

## Workplace Environment, Leader Communication and Hotel Employee Retention: Job Satisfaction as a Mediator

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### ABSTRACT

Every organisation has invested its time, effort and resources to recruit, train and pay employees' salaries. These investments are important to ensure that the organisation can produce high-quality employees who will remain with the organisation for a long period of time and be part of the successful members of the service team. Although a lot has been done to ensure that employees remain with the organisation, research has found that employee retention remains to be a problem to most organisations. In validating whether the findings from past studies are still consistent with the present situation, the present research aims to further investigate whether work environment, leader communication and job satisfaction still present significant relationships with hotel employee retention. In total, 550 self-administered questionnaires were distributed to hotel employees attached to 3-star and 4-star hotels located in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Of the total being distributed, 329 were returned and considered usable for data analysis. The hypothesised relationships between variables were tested using the multiple regression analysis. The findings reveal that workplace environment, leader communication and job satisfaction are significantly related to hotel employee retention. The results also demonstrate that job satisfaction mediates the relationship between workplace environment, leader communication and employee retention. The findings of this research advance the understanding of employee retention and create awareness among hotel management to better appreciate the dimensions of transformation which are essential towards ensuring employee job satisfaction. This will consequently lead to a long-term employee retention. Apart from the findings, the paper also highlights the limitations and suggestions for future research.

**Keywords:** *Workplace environment, leader communication, job satisfaction, employee retention, hotel industry.*

### INTRODUCTION

Past research has shown that the costs incurred by organisations due to employee turnover are not only monetary, but also non-monetary in nature. The loss of skills and knowledge, output reduction and competition in the organisation are outcomes of employee turnover (De Winne, Marescaux, Sels, Van Beveren & Vanormelingen, 2019). It was further highlighted by Simmons (2020) that the impact of an elevated employee turnover is two-fold where it affects the employees by way of a decline in the cost of living, loss of experience and stress related to change in the environment, and also the organisation itself. Findings from recent

studies have shown that the costs of hiring and training new employees forms approximately 50 percent of the employee's annual income (Ameri, Schur, Adya, Bentley, McKay & Kruse, 2018).

Additionally, the criticality in employee turnover is similar to the costs incurred for the recruitment of employees. In this regard, it can be deduced that it would be more advantageous for the company not to recruit new employees especially when there is a possibility of such employees resigning and moving on to another job thereafter. As such, the optimal way to guarantee that employees remain with the organisation for an extended period of time is by increasing the employees' motivation and loyalty towards the organisation. In relation to this, researchers (Fajardo, 2021; Razali, Zahari, Ismail & Jasim, 2018) have also proposed that the principle of 'empowerment' should be introduced and championed. This notion prescribes the employees' role and involvement in the organisation, which can help the organisation to successfully retain its employees. Firstly, it relates to the sense of meaning that the employees create, elucidating how they mirror the significance of their work and how such work is more than just work. Secondly, self-sufficiency that allows the employees to feel accountable for their own work. This includes the freedom given to them to determine and plan how they will perform their work. Thirdly, the employee competency, which enables them to feel confident in their own ability to try something new. Finally, the impact that the employees make that leads them to believe how their attitude and action will affect the way the organisation operates. This explains that the retention of employees serves as a main variable in measuring the health of any organisation.

Of all the industries, the hotel industry observes higher employee turnover rate, and this has become a prevalent issue within the hospitality industry across the globe (Cronin, 2019; King & Tang, 2020; Paul & Kee, 2020). This is also the case with Malaysia. Although the hotel industry has been the main contributor to Malaysia's economy, the standard employee turnover rate in Malaysia's hotel industry was reported to be higher at 66 percent per annum. This leads to hotels experiencing employee shortages that are caused by high turnover (Miah & Hafit, 2020). The problems faced by the hotel industry are attributed to many factors. For example, when employees experience lack of support, it is more likely for employees to show withdrawal attitudes which include the intention to leave the organisation (Abo-Murad & Abdullah, 2019). Samat, Hamid, Awang, Juahari, Ghazali and Nawawi (2020) indicate that organizations which provide the right support for its employees improves employees' loyalty towards the organisation, and at the same time, reduce negative feelings and thoughts about the organisation. Besides support, studies have also identified factors such as competition, which is apparent amongst hotels due to the developments in the hotel industry, the increase in environmental diversity, serious shortage of labour, an equivalent increase in labour turnover and cost of substituting employees as contributors to employee turnover (Phuong & Vinh, 2020; Razali et al., 2018).

