

EMPLOYEE TRAINING IN INTERNATIONAL LUXURY HOTEL CHAINS: EVIDENCE FROM SERBIA

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Abstract: *Increased competition in international luxury hotel industry requires the hotels to continuously improve their HRM policies and practices, with a particular focus on employee training. Hotel industry globally employs a large number of people with high labour turnover. Training employees in hotels, especially in international luxury hotel chains, has always represented a challenge since guests demand high-quality personalized services. The aim of this paper is to examine how international luxury hotel chains in a developing country, such as Serbia, implement training programs. The research was conducted in six five-star and four-star hotels in Belgrade - members of international luxury hotel chains, through in-depth interviews with managers from these hotels. The research has shown examined hotel implement some of the training programs usual for luxury hotel chains. However, in order to develop their local talent pools and improve staff skills on a continuous basis, the luxury hotels in Serbia need to re-examine their training systems, having in mind that most of them are highly standardized, to implement more diversified training plans, and provide more overseas training opportunities for local employees from Serbia.*

Keywords: *training, human resource management, tourism, luxury hotel chain, hotel*

1. INTRODUCTION

Hotels are one of the oldest business activities [1]. They have existed for centuries. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the hotel industry was made up of independent hotels [2], while multiple-unit hotel companies appeared afterwards [1]. A strong incentive appeared for hotels to go international and make hotel chains by acquiring control over other hotels. International hotel chains are more diversified and experienced than local hotels thus generating management expertise and a pool of trained staff [3].

The crucial importance of human resources in the labour-intensive hospitality industry has been highlighted for a long time [4]. Being a labour-intensive industry means that the quality of service depends on people, while labor expenses usually represent more than 50 percent of operating expenses [1]. Access to a sufficiently qualified labour force in sufficient quantity to ensure efficiency necessary for quality service represents a major HR challenge in the hotel industry [5], especially in the high-end segment (5-star and 4-star luxury hotels).

In today's highly competitive world, the hospitality industry is trying to bring their services and products to the highest quality level in order to maintain customers' satisfaction. In addition, international luxury hotel chains are creating impeccable service in order to make their guests loyal customers. A luxury hotel has to offer the highest quality of services in order to face its competitors [6]. High quality of services delivered by professional staff is critical to attract and

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retain customers [1], [7], [8]. Employees with their knowledge, experience, judgment, intelligence and relationships represent strategic resources in the luxury hotel industry to deliver high-quality services [1].

Only well-trained and properly motivated employees who are constantly learning new business skills can meet the challenges posed by the new business environment and create (and maintain) company's competitive advantage. Thus, training and development are integral to a luxury hotel's growth and success - training programs increase employee morale, satisfaction and retention, and decrease employee turnover [9].

Over the past six decades tourism has experienced continued expansion [10] and diversification to become one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world - international tourism receipts increased from US\$ 2 billion in 1950 to US\$ 1,220 billion in 2016 [11]. However, there has been a lack of research on human resource management (HRM) practices, especially employee training, in international luxury hotel chains in developing countries such as Serbia.

Unlike developed economies, where the domestic market is used to luxury hotels and luxury hotels have already created a brand image, in most developing countries it is rare to find a strong presence of international luxury hotel chains. International luxury hotel chains bring many benefits to host developing countries, such as transfer of HRM knowledge, in terms of training and so called "soft technology". They provide a wide range of managerial and technical expertise in different phases of hotel business development. In this way they are helping the developing countries to improve its international management knowledge and capabilities for the further development of the hotel industry [12].

However, international hotel chains operating in developing countries are facing challenges to find employees who can respond properly to their strict requirements. Having in mind a very short tradition of hotel management in developing countries, training employees in these countries is of great importance and there is a challenge to continuously review types of training used in order to improve them [13], [14].

Having this in mind, the aim of this paper is to determine the importance of training employees in the international luxury hotel chains in a developing country – such as Serbia, in order to make the employees capable of delivering personalized service to satisfy the specific customers' needs. The qualitative research was conducted through interviewing managers of several luxury hotels in Serbia – members of international luxury chains. Existing employee training practices were examined with an aim to identify how to properly train employees in international luxury hotel chains, in order to maintain their motivation and dedication, so that they may perform their jobs according to high standards and high demands set by the headquarters.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Luxury hotel chains

"Chocolates on the pillows; a bathroom floor you can eat off of; service with a smile" [15] is what guests expect from luxury hotels. The word "luxury" derives from "luxus" which means "soft or extravagant living, (over)-indulgence and sumptuousness, luxuriousness, opulence"

[16]. Although luxury tends to be defined by premium price, the definition of the term “luxury” is relatively subjective, thus defined by each particular customer [16], [17].

