedication to their bosses (Purtill, 2020).

Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the role of meaningful work and motivations among Generation Z hotel workers in relation towards their work in quarantine hotels. This paper is organised as follows. Following this introduction, we provide a focused

review of the key literature which has informed our research, on the impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry, quarantine hotels, our theoretical framework of the Theory of Planned Behaviour and meaningful work, from which our research questions have been extrapolated. This is followed by the methodology adopted in this study, the findings and subsequent discussion from which conclusions are drawn.

Literature Review

Impact of COVID-19 on the hospitality industry

COVID-19 has been declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation (2020) claiming the lives of more than one million casualties and infecting more than 25 million individuals. Due to the lack of customers in a lockdown restricted economy, hospitality businesses suffered huge financial losses seeing hotels shutting down operations and laying off workers. For example, during the pandemic, hotel groups such as ACCOR closed 33% (4500 hotels) of their hotels in April 2020, and laid off 1000 employees in August 2020 (Thiessen, 2020). Other hotel groups have also implemented pandemic-related job cuts such as Hyatt (1300 employees; Rackl, 2020) and Hilton (2,100 employees; Prang & Karmin, 2020). This sees a staggering 100.8 million global jobs lost in the travel and tourism industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic with Asia Pacific losing the most with 63.4 million jobs (Lock, 2020).

Quarantine hotels and the new normal working conditions

In a bid to confine and isolate returning overseas travellers from potentially spreading COVID-19, Australian governments and health authorities introduced a compulsory 14-day self-isolation policy (Australia Government, 2020). Under the State Emergency legislations such as the Western Australia Emergency Management Act (Government of Western Australia, 2020), hotels are obligated to operate as quarantine hotels.

The pandemic has challenged the traditional nature of hospitality work mainly in the delivery of high-quality service through personal and excellent service encounters with guests. Thus, the customer-centric focus can be emotionally demanding for workers in order to achieve a meaningful connection with their customers (Jung & Yoon, 2014) to aim for customer satisfaction. Past studies have reported the importance of achieving customer satisfaction as an intrinsic motivator that gives hotel workers meaning in their jobs (Chen, Yen & Tsai, 2014).

However, working in quarantine hotels has altered the service delivery standards to become more contactless and removed from face-to-face customer interactions (Jiang & Wen, 2020). This has increased the pace of service automation and customer experience through robotics and artificial intelligence (Tussyadiah, 2020) in hotels such as Sofitel Sydney Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dennis, 2020). Given the role of social distancing and high customer contact encounters such as front desk check-ins, the use of technology such as keyless and self-check in facilities are used to protect frontline employees and hotel guests. Concomitantly, increased cleanliness and hygiene will be key attributes of successful hotel operations in a COVID-19 tormented work environment (Jiang & Wen, 2020). In fact, past studies have reported that customers do revisit a hotel if it is clean and are willing to pay higher room rates for a cleaner room with enhanced disinfection (Zemke, Neal, Shoemaker & Kirsch, 2015). To further protect employees and customers, hospitality providers have used hand gloves, facial masks and plexiglass to serve as physical barriers preventing the transmission of COVID-19, which has further distanced the interactive nature of hospitality.

This new risky work environment has seen the spread of positive COVID-19 cases being transmitted to hotel workers from single isolated cases to multiple cases (Silva & Clure, 2020; Zimmerman & Law, 2020). Since the emergence of quarantine hotels in early 2020, there has been reported cases of hotel workers who have contracted COVID-19 while working at quarantine hotels around the world. For example, isolated cases were reported at a Mantra hotel

in Victoria (Kolovos, 2020), the Crossroads Hotel in Sydney (Thomas, 2020), and the Pan Pacific hotel in Perth (Zimmerman and Law, 2020). There were also clusters of multiple hotel workers who tested positive for COVID-19 in India (Taj Mahal Palace Hotel) with 6 positive cases (Chaturvedi, 2020), and a W Hotel in America with 50 positive cases (Grover & Davis, 2020). To highlight the severity of the problem, 20 hotel employees working in a Melbourne quarantine hotel in Australia unknowingly contracted the virus while working, which exacerbated the community transmissions and led to 90% of the Victoria Australia's second wave of COVID-19 (Silva & Clure, 2020).