Therefore, this study aims towards investigating the significant impacts of workplace environment, leader communication and job satisfaction on the retention of Malaysia's hotel employees. Since the role of job satisfaction as a mediator has also not been sufficiently focused, especially in the contexts of eastern culture and hospitality industry, the present study also explores the potential mediating effect of job satisfaction in the relationships between workplace environment and leader communication and hotel employee retention. In light of the trials and tribulations faced by the hotel industry, it is the intent of this research to further enhance the empirical knowledge of the significant impact of job satisfaction and its correlation with employee retention. Additionally, this research also seeks to augment the

knowledge on employee intention to leave their job and the importance of hotel management to improve its communication and work environment. Resulting from this, employee performance can be improved and this in turn, ensure their retention in the organization.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Employee Retention*

Employee retention can be explained as all that organisations are prepared to do in having and retaining skilled employees with them (Nguyen & Duong, 2020). Simply, employee retention relates to their perception to remain with the present workplace after considering factors such as salary, training, work environment, communication and job satisfaction. As researches have shown (see for example, De Winne et al., 2019; Simmons, 2020; Lin & Huang, 2020), employees who resign bring with them the expertise, investment and relationships. It is opined that the strategy undertaken by the organisation on matters relating to human resource policies and practices need to be specifically modelled to ensure that employee retention would be considered as a vital accomplishment. In relation to this, the hotel management needs to operationalise the necessary plans in order to ensure that there is enough workforce and also intensify the interaction with employees, enthusiasm, job satisfaction and atmosphere in the workplace (Holston-Okae, 2018).

Thus far, the turnover rates among hotel employees are worryingly high and have an influence on both organisational performance and employee morale. Although in many organisations, the decrease in the number of employees can be attributed to retirement, resignation or death (Nishiura, Inoue, Kashino, Nanri, Endo, Eguchi, ..., & Dohi, 2021), employee turnover remains a critical concern to most organisations. Therefore, organisations should comprehend the factors that motivate employees to commit themselves by being loyal and valuable (Phuong & Vinh, 2021). Thereby, retention is seen as the opposite of turnover, because it reflects the action of continuing or staying, rather than quitting or leaving the organisation (Choy & Kamoche, 2021). Hemalatha and Savarimuthu (2013), describes retention as the desire of organisations to keep their competent employees by focusing on three fundamental components; economics, supply chain and workforce. Consequently, employee retention signifies the diverse policies and practices that enable employees to continue working at their workplace for a long time (Dwesini, 2019; Pertiwi & Supartha, 2021).

Indeed, when a competent employee leaves the organisation, he or she forms a gap of vital skills, experience and business relationships (Nishiura et al., 2021), in addition to the monetary costs hidden in line, temporary recruitment, selection and training. In fact, skilled employees have more opportunities for employment than the average ones, and are most likely to leave the organisation. The higher rates of voluntary turnover are often disruptive and detrimental to the organisation. The predicament is further aggravated by the fact that many organisations, especially the larger ones, appear to recompense and appease new employees rather than their existing loyal employees (Rakhra, 2018). Arguably, the best way to keep employees is to heighten their level of job satisfaction and offer them a healthy working atmosphere.

### *Workplace Environment*

Meanwhile, the workplace environment can be explained as the workers' relationship with their workplace. It can be divided into social, technical and economic elements, and are embedded in organisational structure and management style (Luque-Vilchez, Mesa-Pérez,

Husillos, & Larrinaga, 2019). According to Amabile (2019), work environment does not only involve physical objects such as designs, tools and devices, but also psychosocial environment that is made up of worker and workplace safety, job security, agreement in decision making, relationships with colleagues and recognition (Lee, 2021). Studies (see for example, Frye, Kang, Huh, & Lee 2020; Halim & Azizan, 2017) have found that work environment influences the workers' decision to remain in the current workplace. Hence, in ensuring that the work environment is positive for the employees, the organisation should provide a healthy working environment and thus, improve their job satisfaction and enhance their work quality (Bangwal & Tiwari, 2019; Sadick, Kpamma & Agyefi-Mensah, 2020).

Asghar Tayyab, Gull, Zhijie, Shi and Tao (2021) study on hotel employees in Pakistan suggest that guidance from employers can reduce the level of turnover in the hospitality industry. Asghar et al. (2021) demonstrate how the role of specific guidance could reduce stress, enhance attitude, and reduce the hotel employees' intent to leave their job. Asghar et al. (2021) further indicate that the guidance from employers includes the offering of psychosocial support and setting up role models. Their findings also establish that the psychosocial support provided by the employer is among the aspects that stimulate the turnover intention.