Hospitality services rely on intangible assets, such as service quality and atmosphere provided to the guests [18]. Luxury hotels provide not only superior tangible products (e.g. luxury hotel room and amenities, exceptional menu items and superb food presentations) but also attentive service and highly sophisticated consumption environment [19], [20], [21], [22].

Luxury hotels can be defined both as a type of highly customized contact services and as organizations employees may feel proud to work for [23]. According to [24] luxury hotels offer services such as butler service, concierge and special concierge floors, secretarial services, Wi-fi, in-room technology, computers, fax machines, beauty salons, health spas, 24 hours service, swimming pools, tennis courts, ticket office, airline office, car rental, doctor/nurse etc. These hotels are specific for their unique decor, professional landscaping and remarkable architecture. Additionally, luxury hotels differ from other types of hotels because of their luxurious property, developed physical surrounding and personalized services offered to their guests [25].

2.1.1. Personalized service

Guests expect luxury hotels to offer them all the comfort of home, plus pampering and personalized service [15]. The main purpose of personalized service is to keep home-away-from-home feeling for their guests. Additional amenities provide a cozy experience for the guest [24].

Personalized service is what especially distinguishes luxury hotel chains them from lower category hotel chains. International luxury hotel chains have learned that providing personalized services to their customers is crucial for developing and building trust and loyalty of the customers. “Personalized service means adding value to a customer’s choice” [26].

According to the InterContinental Hotel Group (IHG) trend report from 2014, different types of personalized services can be found, such as services rendered through technology (e.g. mobile check-in) and the ones provided by people (e.g. remembering guest’s name or identifying guest’s loyalty status) [27]. Also, technology can be used to support employees’ activities towards guest when delivering personalized services by learning guests’ previous experiences and then recording their needs and requirements.

Rendering personalized services actually means getting to know the guests to the core in order to meet their needs and wishes [27]. People have different emotional needs including acknowledgement, gratitude, importance, being cared about, and listened to, getting noticed and being appreciated. Unlike other hotels, luxury hotel chains are trying to recognize emotional needs of their guests and provide services they expect accordingly [28]. Luxury hotel chains also tend to promote hedonic values derived from a superior experience, which not only appeals to consumers’ luxury value perceptions but also can help the luxury brands go viral and gain public attention. Consumers are more likely to share stories that are memorable or can trigger high arousal emotions such as surprise and excitement [29].

One of the most important things about personalized service in a hotel is to have professionally trained staff that can deliver those services [24]. The frontline employees are the first ones who are facing the guests. They have a unique possibility to make a remarkably positive influence on their guests’ stay and experience. They are likely the most influential people involved in build-

ing and communicating hotel brand to customers [30]. Thus, hotels are more likely than other industries to train their first-line managers in employee relations skills [31].

2.2. Managing employees in luxury hotel chains

In luxury hotels the service cannot be separated from the staff providing the service – the values, attitudes, believes behaviour of employees [23]. The staff that attracts people is far more important than all the glamour and luxury of a hotel. Employees who interact with guests have a potential to build and enhance the hotel brand in order to achieve customer trust and loyalty [32].

In the luxury hotel industry, the crucial way to achieve product differentiation among competitors is to focus on people interactions [33] which is necessary in order to provide personalized services which will satisfy and exceed guests' expectations. Therefore, the quality and the level of services provided depend on the human factor. Essentially, the human factor makes the character and the image of a hotel [34]. And employee engagement drives customer engagement [23]. This indicates that there is a need for engaging staff appropriately within the process of rendering services.

Luxury hotel chains tend to provide guests with a flawless service carried out by professionally trained staff [24]. It is crucial that employees recognize guests' expectations in order to render personalized services. Every employee in a luxury hotel has to pay attention to the preferences of each individual guest and to meet their demands and wishes, sometimes even before they ask for it. Having a personalized relationship with the hotel's staff is what guests are expecting and paying for in a luxury hotel. This kind of service in a luxury ambiance means more than just "service with a smile". It is the appreciation of guest's immense privilege to employee's personalized care, attention and act [35].

2.3. Training employees in the hotel industry

Training aims at increasing employees' skills for performing a particular job. Employees are being trained to learn a sequence of programmed behavior. "Training is the process that provides employees with the knowledge and the skills required to operate within the systems and standards set by management" [36].

Training represents investing both in individual and organizational growth, but employees should stay long enough in the organization so that investment could have an adequate return, which is demonstrated through efficiency, productivity and effectiveness. Here is the link between training and motivation of staff, which can decrease labor turnover and make committed and capable personnel [33]. A lack of employee commitment may have negative consequences like inconsistent messages or negative word of mouth that may impact the meaning of the hotel brand in the stakeholders' mind [37].