Theoretical framework: Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

With the purpose to understand frontline employees' motivations to work in quarantine hotels, this study is anchored on the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) as the theoretical structure as its underpinning. Under the TPB structure, behavioural intention / behaviour is steered by attitudes; subjective norms; and perceived behavioural control. Attitude is derived from behavioural beliefs (positive and negative) towards a respective behaviour. Subjective norms is a form of peer pressure to seek the approval and comply with the expectations of the important social groups. Perceived behavioural control reveals the perceived amount of effort in performance of a particular behaviour under volitional control. This can be seen as difficulties hindering actual behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Utilising an established theoretical framework is often lacking in workforce studies in hospitality, which presents an unnecessary restriction in terms of omitting the identification of important variables (Goh & Lee, 2018). Firstly, previous studies have reported various attitudes that can be associated with working in hotels such as exciting, emotionally draining (Goh & Lee, 2018) and interesting (Richardson, 2009). With regards to subjective norms, family (Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya & Solnet, 2021) and industry managers (Hertzman, Moreo & Wiener, 2015) have been mentioned as important

reference groups that can influence their hotel career trajectory. Finally, perceived difficulties may impede individuals from working in quarantine hotels such as health reasons. These barriers must be seen alongside potential difficulties that deter people from working in hotels such as low remuneration, antisocial working hours, and hard labour (Goh & Lee, 2018; Robinson et al., 2016).

Extending the TPB model

As can be seen, the TPB can be used and has the potential to understand why hotel employees chose to work in quarantine hotels. Although the TPB model has been successful in predicting various behaviours, researchers have been adhering to the call for future research to extend the TPB model beyond the three independent variables to increase the model efficacy (Ajzen, 2005). For example, the inclusion of additional background variables in TPB studies such as anticipated emotions (Londono, Davies & Alms, 2017) have provided additional insights towards intentions and behaviours (Armitage & Conner, 2001). It is vital to note that not all additional TPB variables add value to the overall model efficacy. Therefore, certain new variables simply act as background factors such as demographics and do not provide any significant predictive variance (Ajzen, 2015, 2005). Therefore, this study explores the role of meaningful work as a potential useful additional TPB variable towards working in quarantine hotels.

Meaningful work

The notion of meaningful work has been widely recognised in organisational workplace research (Lysova, Allan, Dik, Duffy & Steger, 2019) and defined as “*work experienced as particularly significant and holding more meaning for individuals*” (Rosso, Dekas & Wrzesniewski, 2010, p. 95) that is personally significant and worthwhile. There are

various positive workplace associations of meaningful work such as work engagement, job satisfaction, career development, and job commitment (Lysova et al., 2019). The power of meaningful work can influence employee behaviour to go above and beyond the realms of their normal duties (Shen & Benson, 2014), establish greater alignment of personal values to the organisation (Supanti & Butcher, 2019), and exhibit higher levels of citizenship behaviour (Maharaj & Schlechter, 2007). It is important to acknowledge that a majority of contemporary meaningful work studies stem from Steger, Dik & Duffy's (2012) three dimensions of meaningful work: 1) positive meaning in work that is purposeful and with personal significance; 2) meaning making through work that contributes to a broader context in life; and 3) greater good motivations that one's work is making a positive impact to the greater good.

Given the benefits, businesses have started to cultivate meaningful work to engage and retain employees (Deloitte, 2017). Surprisingly, a limited number of studies have investigated the role of meaningful work in hospitality. These studies can be divided into three groups. The first group looked at the influence of CSR (corporate social responsibilities) on fostering meaningful work among hotel employees. Both such studies (Supanti & Butcher, 2019; Raub & Blunschi, 2014) found positive relations between CSR activities in shaping employees' outlook on meaningful work and helping behaviour. The second group of studies (Jung & Yoon, 2016) examined the antecedents of meaningful work and found positive associations between meaningful work with job engagement and organizational commitment. The third group of studies investigated meaningful work differences between generational cohorts of hospitality workers. In a study comparing attitudes of Generation X and Generation Y towards meaningful work and helping behaviour, Supanti and Butcher (2019) found meaningful work to affect CSR stronger in Generation X as compared to Generation Y hotel employees. This is similar to Park and Gursoy (2012) who indicated that younger generations

of hospitality workers tend to lack the same motivation and found hospitality work less meaningful as compared to older generations.

This brings us to the question that if younger hospitality workers do not perceive hospitality work as meaningful work, they must endure poor working conditions, and expose themselves to dangerous COVID-19 environments, why do they still choose to work in quarantine hotels? Therefore, this research aims to explore the antecedents behind Generation Z employees' actual behaviour towards working in quarantine hotels through the lens of the extended TPB model (attitudes, subjective norms, perceived difficulties, and meaningful work) through four research questions.