Other than providing guidance, research has also found that support from leaders can reduce the work-family conflict on being emotionally drained and turnover intention (Gholitabar, Costa, & Tourian, 2020). The study which was conducted among frontline employees working for travel agencies revealed that support from leaders is the key factor in retaining employees. Their finding was consistent with findings from other studies (see for example, Bibi, Ahmad, & Majid, 2018; Farrukh, Kalimuthuan & Farrukh, 2019; Haque, Fernando & Caputi, 2019) which suggest that the decision of employees to stay or depart is also based on the management style. Haque et al. (2019) for instance, established that leadership roles influences employees' commitment and turnover intentions. In relation to this, leadership styles such as motivating, encouraging and showing empathy are found to affect employees' turnover intention (Gom, Lew, Jiony, Tanakinjal & Sondoh, 2021; Park & Min, 2020; Sahu, Pathardikar & Kumar, 2018). Clearly, these studies reveal that work environment is an important determinant of employee retention. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H1: Workplace Environment Has a Positive Effect on Employee Retention.*

While it is acknowledged that there have been numerous studies conducted on the relationship between work environment and job satisfaction, there is still little agreement on the relationship between these two variables (Al Sabei, Labrague, Miner Ross, Karkada, Albashayreh, Al Masroori & Al Hashmi, 2020; Singgih, Iskandar, Goestjahjanti, Fahlevi, Nadeak, Fahmi, ... & Purwanto, 2020). Tepayakul and Rinthaisong (2018) describe job satisfaction as the extent where employees are content with their work. Meanwhile, Khan, Butt, Abid and Rehman (2020) explain that job satisfaction consists of the combination of three categories; psychology, physiology, and environment that motivate employees to concede that they are satisfied with their work. Since those who work in the hospitality industry need to directly interact with their customers, employee satisfaction is a major concern due to its impact on the level of customer loyalty. Asaari, Desa and Subramaniam (2019) posit that factors such as work environment, recognition, responsibility accorded to the employees and the opportunity for personal progression and development of employees

can help them understand their value to the organisation. This will further elevate their level of motivation and inner pleasure, which will eventually lead to job satisfaction.

Additionally, Wang and Brower (2019) explain that work environment is pertinent to job satisfaction, especially for people who work in difficult situations. This requires that the management work towards improving the organisational atmosphere to ensure satisfaction among the employees, and that they are equally satisfied as those who work under normal situations. This will consequently improve the overall performance of the employee. Sanyal and Hisam (2018) further added that every organisation needs to establish an encouraging organisational environment that could stimulate employees to be more productive and valuable to the organisation. Their research also highlights how interpersonal relationships can be more important than the salary offered in ensuring job satisfaction. Likewise, management abilities, energy and time are all needed to improve the overall performance especially in the hospitality industry. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

*H2: Workplace Environment Has a Positive Effect on Job Satisfaction.*

#### *Leader Communication*

Leader communication is a key factor that contributes towards the increase in performance and job satisfaction, which in turn, leads to a favourable behaviour among employees, including employee intention to depart from the organisation (Yao, Qiu & Wei, 2019; Weaver, 2021). Previous studies (see for example, Brown, Paz-Aparicio, & Revilla, 2019; Cohrs, Bormann, Diebig, Millhoff, Pachocki & Rowold, 2019; LaGree, Houston, Duffy & Shin, 2021) have established that employee loyalty can only be attained among high levels of leader communication. The findings clearly denote that job performance, job satisfaction and retention are influenced by leader communication. Additionally, leader communication is an important factor in maintaining trust among employees (Men & Yue, 2019; Rabiul, Yean, Patwary & Hilman, 2021).

One of the key aspects behind the successful effort in ensuring employee retention is leader communication strategies. Research indicates that leadership models that integrate language as a fundamental characteristic also increase favourable effects on employees such as job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and performance (Shafique, Kalyar & Ahmad, 2018). Equally important, leader communication has also been recognised as the basis of meaningful variance. This includes the quality of message regarding goal setting, which is strongly associated with the previous organisational findings, which include the intention to leave (see for example, Arici, 2018; Brown et al., 2019).