One of the factors that create the need for training in the hotels is the high rate of labor turnover in the hospitality industry [14],[38], [39]. Unlike other industries, whose labor force has been reduced due to technology innovations, hospitality industry relies on people due to the fact that technology cannot replace human touch and the high-quality service, essential in luxury hotel chains [40]. Therefore, investing in staff training is well worth because guests will feel the difference between highly-committed professional staff and the ones unmotivated to work.

Studies have shown that training programs increase employee satisfaction, employee morale and employee retention, and decrease turnover. Training is considered to boost morale, employee commitment [9] as well as job satisfaction [41] by showing employees that the hotel values them as a crucial resource, which motivates them to work harder and to stay in the company for a longer period of time. Training programs are teaching employees what are the right things to do, and what behaviour is unacceptable.

Training gives employees skills and enthusiasm that will help them provide amazing customer experience which leads to brand loyalty. Operating in a fast-changing and highly competitive environment, it is a must for hotels to constantly provide adequate training for their staff. Training plays a key role in ensuring that the staff is equipped with the skills and knowledge required to deliver good customer services [9].

2.3.1 Training employees in the international luxury hotel chains

Having in mind that luxury hotel chains provide a wide range of products and services, they have a high demand for people with knowledge, skills and experience to meet the needs of their guests on a daily basis. Continuous training of employees in a luxury hotel is used for making sure that the staff acquires new and advanced knowledge or skills, which will hopefully lead to better job performance [42]. Only well-trained and properly motivated employees who are constantly acquiring new business skills can meet the challenges posed by a luxury hotel. Training employees in the luxury hotel chains represents a strategic tool to put into action the differentiation strategy, by building a team of highly professional employees in order to provide a remarkable level of services so that guests' expectations can be met [43].

Training in luxury hotel chains is organized for the following reasons: to develop teamwork so that the team will be more united and respect each other, to build stronger relationships between operational staff and management, to improve employees' competencies and skills so they can meet guests' needs, to increase the level of quality and standards in order to strengthen the competitive advantage of the hotel and to enhance operational performance [42].

Training needs in luxury hotel chains can be classified according to internal factors (such as heterogeneity of service and customers which requires adjustable and dynamic staff, lack of professionally qualified employees, the amount of obligatory training programs) and external factors (constantly changing environment and high competition on the market) which affect hotel operations. External factors are the ones which are out of control of the hotel. Competitors can significantly affect the need for training hotel staff. In a case when competition on the market is high, many hotels use product differentiation strategy in order to raise brand awareness. This is especially the case with large hotel chains such as Marriott, Ritz Carlton or Hilton [44]. In order to create a difference in products and service, different standards are enforced. It applies to, for example, quality of service, the way the tables are set up, the way to fold the napkins, employees' behavior, welcome gestures and time allowed for check-in and check-out, etc. which all requires require additional training. Even when employees have a good educational background and considerable experience, they need time, will and resources to accept the new rules. In addition, training can be an effective tool for preparing for the inevitable changes in the future. For example, technology development can depend on the level of IT skills of staff needed to put a new system into operation.

Additionally, in international hotel chains operating in in two or more countries there is a need for harmonization different cultures by raising cultural awareness of the staff [45]. They have to be able to adapt to working in such an environment, since they sometimes transfer employees between different countries.

3. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research was conducted in 2018 in five-star and four-star hotels in Belgrade, Serbia, which according to their characteristics, products and personalized services offered belong to the international luxury hotel chains. The authors chose the hotels which seek their differentiation through the provision of high-quality services and the development of a strong customer orientation through their HRM strategy.

The data for this research were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with hotel industry professionals from different departments (mainly from HR department) of the hotels examined. The selected representatives of the luxury hotels were chosen in regards to their competency to discuss the issues related to the research problem. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face. As for the instrument of the research, the appropriate questionnaire was applied that served as a basis for discussion, which was further developed in accordance with the participants and the researcher's needs (please see Appendix). In order to increase the response rate, the number of questions was kept the minimum.

Sample

When it comes to the international luxury hotel industry in Belgrade, the offer is relatively modest, even though recently there have been opened new luxury hotels. Six hotels located in Belgrade, all belonging to well-known international luxury hotel chains were selected for this research: Hilton Worldwide, Hyatt Hotels Corporation, Marriott International, InterContinental Hotels Group, and Radisson Hotel Group.

According to the [46], luxury hotels can be categorized as Upper scale, Luxury major and Luxury exclusive. Hotels in Belgrade that have been analyzed can fit into the Upper scale category. Even though there are not many hotels in Belgrade that belong to the luxury segment, these hotels are trying their best to offer the same quality of services and products like other luxury hotels in the world - they are focusing on personalized service, catering to their guest's needs and wishes, and always trying to exceed the expectations of their guests.