RQ1: What are the attitudes of Generation Z hotel workers towards working in quarantine hotels?

RQ2: Who are the important reference groups that influence Generation Z hotel workers towards working in quarantine hotels?

RQ3: What are the perceived difficulties Generation Z hotel workers face when working in quarantine hotels?

RQ4: Why is working in quarantine hotels seen as meaningful work by Generation Z hotel workers?

Methodology

Background of Quarantine hotels

The term quarantine hotel refers to hotels that cater to guests self-isolating for 14 days when returning from overseas as mandated by governments such as Australia (Australia Government, 2020). The first group of quarantine passengers arrived in Australia on 29th March 2020 and were quarantined at the Swissotel in Sydney (Mayers, Thomas & Nguyen, 2020). To date, approximately 63,000 travellers have stayed in quarantine hotels in Australia (Ayling,

2020). Quarantined guests are transported directly from the airport to the hotel by government authorities and not allowed outside of their hotel room for 14 days under the strict supervision of hotel security 24/7. The hotel provides basic F&B services such as three meals per day delivered directly to the outside of each room, and reduced housekeeping cleaning frequency that may be deferred until the end of quarantine period. Hotel workers operating in quarantine hotels are provided COVID-19 compliance training (Government of Western Australia, 2020) and must adhere to strict guidelines as stipulated by the Australian government (Department of Health NSW Government).

Research Design

Given the current and exploratory nature of this research study, a qualitative approach was adopted to provide more in-depth investigation of the research phenomenon. It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic and quarantine hotel situation is a fairly new area of hospitality research so a qualitative approach will avoid the unnecessary restriction to over-rely on statistics in the early stages of development of new a topic area (Khoo-Lattimore, Mura & Yung, 2019). It is also important to note that past studies have highlighted the lack of qualitative studies in TPB hospitality and tourism research (12% - 32 out of 259 studies) and have called for future research to undertake more qualitative methods for a deeper analysis of the TPB theory (Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020).

The present study aims to elicit Generation Z hotel employees' attitudes, key reference groups, perceived difficulties and meaningful work attributes towards working in quarantine hotels. The decision to focus on Generation Z workers (15-24 years of age) is threefold. First, Generation Z is the largest hospitality workforce cohort (43%) in hospitality (Australia Department of Employment, 2014). Second, past studies have also reported younger employees find hospitality work less meaningful and have less desire to stay in the hotel industry as

compared to older workers (Park & Gursoy, 2012), which leads to a high turnover rate of approximately 30% leaving the industry within 10 years (Brown, Arendt and Bosselman, 2014). Fourth, there is a paucity of hospitality workforce related research, where less than 1% (40 out of 6449) of journal articles published in the top eight hospitality and tourism journals focused on young workers (Baum, Kralj, Robinson & Solnet, 2016). Specifically, only a handful of hospitality studies have examined the generation Z workforce (Goh & Okumus, 2020; Goh & Lee, 2018) in turnover studies. One of the reasons for this paucity is that early studies on generations in hospitality literature date back to the early 90s when Generation Y was entering the workforce (Pennington-Gray, Fridgen & Stynes, 2003). Lastly, younger hospitality employees have been reported to be more vulnerable and willing to take the risk of going to work in COVID-19 environments for fear of losing their jobs and willing to do whatever it takes to prove loyalty and dedication to their bosses (Purtill, 2020).

The attitudes variable was identified through positive and negative attitudes to measure the overall perceptions of working in quarantine hotels. The subjective norms variable measured important social groups, and perceived behavioural control measured perceived difficulties or barriers towards working in quarantine hotels. Lastly, the meaningful work variable measured the positive meaning, meaning making through work and greater good motivations respondents attributed towards working in quarantine hotels.

Research Sample

Respondents consisted of Generation Z hotel workers (born between 1995–2009) who worked in quarantine hotels in Australia between April - August 2020. Due to a lack of information and limited accessibility to hotel workers during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, a purposeful snowballing technique (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) was employed to recruit knowledge-rich respondents who could provide contemporary insights into working