Regardless, more studies are needed to further investigate the impacts of leader communication on crucial organisational outcomes. A number of research have suggested that leader communication elements such as role and task interpretations, performance feedback, and information sharing are strongly correlated with employee turnover intention (see for example, Aburumman, Salleh, Omar & Abadi, 2020; Ali, Lodhi, Raza & Ali, 2018; Shafique et al., 2018; Pravichai & Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2018; Shin, Hur, Park & Hwang, 2020; Vandenbergh, Landry, Bentein, Anseel, Mignonac & Rousset, 2021; Weaver, 2021). Thus, we propose the third hypothesis:

*H3: Leader Communication Has a Positive Effect on Employee Retention.*

### *Job Satisfaction*

Generally, job satisfaction precedes to successful employee performance, consequently, making them feel loyal to the organisation (Tepayakul & Rinthaisong, 2018). A study by Puhakka, Nokelainen and Pylväs (2021) indicates that job satisfaction affects employee retention. Furthermore, job satisfaction has shown to correlate positively with employee retention, and it is argued that if employees are dissatisfied with their work due to factors such as unsafe work conditions, uncooperative colleagues, supervisors who are not considerate in decision making; these factors will cause them to leave the organisation (Farrukh et al., 2019; Gholitabar et al., 2020; Redondo, Sparrow & Hernández-Lechuga, 2019; Stamolampros, Korfiatis, Chalvatzis & Buhalis, 2019). Alias, Rohmanan, Ismail, Koe and Othman (2018) highlight that organisations could not have dissatisfied employees as such employees would not achieve the assigned benchmarks or the leaders' expectations. This would result in them being dissatisfied and thereafter, end up leaving the organisation or being terminated by their superiors. Consequently, organisations need to cover additional costs for recruiting new employees. In order to reduce these costs, organisations need to offer a flexible working environment, make their employees feel that their thoughts are valued, and they belong to the organisation. The employees' self-esteem should be at a high level as it will be manifested in their attitude towards work. Low self-esteem would result in them failing to improve themselves.

Likewise, past studies have established that leader communication also poses a crucial impact on job satisfaction; an approach that has been strongly associated with turnover intention (Allen, 2018; Chan & Ao, 2019; Yang, Kuria, & Gu, 2020). Employees who report to have a high-level of communication with their leader are more likely to be satisfied with the condition in their organisation (Brown et al., 2019; Kim, McGinley, Choi & Agmapisarn, 2020). Prior research indicates that relational communications involving the exchange of information between leaders and employees can have major consequences on job satisfaction, organisational commitment and burnout (MacDonald, Kelly & Christen, 2019; Rabiul et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2020). Generally, when employees have positive communication with their leaders, they also exhibit positive outcomes in their line of work. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H4: Leader Communication Has A Positive Effect on Job Satisfaction.*

The triumph of the hotel industry immensely depends on the employees' satisfaction. In this regard, employees who possess a sense of satisfaction with their current role will also have the accountability to perform their best, resulting in the positive progression in the quality of service. In the context of the hospitality industry, employees play a significant role when it comes to the quality of service, due to the inability of machines to alter the quality and service provided by the hotel employees (Halim, Bakar & Mohamad, 2019; Halim, Mustaffa & Azizan, 2020; Ismail, Wahab, Ismail & Latiff 2019). Consequently, the attitude and behaviour of the employees are very important to the quality of service offered by the hotel, which consequently shape the degree of customer satisfaction. It is with this understanding that only the finest services should be offered to customers considering the dynamic and competitive environment of the hotel industry (Chan & Ao, 2019), to foster a maintainable competitive advantage.

Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge the causes that affect the level of job satisfaction among hotel employees, as satisfied employees will deliver a greater service to customers (Koo, Yu, Chua, Lee & Han, 2020). In the hotel industry, a high level of customer satisfaction can help hotels to generate more profit (Sanchez-Rebull, Rudchenko & Martín, 2018). As the hotel industry is also experiencing a shortage of workers, with the average turnover rate of over 65 per cent per annum (Bangwal & Tiwari, 2019), it is crucial that studies are being conducted to identify the determinants of employee satisfaction within the industry. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

*H5: Job Satisfaction Has A Positive Effect on Employee Retention.*

With regard to this, Herzberg's Two-Factor Motivation-Hygiene Theory (Herzberg, 1966) was chosen as a guide towards developing the understanding of the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between workplace environment, leader communication and employee retention. The theory explains the relationships between employee job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction based on the workplace situation. This theory indicates that hygiene and motivation are the linking factors between these variables. Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (1959) posit that poor hygiene factors affect employees negatively and lead them to experience job dissatisfaction. However, the motivational factors enable employees to move from job dissatisfaction to job satisfaction. The finding from Lawson and Frimpong (2021) study was consistent with the theory as it revealed that hygiene factors were crucial towards ensuring job satisfaction among the samples being studied.