Like in other developing countries [12]-[13], international luxury hotel chains do not have a long history in Serbia. The first five-star hotel belonging to an international luxury hotel chain that was opened in Belgrade was Hyatt Regency Belgrade in 1990. Metropol Palace was built in 1957 but not until 2012 it became a five-star hotel and a part of the Luxury collection hotel of Marriott chain. Crowne plaza was opened in 2014 after reconstruction of old Hotel Intercontinental, but now having four stars (member of InterContinental Hotel Group, the largest hotel company in the world). Radisson Blu Old Mill and Courtyard by Marriot are examples of recently increased entrance of luxury international hotel chains, together with the newest star of Belgrade luxury hotels, Hilton Belgrade which was opened in March 2018.

As presented in Table 1, almost all examined hotels are headquartered in the United States. The size of hotels varies, both in terms of the number of rooms and the number of employees. The interviews were conducted mainly with representatives of HR departments (mainly HR managers) or in two cases with the managers from other departments familiar with training policies and practices examined in the research.

<i>Hotel name</i>	<i>Hotel chain</i>	<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Number of rooms</i>	<i>Number of employees</i>	<i>Interviewee job position</i>	<i>Department</i>
Hyatt Regency Belgrade	Hyatt	US	302	300	Assistant HR Manager	HR
Metropol Palace	Marriott International	US	236	120	Rooms division Manager	Rooms
Courtyard Belgrade City Center by Marriot	Marriott International	US	114	80	HR Manager	HR
Crowne plaza	InterContinental Hotels Group	UK	416	350	Meeting concierge Manager	Food and Beverage
Hilton Belgrade	Hilton hotels	US	242	180	HR Manager	HR
Radisson collection Old Mill Belgrade	Radisson Hotel group	US	235	110	HR Administrator	HR

Table 1: Sample

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Employees' role in the international luxury hotel chains

The respondents interviewed were asked to explain how important employees are to their business. The majority of them explained that employees play a crucial role in providing quality services to their customers. According to the respondents, their employees perform depending on the needs of each guest, and it is believed that this approach allows the hotels to build long-term relationships with customers. They all emphasized that customers are not returning back because of the amazing walls, paintings, bed or decoration, but thanks to the people working at that property who made their stay amazing, memorable and unique. In addition, their skills, knowledge and experience contribute to making the hotel recognizable. Each of them has some skill and knowledge that contributes to discerning guests and customers. That's why all the respondents emphasized the role of the hotel staff, as they are the hotel's driving force.

One respondent said that hotel business requires teamwork, where everyone matters and everyone plays a huge role in making the guests happy (e.g. a combination of personalized services provided by more employees has a remarkable impression on guests).

Manager from Crowne plaza explained: "It all starts with the check-in and all the smiley faces that greet them in the moment of check in, all the way to the bell boy who takes their stuff to

the room, to the clean room, to the excellent breakfast, a great bar where they can relax and get a drink etc. Everyone plays a huge role when it comes to making a guest satisfied.”

Confirming the conclusions of [1], [24] and [30] our study has shown that in the examined hotels in Belgrade employees play a crucial role in providing quality services, especially personalized and intuitive services, thus achieving success of a hotel business. Their performance is based on comprehension of the needs and demands of each guest, and it is believed that this approach allows the hotel to build long-term relationships with customers. The results of the study confirmed the conclusion made by [47] that employees who interact with people are far more important than all the glamour and luxury that could exist in a hotel.

Importance of employee training in international luxury hotel chains

Different authors researched employee training in luxury hotels (such as [9], [48], [49], [50]). According to the literature, nowadays employee training has become a key factor to achieving success in hospitality industry [9], [51]. Training provides many benefits for hotels such as higher job satisfaction, higher guest satisfaction and lower operation costs. Quality problems and key employee issues in hotels can often be solved with so-called “People and Quality” strategy which involves, among other, training and empowering employees [52]. The findings of [50] show that employees of luxury hotels in New Delhi, India accept better work responsibilities towards achieving organizational goals if they have adequate training background.

The respondents in our study were asked to assess the importance of employee training in their hotels. Most of them agreed that training of their employees is essential as well as monitoring and helping their staff, since it affects all aspects of hotel operations. First of all, all the managers pointed out that training programs are used primarily for making employees familiar with the rules, policies and procedures of the hotel in order to enable every employee to behave and perform according to the guidelines defined.