in quarantine hotels in Australia. The initial sampling approach was through the researcher's industry contact with a quarantine hotel in Perth, Australia to approach potential participants for this study, with interviews conducted through telephone calls. With regards to snowball sampling, participants were asked to recommend other potential Generation Z participants within the same hotel or in other quarantine hotels. A total of 42 respondents (17 males and 25 females) agreed to participate (response rate = 52%) (See table 1 for sample profile) in the semi-structured interviews. The total sample size of 42 meets the recommended sample size ($n \geq 25$) for TPB elicitation studies (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1991). There were more female respondents as compared to male respondents. This is consistent and a reflection of the gender balance in the hospitality industry where there are more female workers (55%) as compared to male workers (45%) (Australia Department of Employment, 2014). It is important to note that majority of respondents (56%) were working in Front Office followed by Food & Beverage (26%) positions. These positions will have some contact with quarantine clients at some point of the 14 day quarantine period such as checking in or delivery of meals to rooms strictly adhering to the standards imposed by Department of Health, Western Australia for hotels providing accommodation for guests in quarantine or isolation (Department of Health, Western Australia, 2020).

Insert Table 1. Demographics Profile

Individual interviews were conducted through telephone with all respondents invited to respond through open-ended questions in order to encourage them to speak their own words and narrative structures. The interviews began with an introduction of the research purpose, instructions on the interview layout, and reassured confidentiality of the research data collected. Respondents were told that they can stop the phone interview at any point of time if

they felt uncomfortable by simply hanging up. On average, each interview lasted between 35-60 minutes. To ensure accuracy and reliability, the recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim within 48 hours.

Data Analysis

Given the exploratory lens of this study, this research study adopted a manual content analysis to systematically unpack the collected data as recommended by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). A key benefit of using manual analysis is the provision for an interpretative approach rather than a mechanical analysis when conducted through software tools and allows the researcher to be immersed in the data process (Groschl, 2005). A coding system was designed to identify, code and group the raw data using ATT coding for attitudes towards working in quarantine hotels, SN coding for important reference groups, PBC coding for perceived difficulties, and MW for meaningful work towards working in quarantine hotels. In order to ensure reliability of the coded data, the data driven codes were coded by a team of researchers to ensure inter-rater reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each of the researchers coded the data underpinned by the four independent variables of the extended theory of planned behaviour as the theoretical framework. To ensure validity, authors verified the data analysis, corrected discrepancies and discussed methods to improve the coding process, which also provided triangulation.

In order to explore the distribution of the key elicited items, a frequency analysis was performed through manual analysis to count the number of times a particular code occurred repeatedly. This technique allowed the identification of key salient beliefs of the extended TPB items, which is commonly used in past TPB studies (Goh, 2020; Goh & Jie, 2019; Goh & Kong, 2018; Goh, Nguyen & Law, 2017; Goh and Scerri, 2015). In total, 33 key items were elicited from the interviews: 10 key attitudes, six important social reference groups, eight key

difficulties, and nine meaningful work items towards working in quarantine hotels (See Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1. Extended TPB framework with meaningful work

Findings and discussion

RQ1: What are the attitudes of Generation Z hotel workers towards working in quarantine hotels?

It is important to note that Generation Z hotel workers held both positive and negative attitudes towards working in quarantine hotels (See table 2). In total, positive attitudes were mentioned 107 times, distributed across five different attitudinal categories such as it is exciting (32 counts), courageous (26), respectable (22), multitask oriented (16), and unique (11). Negative attitudinal items were recorded 109 times, across five related attitudes: dangerous (38 counts), long / odd hours (29), emotionally challenging (22), limited customer / service interactions (15) and unable to meet brand standards (5).

An interesting key finding in this study revealed several simultaneous responses expressing both positive and negative attitudes towards working in quarantine hotels. For instance, P9 who explained *“I like working in this exciting environment with new things happening everyday”*, but this respondent also provided negative attitudes stating *“Sometimes I am afraid to interact with guests and personnel at the hotel as you might contract the virus. Working in hospitality is now quite dangerous”*. Some respondents with a more realistic approach acknowledged the challenges of working in a quarantine hotel but were overall positive. For instance, P25 mentioned *“Even though I am working more hours than before and become more emotionally stressed, I am very proud of working in hospitality. My family and*

friends think highly of what I am doing". This sudden increase in hospitality professional identity is a new finding as past studies have reported the negative stigma of hospitality work as unappreciative, low status, and often not perceived as a serious career (Goh & Lee, 2018; Richardson, 2009).