Although the hygiene factors (Herzberg et al., 1959) are not directly related to the job itself, they concern the conditions that relate to the performance of such a job. These include conditions such as the reward system, salary, working environment and interpersonal relations (Herzberg et al., 1959; Taba, 2018). According to Herzberg (1966), when these factors are satisfied, it can motivate the employees to stay in the organisation. Herzberg's theory has also been applied and adapted in studies relating to the hospitality industry. For instance, Balwa's (2021) study focuses on job satisfaction in the accommodation sector by focusing on various hygiene factors including facilities, tools, lighting, noise, ventilation and the cooperation between superior and subordinates. The findings indicate that Herzberg's model is relevant when attempting to understand job motivation in the hospitality industry.

To further comprehend job satisfaction among employees, Sell and Cleal (2011) advanced a job satisfaction model by incorporating the economic variables and work environment variables. Their main focus was to identify how employees reacted to different work settings. They separated the respondents into two groups; (i) those in high-risk work environments with high financial remunerations; and (ii) low-risk work environments with low financial remunerations. They discovered that psychosocial factors and work environments such as social support had a direct effect on job satisfaction, while increasing rewards did not increase the level of employee dissatisfaction. Leaders who have the ability to spend their time when needed, connect with employees, encourage creative thinking, be open-minded and respect the employees' knowledge, and the capability of effectively communicating with employees are the hallmarks of supervision. This explains how commendable and effective management improves job satisfaction among employees (Garcia-Rodriguez, Dorta-Afonso & González-de-la-Rosa, 2020; Umrani, Afsar, Khan & Ahmed, 2019). This is consistent with the findings from Puhakka et al.'s (2021) study described earlier, which suggested that in order to increase job satisfaction in a difficult work environment, it is imperative for an organisation's

management to improve their working conditions so that they are compliant with the employees who work normally. Thus, improving the overall performance of the organisation. In relation, Torlak and Kuzey (2019) also suggest that interpersonal relationships, as well as recognition and supervision will enhance job satisfaction among employees.

On the other hand, Alam and Asim (2019) stress that job satisfaction has also been found to correlate negatively with turnover intention. This indicates that the effect of job satisfaction on hotel employee retention can be enhanced by several factors such as salary, working environment, autonomy, leader communication and organisational commitment. Loyalty towards the organisation is developed when an employee is satisfied with their job, and consequently leads to the intent to serve the organisation for a longer duration.

In sum, findings from past studies have clearly established significant relationships between workplace environment, leader communication and employee retention (Sadick et al., 2020; Tepayakul & Rinthaisong, 2018; Weaver, 2021), workplace environment, leader communication and job satisfaction (Rabiul et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2020), and job satisfaction and employee retention (Farrukh et al., 2019; Puhakka et al., 2021). Therefore, it can be assumed that job satisfaction could be a mechanism that would mediate the relationship between workplace environment, leader communication and employee retention. Accordingly, we hypothesise that:

*H6: Job Satisfaction Mediates the Relationship Between Workplace Environment, Leader Communication and Employee Retention.*

Based on the discussions and proposed hypotheses presented above, we develop a research framework (as illustrated in Figure 1) that explains the factors contributing towards employee retention in Malaysia's hotel industry. While workplace environment and leader communication have been included as independent variables in this study, job satisfaction acts as a mediating variable that explains the association between the independent and dependent variables. Employee retention serves as a dependent variable.

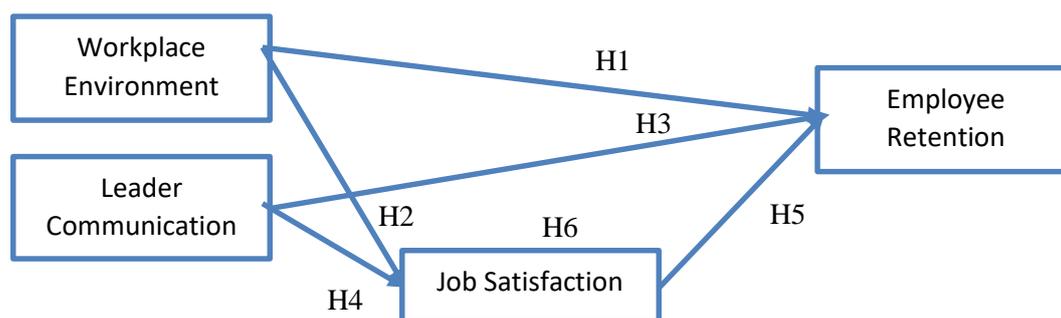


Figure 1: Research Framework

## METHODOLOGY

### *Participants*

The participants of the study were the low-level to mid-level hotel employees working with 3-star and 4-star hotels located in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. These hotel categories were chosen due to their sincere intent towards the implementation and execution practices in addressing the high turnover rate among its employees. A systematic and disproportionate sampling techniques were employed in the present study. The hotels selection was made

based on the systematic sampling technique, while the disproportionate sampling technique (i.e. the stratified random sampling) was utilised in the sample selection from each identified hotel.