All the hotels included in the research focus their training programs on improving the existing skills, knowledge and abilities of their employees in order to develop their talent. One of the managers said: „We are developing talent, and the talent is developing the hotel.” All the respondents agreed that beside developing the capabilities of employees, training serves to motivate staff to do their best. Some of the managers stated that training depends on the individual needs of their employees. They find it very important to provide the best opportunities for career development and fulfillment of professional goals of their employees.

It may be concluded from the information gained from the hotels that the significance of appropriate employee training is recognized in the hotels in Belgrade. The results are in line with the evidence from other studies (e.g. [4], [9], [53], [54]) which emphasized the importance of effective training of employees in luxury hotel chains. Unfortunately, luxury hotel management is usually not willing to invest in proper training programs for their employees as well as in training for trainers [38].

Training new employees

Respondents were asked to explain the approach their hotels have towards employee training with identifying specific objectives they are trying to achieve through training programs. The interviews showed that in all the hotels examined every new employee has to go through initial

induction training (often called orientation or general training). These entry training programs are mandatory for all new employees, so that they can learn the company's history, mission, vision and objectives. They are informative, with an aim to introduce the new employee with the hotel and provide all the necessary information in the orientation process. Four out of six respondents emphasized that orientation is the most important training program because every employee has to get to know the whole hotel including its mission and core values, departments, amenities and services provided. Furthermore, this is done because no matter what position an employee is currently holding, every employee has to be always ready to answer any guest's question. Also, since these hotels are members of international hotel chains every new employee must learn the brand standards. Hotels examined tend to provide formal training programs which is in line with the findings of [31] who found that luxury hotels were significantly more likely to have adopted formal training programs than other workplaces.

One of the hotels implements an additional training of new employees after the initial induction training called "operational orientation". It is a classroom-style training focusing on the explanation of job specifics.

All respondents agreed that the goal of the induction training is to enable new employees to gain independence so that they can function independently, to introduce them to safety at work standards, and to teach them how to behave in a manner that will never affect negatively the image of the hotel. One of the managers commented that it is important to teach them not to be afraid of the guests, to smile and have a positive attitude: "We want every employee to feel welcome and as a part of the team from the first day at work. Cultivating a culture of open communication and good interpersonal relationships, we are directing each newly employed to strengthen team spirit and mutual respect."

Training existing employees

After completing induction training each new employee in all hotels examined is put in a particular department where he/she will go through further training depending on the job itself. These findings are in line with the findings of [55] whose study showed that almost all employees (95 per cent) in UK luxury hotel chains received at least one form of training (whether on-the-job or off-the-job training).

According to [7] luxury hotel chains use three types of training programs: on-the-job training, on-site-but-not-on-the-job training and off-the-job training. In line with this typology, the employees interviewed stated that the examined hotels mostly conduct on-the-job and on-site-but-not-on-the-job training. All respondents stated that their hotels conduct on-job-training, where every employee in his/her department is given specific job-related guidelines and trained in order to gain necessary knowledge to perform the required tasks. Half of the respondents explained that on-the-job training is done right away at their workplace, when employees are being advised with particular solutions. Periodic on-the-job training programs are organized according to the specific needs focusing mostly on skill development and customer service knowledge. On-the-job training in the examined hotels is usually done by the head of the department. According to the interviewees on-site-but-not-on-the-job training mainly refers to orientation training programs in order to provide new employees with basic information about the organization.

More formalized off-the-job training programs (training out of the hotel by a person employed at the hotel or external training agency) are rarely implemented in examined luxury hotels in Belgrade mostly due to the lack of financial resources. Few respondents mentioned that they are providing off-the-job training whenever the budget allows them (for example, they send their bartenders to attend various courses to improve skills). These findings are in line with analysis of Britain's Workplace Employee Relations Survey which indicated that off-the-job training occurred less frequently in the hospitality industry comparing to all other industries and services [56].

Similarly, [9] investigated existing training strategies and practices in Chinese luxury hotels (4-star and 5-star hotels) in Beijing, Shanghai and Nanjing mainly through semi-structured interviews with managers at different levels. In terms of training techniques used, the study has shown that Chinese luxury hotels applied most of the contemporary Western training methods, while majority of state-owned hotels still relied on conventional training delivery methods (such as lectures and apprenticeship). All eight hotels included in their study mainly provided basic skills training to frontline employees, while only a minority paid more attention to training their managers.