Insert Table 2. Attitudes

While the traditional harsh working conditions of the hospitality industry such as long working hours remain prevalent in quarantine hotels, there are some new attitudes that have emerged from working in quarantine hotels. For example, the courageous aspects of working in hospitality where most Generation Z workers viewed their work to be in a dangerous working environment. **This can be related to armed forces combating on a battlefield or nurses working in hospitals** (Beukes & Botha, 2013; Britt et al., 2001). Another interesting finding is the negative view about limited customer interactions and not being able to provide traditional hospitality customer service. This is mainly due to hotels altering their service delivery standards to become more contactless and removed from face-to-face interactions with customers to minimise the spread of COVID-19 (Jiang & Wen, 2020). Some respondents felt that the safety measures have taken away the true meaning of hospitality and customer service. As mentioned by P.31 *"I don't see how we are providing service excellence when we do not even see the guests, leave the food outside their doors, and they check out on their own. Robots can do all of this"*. This is consistent with past studies that have emphasised the need for technology and automation as support roles but not to replace the human service encounter experience that is highly valued in hospitality service settings (Lemy, Goh & Jie, 2019).

Although Generation Z expressed negative attitudes that supported past research about working conditions in the hotel industry such as emotionally challenging and long working hours (Robinson et al., 2016), it is important to note that these attitudes are not stable and could

potentially fluctuate and transform due to the current evolving pandemic. For example, the positive attitude of excitement was also seen as a negative attitude as dangerous. One possible explanation of positive attitudes appearing concurrently with negative attitudes suggest that even with a relatively positive outlook, Generation Z maintains negative connotations about working in quarantine hotels. This finding may be linked to past studies that reported Generation Z to generally find hospitality work to be interesting / exciting but also highly mentally exhausting, which acts as a barrier to pursuing a hospitality career (Goh & Lee, 2018). This element of mental stress has been well documented in hospitality workforce research, which ultimately leads to emotional exhaustion and job turnover (Xu, Martinez, Van Hoof, Duran, Perez & Gavilanes, 2018). Another reason for the instability of attitudes could be due to the emotional and physical exhaustion from working in quarantine hotels, where employees are required to operate for longer hours, helping across multiple departments, and navigating the dangerous work environment with an expectation to be flexible and help other departments who are short of staff.

RQ2: Who are the important reference groups that influence Generation Z hotel workers towards working in quarantine hotels?

In relation to reference groups influencing Generation Z's perception towards working in quarantine hotels, family was reported as being most important (39 counts), colleagues (33), medical officers (28), industry associations (17), other quarantine hotel workers (11), and government officials (4) (See Table 3). This is similar to past studies who reported the importance of family support in encouraging the Generation Z cohort to study hospitality (Goh, Nguyen & Law, 2017) and work in hospitality (Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya & Solnet, 2021). This suggests that given the possibility of transmission of the deadly virus, the approval from

the family nucleus to work in quarantine hotels is seen as the most mentioned reference group. This is understandable as front-line service employees are concerned about contracting the virus during work bringing this home unknowingly and thus transmitting the virus to family members. As mentioned by respondent (P12) *“Initially, my wife was unhappy about my new job requirements as she felt it was very dangerous. However, after reassuring her that I will take extra safety precautions and not bring the virus home, she became supportive”*. The role of colleagues was the second most mentioned reference group. It is particularly important to have colleagues who are likeminded and have supervisors who recognise employees’ competitive demands from work and non-work, which helps employees to manage these competing demands (Crain & Stevens, 2018). For example, respondent (P22) mentioned *“My family doesn’t really like the idea of me working in quarantine hotels. We normally argue about this. However, I have a manager that understands my situation and listens to my problems and sometimes he will ask me to end my shift early so that I can spend more time with my family”*.

Insert Table 3. Subjective Norms

The present study also revealed an interesting finding that more Generation Z employees felt the importance of medical officers than that of government officials. This could be due to conflicting views and internal tensions between state and federal government such as disagreement on lifting border restrictions (Laschon, 2020), and dangerous advice by government against medical advice such as injecting bleach into the human body as a preventive measure to kill the virus (Kelland & Satter, 2020). For example, P5 mentioned *“There are so many sources who claim to be experts out there. I rely on the medical officers as they seem to be scientifically proven such as wearing face mask, gloves and hand sanitisers to prevent the spread of virus”*. Another reference group, industry associations, was perceived as important in influencing Generation Z workers to work in quarantine hotels. This elicited reference group can be seen as the voice representing hotel workers. Recent studies have

reported the important function of hotel industry associations such as the China Hospitality Association as a monitoring agent on pandemic cases to develop pandemic preventive measures for the hotel industry in China (Hao, Xiao & Chon, 2020). Another example is where the Australia Hotel Association was directed by the government to provide compulsory COVID-19 hygiene training to all hospitality workers in Western Australia to ensure COVID-19 workplace compliance (Government of Western Australia).