Since the total population of hotel employees was not available, the researchers sent a request to the Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) to obtain information on the total number of hotels in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor that were registered with the association. Subsequently, the population of hotel employees was drawn from the discussion between the participating hotels' Human Resource (HR) Managers and the researchers. The sampling frame for the present study was a list of all the employees attached to the 3- and 4-star hotels located in the Klang Valley area. From the sampling frame, it was identified that there were about 5200 employees hired by these hotels at one time, and the figures consisted of part-time and full-time employees. The frontline positions consisted of the receptionists, customer services staff, food and beverages staff, security, maintenance staff, housekeeping staff and general managers, all of whom were crucial to the hotel industry. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) method of sampling, the researchers identified that the sample size for the present study was 357. Yet, the researchers distributed 550 questionnaires after considering the suggestion made by Lovelock, Stiff, Cullwick and Kaufman (1976) which indicated that the response rate for a drop and collect method was normally up to 70%.

Based on the list of employees obtained from the hotels, we randomly selected the samples. The questionnaires were then sent to the HR Managers of the identified hotels. The Human Resource office then distributed the questionnaires to the hotel employees. Out of 550 self-administered questionnaires being distributed, a total of 351 questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 63.8 percent. However, only 329 questionnaires were identified as usable, representing a 59.8 percent response rate, and this was considered acceptable for data analysis.

### *Instrumentation*

The measurement for the employee retention scale was adapted from Abbasi and Hollman (2000) and Fitz-enz (1990), which consisted of 10 items (e.g., I plan to leave this organisation as soon as possible). The job satisfaction scale was developed by Blau (1987) and Susskind, Borchgrevink, Kacmar and Brymer (2000), which consisted of nine items (e.g., My work in this practice has met my expectations). Meanwhile, the workplace environment scale was developed by Buhai, Cottini and Nielseny (2008), and it consisted of six items (e.g., I feel satisfied with the temperature and can enjoy fresh air in my workplace). As for leader communication, the scale was developed by Mayfield and Mayfield (2007), which consisted of seven items (e.g., I receive in time the information needed to do my job). All measurements utilised a five-point Likert-scale format, and all composite scores resulted from the summated items in each scale. The evaluations for scale reliability stipulate that the items measured the target constructs appropriately. The Cronbach's alpha scores for each construct was as follows: employee retention, 0.90; job satisfaction, 0.94; workplace environment, 0.90; and leader communication, 0.89.

## FINDINGS

### *Participants Characteristics*

The analysis showed that most of the respondents were between the age group of 26 and 35 years old, accounting for 44.1 per cent of the total respondents. A majority of the respondents were female, representing about 57.1 percent and the remaining 42.9 percent were male.

The results also revealed that 48.3 per cent of the respondents had been with the organisation less than 3 years, while only 3.6 per cent had been with the organisation between 12-15 years. As for job designation, a majority of the respondents were the support staff of the hotel (49.2 per cent), followed by 20.7 percent Assistant Managers, 16.4 percent Chefs, 12.8 percent Managers and 0.9 percent hold other positions at the hotel. Most of the respondents were from the Front Office, accounting for 22.8 per cent of the total respondents, 14.9 percent from Housekeeping and Finance department, 13.4 percent from Food and Beverages, 9.7 per cent were from the Human Resource department, 8.5 per cent were from the Kitchen, and 15.8 percent from other departments in the hotel.

### Descriptive Analysis

An illustration of the means, standard deviations and correlations of the variables being studied is provided in Table 1. The zero-order correlation indicates that workplace environment and leader communication are found to be significantly positively correlated to employee retention ( $r=0.354$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and job satisfaction ( $r=0.648$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, job satisfaction is found to be positively correlated to employee retention ( $r=0.262$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). In addition, an examination of the variance inflation factors (VIFs) indicates the VIFs in all models to be lower than 10. Hence, all variables could be retained in the regression analysis (Neter, Wasserman & Kutner, 1985).