Half of the respondents in our research said their hotels use cross training. According to [31] cross training programs expose hotel employees to different tasks within the same department where they work or enables them brief rotations which facilitates internal promotion opportunities to other departments. Employees get to learn their responsibilities within the organization, the mission and vision of the company as well as the activities within each department of the hotel [48]. Half of the examined luxury hotels in Belgrade consider cross training an important asset which provides their employees with the opportunity to express the desire to go to training in other departments. According to information gained through interviews, this way they get to learn about activities of other departments in the hotel, so that they can see if there is another job position in another department more suitable for them. Cross training provides the employees with additional knowledge necessary to prepare them to change positions within the hotel. This way cross training offers the possibility to discover hidden talents among employees and to promote them within the hotel. These training programs are organized throughout the year and usually last for a month. It may be concluded that examined luxury hotels in Belgrade are operating similarly to many US and UK hotels which offer their employees opportunities for cross-training as stated by [55]. In line with the conclusion of [31] interviewees stated that cross training improves cross-departmental communication, upgrades customer service, and may result in reduced staff turnover and lower hiring costs.

Most of the respondents (from Crowne Plaza, Hilton, Marriot and Radisson Blu) stated that the luxury hotels in Belgrade rely on standardized online training programs provided by the chain headquarters. These online courses save time and money and allow employees certain time span to complete them. For instance, Crowne plaza uses over 500 online training courses to develop further capabilities of their staff. Marriott has over 200,000 online employee training programs (such as brand specific, cultural, company information, global anti-corruption, information and protection of the data, discipline specific etc.). The manager from Crowne plaza said that they are mostly using online training on the corporation's website called "Merlin", provided by the IHG group which they belong to. On that website all employees have the opportunity to complete different training programs whenever they wish. These training programs are mainly in English. However, providing standardized training programs to hotel employees in different parts of the world within the same chain may lead to various issues. Similarly to the hotels in Serbia, [57] found in their study that international luxury hotels in China showed a relatively high degree of standardization in training systems, tending to use standardized training pro-

grams from the headquarters in hotels around the world, with all the training materials being demonstrated in English which may represent a challenge for local employees. Also, in their study conducted in a chain of luxury hotels Starwood Hotels and Resorts [49] found that it was difficult for non-native English speakers to understand the training process, and suggested that the training materials and the online training system which were only in English should be translated to improve employees' understanding.

Contrary to [7] who suggested that luxury hotel chains should implement five models of employee training (functional, buyer, matrix, corporate university model and virtual mode), Belgrade hotels included in this study did not confirm using these training models. The only exception is Hilton which partially uses corporate university model - Hilton University as an online source of training programs for developing different kinds of skills depending on the job position.

One of the hotels organizes "training for trainers". These training programs take place abroad, where instructors are corporation and regional coaches. Employees sent from Serbia to these training programs are expected to transfer knowledge and train local workers afterwards. According to the manager from this hotel, it often happens that employees themselves offer to train their colleagues.

All respondents stated that according to Serbian legal requirements hotels must organize so-called "legal training" including training in health and safety at work and fire protection. Staff working in food and beverage sector has to go through specific training programs imposed by the law. These findings are in line with the findings of [40] who explained that shortage of these training programs imposed by the law may result in serious problems caused by the employees who are not trained or informed enough, as well as losing the loyalty of customers and worsening the image of the hotel.

Additional training is not strictly defined but varies depending on the needs of the hotel. One of the hotels provides core management training programs for employees on managerial level, including 40 hours of instructor-led training during one year covering different topics (such as: Seven habits of extraordinary people, Five choices to extraordinary Productivity, Crucial conversations, Foundations of leadership etc.). Another hotel has a unique type of training, which is not seen in others called Responsible business training.

Training expatriates vs. local employees

Our research has found that in the hotels examined managerial positions are filled by expatriates, who are more familiar with the corporate values, culture, processes and procedures, as well as the control systems of the hotel chain headquarters than local managers. The respondents explained that having an expatriate manager leads to better communication with the hotel headquarters, which is in line with the conclusions of [58]. Various studies have confirmed that in developing countries the most important managerial positions in hotels belonging to an international luxury hotel chain are filled by expatriates, while lower-level positions require lower proficiency and skills, so those employees are trained for service quality and performance [12], [57]. Use of expatriate managers in developing countries can be justified by a lack of suitable local experts with experience in hotel business. International hotel chains usually develop their own pools of international managers and relocate them to work in subsidiary hotels in different countries with an aim to transfer the policies, ideas, and culture of the parent company are to the foreign country hotel [57]. This approach helps a hotel chain build up a global network and

maintain control over its hotels around the world and use uniform management and operation systems [57] and improve the global mindset among its employees.

Expatriates are expected to go through extensive training programs which should prepare them for relocation to a foreign country. However, our research has shown that the majority (four out of six) of hotels examined do not have expatriate training programs at all. One of the hotels provides their employees basic information of the foreign country in a form of a short document.