RQ3: What are the perceived difficulties Generation Z hotel workers face when working in quarantine hotels?

With regards to perceived difficulties, Generation Z workers perceived eight key difficulties with regards to working in quarantine hotels (See Table 4). In relation to these, Generation Z reported virus exposure / transmission (36 counts) to be the most challenging aspect relating to working in quarantine hotels, followed by dealing with confined guests (27), long working hours (24), lack of training (21), element of uncertainty (17), lack of job security (15), lack of communication updates (8), and lack of resources / manpower (7). Concerns related to Generation Z's perceived difficulties support existing perennial literature about working in hotels such as poor career progression, low pay, long working hours, and labour intensive (Goh & Lee, 2018; Robinson et al., 2016). Our results show that having to deal with confined guests as a perceived difficult, which is a consistent reminder that the hospitality business is a people industry regardless of a pandemic. This is mentioned by respondent, P8 *"I think the challenge is traditionally we normally deal with happy customers in the leisure and business market who stay at their own freewill. To some extent, quarantine guests don't want to be here especially confined to their room for 14 days"*. The stress when dealing with guests is magnified in a pandemic environment where most respondents mentioned the potential

exposure and transmission of virus as the most salient perceived challenge when working in a quarantine hotel. These findings imply the possibility of the fear of virus transmission that adds to the stress of having to deal with confined guests.

Findings of the present study also suggest that Generation Z are concerned with the lack of training regarding matters about working in quarantine hotels. For example, P11 mentioned *“There needs to be more training especially on protocols and standard operating procedures, and how to deal with positive cases”*. This can impact on their ability to perform and diminish their confidence to operate in an uncertain environment. One possible explanation is that Generation Z are relatively young and most likely have limited work experience and have not dealt with major crises such as the SARS on a global scale. This links to past studies who have reported Generation Z hotel workers to be overqualified, ambitious, afraid to deal with customer complaints, and lack real work experience (Goh & King, 2020; Goh & Lee, 2018).

RQ4: Why is working in quarantine hotels seen as meaningful work by Generation Z hotel workers?

In relation to meaningful work, there were a total of 136 counts that mentioned Generation Z workers. A total of nine meaningful work items were further clustered into the three dimensions of meaningful work as proposed by Steger et al. (2012): positive meaning – feel good about oneself (28 counts), purposeful satisfying (19), fulfilling (14), and noble (5); meaning making – hospitality passion (32), beyond the call of duty (22), inner superhero (15); and greater good – a safer world (41), and customers as patients (26). As can be seen the role of meaningful work is an important impetus that motivates Generation Z hotel workers to work in quarantine hotels and could outweigh the dangerous working COVID-19 environment. As mentioned by respondent P33 *“This job gives me fulfilment. Seeing guests leave the property*

without testing positive for COVID-19 is a good satisfying feeling". This feeling of fulfilment has also been reported in past hospitality workplace studies where researchers found Generation Z hospitality students to seek when deciding to pursue a hospitality career (Goh & Lee, 2018).

Similarly, past research has reported fulfilment at work to correlate with meaning making in meaningful work to go the extra mile (Supanti & Butcher, 2019). This was reflected in the results where majority of respondents related to their passion towards indiscriminate hospitality to provide hospitality service for all types of guests *"I have come to realise my love and passion for hospitality. It feels like my calling in life is to provide people with good service no matter what the situation"* (P32). This belief also motivates Generation Z workers to go above and beyond for the company to provide hospitality service to quarantine guests, which several respondents referred to their alter ego as a superhero going beyond the call of duty. For example, respondent P2 mentioned *"I think this job requires going above and beyond normal hotel work and helps you grow as a person and hotelier. This has been good experience to deal with further crisis"*. Another respondent, P27, mentioned that *"Working in quarantine hotel reminds me of being a superhero saving the guest and public from the virus. To some extent, we are sacrificing our lives walking on landmines during our shifts"*. This finding supports past literature who has reported the power of meaningful work to influence employee behaviour to go above and beyond the realms of their normal duties (Shen & Benson, 2014), establish greater alignment of personal values to the organisation (Supanti & Butcher, 2019), and exhibit higher levels of citizenship behaviour (Maharaj & Schlechter, 2007).