Table 1: Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
Workplace environment	3.90	0.66	1			
Leader communication	4.06	0.71	0.728**	1		
Job satisfaction	3.97	0.62	0.775**	0.778*	1	
Employee retention	3.70	0.59	0.556**	0.647**	0.668**	1

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

### Hypotheses Results

Hypotheses 1 to 5 were tested using a multiple regression technique. Table 2 illustrates that workplace environment, leader communication and job satisfaction were positively correlated and significantly contributed to the prediction of employee retention at the .01 levels ( $\beta=.196$ ,  $t=2.959$ ;  $\beta=.543$ ,  $t=7.196$ ;  $\beta=.668$ ,  $t=16.212$ ). The results also indicate that all the variables explain 43.5% ( $F=83.331$ ,  $p < .01$ ) of the variance in employee retention. In addition, the results show that workplace environment and leader communication were significantly related to job satisfaction ( $\beta=.356$ ,  $t=7.585$ ;  $\beta=.306$ ,  $t=5.721$ ). All variables explain 71.7% ( $F=273.796$ ,  $p < .01$ ) of the variance in job satisfaction. Therefore, H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5 were accepted.

Table 2: Regression summary for direct relationships

Predictors	Employees' retention		Job satisfaction	
	Std. $\beta$	t-value	Std. $\beta$	t-value
Workplace environment	.196**	2.959	.356**	7.585
Leader communication	.543**	7.196	.306**	5.721
Job satisfaction	.668**	16.212		
R <sup>2</sup>		.435		.717
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		.430		.714
F-value		83.331		273.796
Sig.		.000		.000

Note: \*\* p <0.01; \* p < 0.05

For the purpose of this study, the regression coefficients for each equation were estimated using the multiple regression analyses performed according to the criteria suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). To reiterate whether mediation effects occurred in this study, the four criteria proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) were first considered: (i) the independent variables (i.e. workplace environment, leader communication) must predict the dependent variable (i.e. employee retention); (ii) the independent variable (i.e. workplace environment, leader communication) must envisage the mediating variable (i.e. job satisfaction); (iii) the mediator (job satisfaction) must predict the dependent variable (employee retention); and (iv) the predictive utility of the independent variable (i.e. workplace environment, leader communication) must be reduced, in comparison to condition (i), when the independent variable (i.e. workplace environment, leader communication) and the mediator (i.e. job satisfaction) are used simultaneously to predict the dependent variable (employee retention).

The results presented in Table 3 indicate that workplace environment was significantly related to job satisfaction ( $\beta=.356$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and employee retention ( $\beta=.196$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and job satisfaction was also significantly related to employee retention ( $\beta=.668$ ,  $p<.01$ ). However, when job satisfaction intervened, the relationship between workplace environment and employee retention became insignificant. This explained that job satisfaction fully mediated the relationship between workplace environment and employee retention. In addition, the result also demonstrated that the beta coefficient (.033) between workplace environment and employee retention reduced in absolute size in the presence of job satisfaction. This beta coefficient was not only smaller than the total effect between workplace environment and employee retention, but also became insignificant; this suggested a full mediation of job satisfaction on the relationship between workplace environment and employee retention.

As shown in Table 3, there was also a significant correlation between leader communication and job satisfaction ( $\beta=.306$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and employee retention ( $\beta=.543$ ,  $p<.01$ ). There was also a significant relationship between job satisfaction and employee retention ( $\beta=.668$ ,  $p<.01$ ). However, in the presence of job satisfaction, the relationship between leader communication and employee retention became significant ( $\beta=.403$ ,  $p<.01$ ); thus, implying partial mediation. Besides, in the presence of job satisfaction, the beta coefficient value (as shown in Table 3) between leader communication and employee retention was significant and became smaller in comparison with the beta coefficient between leader communication and employee retention. This suggests that job satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between leader communication and employee retention. Therefore, H6 was accepted. Overall, the findings supported the proposed framework of the study. In sum, the findings demonstrate that workplace environment and leader communication show significant

relationships with employee retention while job satisfaction mediates the relationship among workplace environment, leader communication and employee retention.

Table 3: Regression summary for mediation

Predictor	Std. $\beta$ X-M	Std. $\beta$ M-Y	Std. $\beta$ X-Y	Std. $\beta$ X-M-Y
X=				
Workplace environment	<b>.356**</b>	<b>.668**</b>	<b>.196**</b>	.033
Leader communication	<b>.306**</b>		<b>.543**</b>	<b>.403**</b>
M= Job satisfaction				.459**
R2	.717	.446	.435	.495
Adjusted R2	.714	.444	.430	.488
F-change	273.796**	262.816**	83.331**	79.25**

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ ; X = workplace environment, leader communication; M = job satisfaction; Y = employees' retention

## DISCUSSIONS

The findings validate the crucial affiliation among workplace environment, leader communication, job satisfaction and employee retention, and support previous studies (see for example Bangwal & Tiwari, 2019; Frye et al., 2020; Halim & Azizan, 2017) on the importance of workplace environment and employee retention. This is further substantiated with a past study by Sahu et al. (2018) which found that the effectiveness of leader communication vividly impacts the behavioural intent of employees. The findings are also consistent with the study by Farrukh et al. (2019) which produced an encouraging relationship between job satisfaction and the employees' loyalty to the organisation. Overall, these studies reveal that workplace environment, leader communication and job satisfaction are significant factors that contribute towards employee retention. In increasing the performance of employees, the strategies applied by the hotel management need to emphasise positive working conditions.