Luxury hotels tend to recruit a large number of local employees for lower positions. Thus, the expatriates are expected not only to bring experience and competence necessary to organize the hotel business, but also to train and educate the local staff about the luxury brand as well as luxury service, policies, corporate values and practices of the luxury hotel chain. This was confirmed by all the respondents in the research.

According to the interviewees the majority of hotels do not provide local employees the opportunity to go to international assignments to other hotels from the same chain. The respondents stated that they were not even familiar with this type of training programs. This finding is in line with the findings of [57] who concluded that none of the hotels belonging to international luxury hotels in China from their study provided overseas training opportunities for local employees. However, the finding is contrary to [12] study who found that expatriates in luxury hotels are expected to train local employees, so that they can be later relocated within the multinational hotel chain. In our study only one hotel has employees' exchange program "similar to student exchange at universities, only directly related to work and to skills development". This approach assumes that if an employee from Serbia expresses the desire to go abroad (to another hotel from the same hotel chain) for training, another employee will be sent from that hotel to hotel in Belgrade.

Employees' motivation for training

Employers in the hotel industry should consider the use internal and external training and development programs to motivate employees' excellent performance [48]. Unfortunately, hospitality industry is characterized by poor training of employees leading to lack of motivation and poor commitment of employees [38].

For example, the results of the study by [48] conducted in six luxury hotels of multinational chains in Athens, Greece indicate that most of luxury hotel employees (61%) have a strong concern for opportunities of personal development through training, especially through the provision of seminars as important incentives for improving their performance and increasing their job satisfaction.

In our research interviewees were asked to describe the ways they use to motivate their employees to actively take part in the training programs. The majority of them stated that their staff is primarily motivated by the atmosphere in the workplace - a long-term perspective at work, pleasant work environment and developed culture of communication, interpersonal relations and team spirit are what inspire them to participate in the training initiatives.

One manager stated that their hotel strongly believes that the head of each department should play the biggest role in motivating the employees within his/her department, which is in line with the findings of [4]. Another manager added that employees have to be well informed about the purpose of the training and that it is the trainer's responsibility to explain it to the employ-

ees. One HR Manager explained that in their hotel employees in non-managerial positions are less interested to actively participate in training programs compared to those holding managerial positions. Usually they consider training useless effort, and the HR department has attempted to explain the benefits of the training for them. One respondent said that their hotel is trying to design specific training programs for each employee so that they would participate actively in training and show initiative.

One of the managers in our research said: “A good manager must have understanding for his employees, he must let them know when they did a good job. He must see and feel if someone is not performing well, and ask the employee if there is something that can be done by the hotel to help him/her improve his performance, suggest additional training and development in order to make him a better employee. Having someone you can talk to and having someone who is on your side is the biggest motivation for every employee.”

In the hotels examined motivation of employees to accept and participate in the training courses mostly depends on several factors – whether employees are interested enough in the topic and whether the training provides them with certain benefit. For example, employees usually show a desire to participate in training when they know they can learn a lot and improve themselves, when they have to possibility to be promoted to a higher position in the hotel, or to get an increase in salary. Also, they prefer interesting training programs. This is the reason why hotels tend to include role plays and games to keep their attention during the training courses. Also, employees prefer when trainers give them examples, various fun facts, possibilities for discussion and Q&As. The time of occurrence and frequency of training is also important. According to respondents, employees from luxury hotels are not thrilled to participate if the training is happening more than once in a few weeks, after their working hours or if it lasts too long. From the data gathered it may be concluded that the hotels examined are aiming to achieve employees’ satisfaction which will lead to their positive action in offering services to customers as stated by [59].

There are different ways to motivate employees to actively participate in the training, mainly through teamwork, performance appraisal, effective compensation and communication [60]. The hotels examined are using performance appraisal and communication as a tool to motivate their employees, while, according to the managers interviewed, compensation is not used at all.

The luxury hotels in Belgrade monitor employee development through periodic evaluation. Employees’ performance is usually assessed by their managers, they discuss together the achievement of the goals set in order to determine whether the performance was good or there was room for improvement in the future. In one of the hotels this is done in the way that they are monitoring and evaluating employees on a quarterly basis and creating their business and personal development plan and helping them to achieve their goals. These evaluations are also used as a basis for determining training needs of each employee.

5. CONCLUSION

It is difficult to attract and retain top class employees in the hotel sector [61], especially in the luxury multinational chains. Hospitality industry has been facing high employee turnover ([62], [63], [64], [65]) mainly due to the treatment by superiors, working hours, job pressure, lack of training, inadequate benefit packages etc. [66]. However, there is a lack of relevant literature with respect to adequacy of employee training in the hotel industry [38].