The present results also displayed the importance of greater good in meaningful work, where helping to create a safer world was the most mentioned meaningful work item (41 counts) by Generation Z workers. As mentioned by respondent, P35 *"I am only a single individual but I think my job helps to prevent the spread of virus and make the world a safer"*

place again so that we can start travelling and get back to normal conditions". This greater good outlook is highly important as it could serve as a beacon of hope for Generation Z workers to cling onto in a COVID-19 vulnerable state of recovery (Baum et al., 2020). Past research also indicated the recovery of hotels from the pandemic should go beyond the organisation and sector levels but collected efforts from all stakeholders aimed at health issues for the global citizens (Jiang & Wen, 2020). This "*we are in this together*" mentality can be a latent driver to shape Generation Z workers' mindset that working in quarantine hotels is particularly significant and seen as meaningful work that leads to work engagement, job satisfaction, career development, and job commitment (Lysova et al., 2019). These are in line with greater good motivations that one's work is making a positive impact to the greater good.

It is important to note that the present study elicited more items for meaningful work as compared to attitudes, subjective norms and perceived difficulties. This indicates that meaningful work plays an important role among Generation Z hotel workers when deciding to work in quarantine hotels. This unique finding is different from past studies who have reported younger employees to find hospitality work less motivating and meaningful (Supanti & Butcher, 2019; Park and Gursoy, 2012).

Conclusion and Implications

To the authors' knowledge, no previous study has examined the underlying motivations of hotel workers within the parameters of quarantine hotels. Therefore, this study addressed a significant urgent gap of quarantine hotels to prevent further transmission of COVID-19. In addition, this paper contributed to the paucity of studies investigating the role of meaningful work in hospitality research (Supanti & Butcher, 2019) and calls for future research into the underrepresentation of studies on young hospitality workers (Baum et al., 2016). This study targets one of the largest cohorts of hospitality workers - Generation Z, which is an important

fabric of the hospitality workforce that only a handful of studies have attempted to investigate (Goh & Okumus, 2020; Goh & Lee, 2018). This study makes a significant theoretical contribution addressing the call by Ajzen (1991) to identify potential additional TPB variables to better understand intentions and behaviours. The present study explored the role of meaningful work and has demonstrated the usefulness of meaningful work as a potential variable to understand Generation Z hotel workers' behaviour towards working in quarantine hotels.

The impetus of this exploratory study identified 10 key attitudinal factors, six important social groups, eight perceived constraints, and nine meaningful work items of Generation Z towards working in quarantine hotels. Results suggest that Generation Z hotel workers in general have pre-conceived attitudes that working in quarantine hotels is exciting, and courageous but also viewed the excitement in a virus prone dangerous environment as a perceived barrier. The role of family members must be acknowledged as they are key influencers in Generation Z's decision to work in quarantine hotels for obvious safety reasons. This research study recommends several strategies to bridge the gap between attracting and retaining Generation Z hotel workers in quarantine hotels and future pandemic hotel work environments.

First, the present study elicited several new positive attitudes towards working in quarantine hotels such as courageous and respectable. This new discovery suggests that the image of the hospitality industry has somewhat lifted in terms of professional identity to be an industry that is respected by society given the high-risk work environment with increased exposure to COVID-19. This sees a shift from the hospitality workforce as being precarious, poor working conditions, and low job status (Baum et al., 2020) to be a profession that is respected by society. Even though Generation Z still see some long-standing negatives in hotel work such as long hours and emotionally challenging, it is positive to know that there are

contexts in which they can have more pride and feel appreciated and respected by society. In order to entice Generation Z to work in quarantine hotels, recruiters should be emphasising on positive job aspects such as a career that is exciting, courageous and respectable.

In a similar vein, recruiters need to present future career prospects and long-term opportunities in a post COVID-19 environment. This is an important consideration among Generation Z when deciding on careers in hospitality (Goh & Okumus, 2020). Hotel recruiters must be mindful that the war on talent may well intensify and there will be a talent drain in hospitality due to the migration of jobs to other sectors (Baum et al., 2020) given the reduced attractiveness of hospitality jobs (Baum and Hai, 2020). Hotel companies such as ACCOR and TFE Hotel groups who have traditionally provided established career development programs such as “Future leaders program”, and “Inspire program” could benefit from continuing to offer career acceleration opportunities for their employees to develop their leadership qualities and skills to move up the career ladder (TFE Hotels, 2020; ACCOR, 2019). Another aspect that Human Resources can instil in future and current hotel employees is the need to be flexible / agile and be able to work across multiple departments. This multi-department skillset will be an important job attribute as evident during COVID-19 where hotel employees and senior management had to work across multiple departments due to a reduced workforce (Filimonau, Derqui & Matute, 2020).