Our findings also demonstrate that job satisfaction mediates the relationships between workplace environment, leader communication and employee retention. This is consistent with previous work by Asghar et al. (2021) which indicated that the main reason workers leave the organisation is due to internal problems such as poor working environment and lack of effectiveness in leader communication, and this will ultimately affect employee job satisfaction. According to Asaari et al. (2019) job satisfaction is about an individual's satisfaction in meeting their needs, desires and expectations of the job being performed and their study has found that a better working environment enhances job satisfaction, and in turn, leads to employee commitment to the organisation. Satisfied employees tend to be more productive, have an increase in creativity and would end up being loyal to their organisation.

As discussed earlier, the motivation-hygiene theory explains the fundamental requirement for job satisfaction and employee turnover. To the employees, working environment and employer support are the most significant factors that can promote their interest in organisational activities. The findings of this study prove the assumption that employees have individual needs which motivate their actions toward an intention. This theory also explains how motivation derives employee intention towards remaining with the organisation (Dhamija, Gupta, & Bag, 2019).

Thus, it is essential for the leaders in the hotel industry to consider work environment, leader communication, job satisfaction and employee retention in strategising their business. This is even more so considering the continuous expansion of Malaysia's hotel industry since the early 90s and its significant role as the primary economic contributor to the country (Halim, Bakar & Mustafa, 2016; Salem, 2021; Shamsudin, Esa & Ali, 2019; Yusoff, Nejati, Kee & Amran, 2020). As suggested by Nazar, Jahan, Amoozegar, Anjum and Raju (2020), innovation and improvement in the quality of service are key components to be considered by the Malaysian hotel industry. Employees that are satisfied would generally result in the improved quality of service.

Additionally, profitability and progression of the industry are dependent on job satisfaction and employee retention. Hotel management and policy makers could utilize the findings from this study and use them as a reference when making decisions that are related for example, to hiring policy, salary, work environment, leadership, and communication. Evidently, organisations must pay attention to their employees' satisfaction. Accordingly, besides contributing towards new knowledge, the mediating effect of job satisfaction on the relationship between work environment, leader communication and employee retention, this study enhances the knowledge about employee retention. The findings also serve to create consciousness among the above parties so that they can be more aware of the factors that contribute to employee turnover, take appropriate action when it comes to the management of the organisation, and either work towards modifying or creating new rules and regulations pertaining to the work environment that organisations must adhere to in order to safeguard the Malaysian workforce, particularly those concerning the hospitality industry.

#### *Research Limitations*

Besides its significance, the present study also has its limitations. As the present study is constrained only to a specific area, there are limitations in the generalisation of the findings to another organisational environment. Hence, the researchers believe that if the study is being conducted throughout Malaysia, it might offer a better scenario of the performance of Malaysia's hotel industry, especially in relation to employee retention. Moreover, since these findings could be influenced by a small sample size, larger samples are needed to confirm the relationships between variables. Additionally, the present study is also restricted towards examining workplace environment and leader communication as independent variables, job satisfaction as a mediating variable, and employee retention as a dependent variable. Future studies should consider other variables such as job motivation, organisational culture, remuneration, burnout and work autonomy when investigating employee retention.

#### CONCLUSION

The outcome from the present study may assist in creating awareness of the significance of work environment, leadership communication and job satisfaction and in turn, reduce employee turnover in the hotel industry. Leaders and managers in the hotel industry need to put their right foot forward and design appropriate strategies to ensure that employees remain with the organisations for a long period of time. In relation to that, the management needs to be mindful on how to create a positive and challenging work environment to ensure that employees achieve the organisational goals. As a result, these employees will most likely remain loyal with the organization due to their increased level of satisfaction. Focus should also be given by leaders on the need to foster a positive environment with the aim of maintaining employee satisfaction and well-being. It is imperative for every employer to

appreciate that the satisfaction of hotel guests is dependent on their employees. Consequently, the most important part is to ensure that employees also feel the same in order to display such positive behaviour and experience to the hotel guests. The strength to regulate the employees' value and establish job satisfaction is key in the present global economy.

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