Our study context were five-star and four-star hotels in Belgrade, Serbia which are members of international luxury hotel chains. The aim of this research was to find out how employees are trained in international luxury hotel chains in Serbia in order to provide quality service. The research which was conducted in six hotels in Belgrade has shown that these hotels tend to implement various internal training for employees with an aim to achieve commitment and loyalty towards the organization, as expected by [4] and [67]. The hotels examined are committed to train employees to behave in the way which will impact customers' perceptions of the hotel brand, as claimed by [68], thus considering training of employees as integral to a hotel's success.

However, international luxury hotel chains that want to develop their local talent pools need to re-examine their training systems, having in mind that most of them are highly standardized [57] and as such applied in all foreign subsidiaries. Also, they should focus on improving their training programs by implementing more diversified training plans as well as more overseas training opportunities [57] for local employees from Serbia. These hotels should use more often the fact that they are a part of large international chains, and thus provide their employees opportunities to be transferred to other countries. The transfer needs to be followed by expatriate training programs in order to prepare the employees to successfully fulfill the assignment abroad so that they could bring new knowledge and experience and train the colleagues afterwards.

Online training programs may be financially more convenient, but dealing with the employees in person opens more space for developing team spirit and improving communication. Furthermore, another way to engage them would be if the employees could choose which exact skill they could improve or what course to attend in order to perform their jobs better. In that way employees would be more eager to participate in the training. Additionally, other contemporary methods may be considered, such as coaching and mentoring, which were found to be more efficient and effective for developing employees' skills comparing to traditional off-job training [49].

The management of the hotels included in the research should aim at providing high-quality in-house training programs continuously. However, they should not focus only on in-house training, but also look for adequate external training opportunities. They may also consider outsourcing training, i.e. hiring external agencies that sometimes may be more competent and provide more professional training for their employees. Also, additional training programs that existing employees are getting are not professional enough, and they could implement a better strategy of conducting those training programs more frequently in order to monitor and improve the performance of their staff. These training programs should not only occur when the problem in operation arises, but it should prevent any escalations. This is very important because the guests expect impeccable service and staff should be trained to maintain high standards of the hotel. Finally, more emphasis should be put on career planning for luxury hotel employees, which has traditionally been a weak HRM area in the hotel industry [48].

Even though industry experts have shown that they are aware that training is a very powerful tool leading to improved service quality and increased market competitiveness, yet only few of them have clear strategies in practice which would enable their employees to improve their skills on a continuous basis.

Other studies (such as [69], [70]) have shown that there is room for improvement in terms of effectively managing human resources in tourism sector in Serbia. It is important to pay significant attention to managing human resources effectively (with particular focus on continuous

improvement of employee knowledge and skills) which may contribute to increasing competitiveness of Serbia in tourism sector [58], and thus in luxury hotel industry. International tourist arrivals worldwide are expected to increase by 3.3% a year between 2010 and 2030 to reach 1.8 billion by 2030 [71]. Increased competition in international luxury hotel industry requires the hotels to continuously improve their HRM policies and practices to create an environment that promotes customer-oriented behaviour in order to maintain hotels' competitive advantage. Having this in mind, the examined hotels in Serbia may use a regional hub approach and hire HR specialists to coordinate diverse functions (such as employee training) who would have the responsibility to supervise HRM activities (including training) in all the hotels in the region. This would require a higher propensity to invest in the HR function [31] in these hotels.

This research has its limitations. For example, the answers may be biased because the interviewees perhaps wanted to present their organization in the best manner or they may have some personal involvement in a certain subject. Further research may include an anonymous survey which could cover more respondents from the examined hotels, including employees from different hierarchical levels and different departments in order to check whether their experience is aligned with the opinions of the respondents. Additionally, future research may be expanded to other hotels in the region - members of the same international luxury chains as those included in this research, in order to analyze and compare employee training practices.

Appendix: Interview Questions

1. How important is the role of employees in a luxury hotel?
2. How important is employee training for your hotel?
3. Which types of employee training does your hotel provide (on-the-job/off-the-job)? Please describe each of the training programs provided by your hotel.
4. Which training techniques does your hotel use for orientation and training new employees?
5. How does your hotel provide additional training to existing employees in order to improve their skills? Please explain in detail (time, frequency, duration, content, trainers).
6. What are the typical areas and topics the training programs provided focus on?
7. In which language are the training programs/learning materials provided?
8. Does your hotel provide online training for employees? Please explain.
9. Does your hotel provide expatriate training programs?
10. How does a typical expatriate training program look like (time, duration, content, trainers)?
11. To what extent are the employees eager to participate actively in the training programs?
12. How does your hotel motivate employees to take more active part in training?

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