In relation to important normative groups who have a strong influence in supporting Generation Z, recruiters may consider and perhaps reassure family members of hotel employees that the quarantine hotel is COVID-19 compliant according to government guidelines. This can be done by sharing training videos and providing accommodation rooms for employees and family members to self-isolate if necessary. Hotels can also feature existing employees through testimonials to communicate tangible evidence of the reality and excitement of working in quarantine hotels.

Colleagues was one of the most important social groups that Generation Z referred to when working in quarantine hotels. Human resources managers will need to strengthen the workplace culture and unitedness of hotel employees to maintain a positive employee mindset in a pandemic environment. For example, ACCOR committed \$70m to the “*All Heartist fund*” to cover the medical expenses of employees without medical insurance and offer financial assistance to those in hardship (Lennon, 2020). Given the strong reference to colleagues when working in quarantine hotels, it would be useful to introduce mentoring programs to pair Generation Z workers who are less experience to senior hotel employees. A good mentoring program can help reduce some of the emotional stress operating in COVID-19 work environments (Scerri, Presbury & Goh, 2020; Goh & Kim, 2020). Next, hotel management need to mirror their workplace environment in line with directives from Medical Officers as this was a key reference group Generation Z viewed as important when working in quarantine hotels. This includes implementing proper sanitisation stations, cleaning procedures, social distancing measures, delaying re-opening times if necessary, and locking down where possible.

With regards to overcoming constraints, it is recommended that hotels be upfront about the reality of working in a dangerous environment in dealing with potential COVID-19 guests. This is the core business model of quarantine hotels at least during the pandemic period. Hotels should be more transparent and provide training for safe interactions with quarantine guests. For example, hotels in Australia are subject to strict health guidelines stipulated by the government for employees in hotel facilities hosting people in COVID-19 quarantine isolation such as room cleaning frequency, cleaning products used, and dealing with proper waste management (Australia Government, 2020). This will reduce uncertainty and perceived lack of training that Generation Z see as worries when working in quarantine hotels. Hotels have been quick to address this and will need to continue implementing COVID-19 related SOPs to instil employee confidence. For example, ACCOR released their “ALLSAFE” cleanliness and

prevention program (ACCOR, 2020); Marriott established their “Marriott cleanliness council” and introduced electrostatic spraying technology in their housekeeping (Marriott, 2020); and IHG introduced new cleaning protocols known as the “IHG Clean promise” (IHG, 2020). Such measures can address the emotional stress Generation Z hotel employees are concerned about if they knew more about support training and strategies hotels have in place to prevent the virus transmission.

The power of meaningful work must not be underestimated. The desire to find meaning in work is evident among Generation Z hotel workers. This is partly due to a more educated and demanding hospitality workforce (Gursoy, Chi & Karadag, 2013). Given the importance of meaningful work, recruiters should consider using this as a screening mechanism for future recruitment to identify hoteliers who see hospitality work as purposefully satisfying, fulfilling, and would go beyond the call of duty. This is an important instrument to select the right candidates to work in quarantine hotels as they have a genuine passion and purpose to serve and operate in a virus prone environment because they believe in the greater good of making the world a better place. Existing employees who have a high sense of the meaning of their work should be role models and paired as mentors to new recruits (Scerri, Presbury & Goh, 2020). These mentors can train and show new employees the meaning that they place on working in quarantine hotels and how it helps them to align to the meaning it brings to their life. In a pandemic working environment where collegiality is extremely important, the development of positive interrelations between colleagues and managers (Shi & Gordon, 2019) must be engaged to nurture meaningfulness of work. Hotels can provide training workshops such as artistic interventions (Antal, Debucquet & Fremeaux, 2018) to help Generation Z workers find meaning in their work and rectify problems experienced in the workplace.

Limitations and future research

The brevity of this study offers several future research opportunities. First, the sample was limited to Generation Z employees in a single industry and country. Consequently, the generalisability of the results might be limited to quarantine hotels in Australia. Nevertheless, the exploratory paradigm of this research is a critical pace in contributing academic knowledge about the underlying meaningful work attributes and salient motivations Generation Z hotel workers hold towards working in quarantine hotels. Next, the results of this study could not be compared to others because no other studies have been conducted on the meaning of work in relation to working in quarantine hotels. One future research area is to conduct further statistical tests to quantify the motivational and meaningful work items from this elicitation study before they can be generalised. Future research might also compare different generations of hotel workers to test if meaningful work is perceived differently across generations of hotel workers.

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