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Reducing Employee Turnover Rates in the F&B Sector

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Abstract

The global hospitality industry and F&B sector is plagued by high employee turnover rates, which detracts consumers' perception of service value, satisfaction, and loyalty. Although research is available regarding the identification of factors contributing to high employee turnover rates; and retention strategies, few studies identify strategies that have been most effective in mitigating employee turnover rates during the COVID-19 pandemic or strategies that will remain effective in a post-COVID future. Therefore, the researcher aims to answer the questions: "What retention strategies have been most effective in decreasing employee turnover rates within the F&B sector both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic?"; and "What strategies will remain effective in a post-COVID future?" To answer these questions, the researcher utilized a mixed-methods approach while focusing on scholarly articles regarding turnover rates in the hospitality industry and F&B sector; the identification of factors which contribute to employee turnover and job motivation; employee retention strategies; employees' perception of retention strategies; the effect retention strategies have on turnover; and recommended strategies for a post-COVID future. In this study, the researcher first discusses the pervasive problem of high employee turnover rates; the contributing factors of employee turnover and job motivation; effective employee retention strategies; employees' perception of retention strategies; the effect retention strategies have on turnover; and subsequently recommends strategies for a post-COVID future. Finally, the researcher discusses gaps in current knowledge; this study's limitations and implications; and suggests future research opportunities.

Keywords: Employee turnover; employee job motivation; employee retention; hospitality industry; food and beverage sector; and COVID-19.

The hospitality industry “is a highly guest-service oriented business,” where encounters between employees and guests can determine an organization's success (Santhanam et al., 2014, p. 76). The industry consists of several sectors including lodging, F&B, recreation, travel, and tourism (EHL Insights, n.d.).

Today, hospitality is “one of the fastest global rising industries” and contributes “to more than one third of the service business” (AlBattat et al., 2014, p. 45). It is also considered one of the most successful industries due to its contribution to the global economy (AlBattat et al., 2013). Because of the service-oriented nature of the hospitality industry, organizations must rely heavily “on the human factor and direct contact with” consumers (AlBattat et al., 2014, p. 45). Unfortunately, the industry is plagued by the pervasive problem of high employee turnover rates, which negatively impacts consumers’ perception of service value, satisfaction, and loyalty (O’Fallon & Rutherford, 2011).

As a component of the hospitality industry, the F&B sector also faces the challenge of high employee turnover rates. According to DiPietro and Milman (2004), the average turnover rate for hourly employees working at high profile restaurant chains is reported to be 104% and the average turnover rate for managers is 25%. The turnover rate for the quick service segment of the F&B sector is even higher than that for the overall hospitality industry, with a “combined turnover rate of hourly and salaried employees at over 150% annually” (DiPietro & Milman, 2004, p. 34). A higher turnover rate in the quick service segment can be attributed “to the lower median age of the employees, limited experience of the workforce, and higher demands associated with working conditions” (DiPietro & Milman, 2004, p. 34).

To mitigate the impact of high employee turnover rates, F&B professionals should identify and implement retention strategies that decrease employees’ turnover intentions, while

improving the public's perception of the hospitality industry's F&B sector. Therefore, the researcher aims to answer the questions: "What retention strategies have been most effective in decreasing employee turnover rates within the F&B sector both before and during COVID-19?" and "What strategies will remain effective in a post-COVID future?"

To answer this question, the researcher focused on current scholarly articles regarding turnover rates in the hospitality industry; the identification of factors which contribute to turnover; the identification of job motivation factors; employee retention strategies; employees' perception of retention strategies; the effect retention strategies have on turnover; and recommended strategies for a post-COVID future. These themes are discussed in more detail below as well as a section regarding the results of the literature review, gaps in current knowledge, this study's limitations and implications, and opportunities for future research.

Literature Review

To ensure the relevance and validity of this study, the researcher utilized several scholarly and professional databases, including EHL Insights; Emerald Insight; ResearchGate; Sage Journals; and Science Direct to identify articles regarding turnover rates in the hospitality industry and F&B sector; the identification of factors which contribute to turnover; the identification of job motivation factors; employee retention strategies; employees' perception of retention strategies; the effect retention strategies have on turnover; and, recommended strategies for a post-COVID future. The selected articles were written within the last 20 years by sources of authority, including scholars and professors at major universities like Johnson & Wales and Purdue; hospitality experts; senior associate editors; and professional writers. The selected articles also utilized a variety of methodologies including comparative, conceptual, empirical, experimental, exploratory, theoretical, and quasi-experimental qualitative, quantitative, and

mixed method research; conceptual, theoretical, and experimental research; purposeful sampling; and qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method surveys and questionnaires.

High Employee Turnover Rates

The main theme identified in current research regards the problem of high employee turnover rates in the hospitality industry and more specifically, the F&B sector (Riegel, 2011). For the purposes of this study, turnover is defined as the percentage of employees who willingly leave an organization within a specific period of time (Warren, n.d.). Although turnover can be expected in any industry, the problem is more significant for the hospitality industry and F&B sector because its employee turnover rate consistently doubles the national turnover rate average for all other industries (Cicerale, 2020; Robinson, 2021). Turnover is also a more significant problem for the hospitality industry and F&B sector because it compounds already existing workforce shortages, decreases employee satisfaction levels, and reduces an organization's overall profitability (Bonn & Forbringer, 1992; Riegel, 2011). To mitigate the problem, researchers suggest that F&B professionals identify and analyze the factors which contribute to high employee turnover rates within an organization before developing and implementing retention strategies (Bonn & Forbringer, 1992; Dwesini, 2019).

Contributing Factors of Turnover

The problem of high employee turnover rates can be attributed to several significant factors. These include employee job satisfaction, retention programs, working conditions, organizational culture, regular and competitive compensation, and benefit packages (AlBattat et al., 2014; Cicerale, 2020; Dwesini, 2019; O'Fallon & Rutherford, 2011; Riegel, 2011; Robinson, 2021). Therefore, F&B professionals must identify and successfully implement strategies that

have a positive effect on employees' turnover intention to reduce turnover rates within an organization.

Employee Job Motivation Factors

Although there are many factors which contribute to employee job motivation, current research states the most significant factors for independent and chain restaurants include management styles; compensation and benefit; cash and non-cash incentives; bonuses; work environment; opportunities for participation; training and mentorship programs; recognition; opportunities for promotion; relationships with coworkers; and flexible yet consistent scheduling (Basnyat & Lao, 2009; Dermody et al., 2004; DiPietro & Milman, 2004; Khalid & Nawab, 2018). These factors are identified as significant because they appear most frequently in current research regarding employee job motivation and the impact that they have on employee turnover intention (Basnyat & Lao, 2009; Khalid & Nawab, 2018). By recognizing the contributing factors of employee job motivation within an organization, F&B professionals can successfully select and implement retention strategies that are effective in improving employee satisfaction and reducing employee turnover rates.

Employee Retention Strategies

While there are many strategies designed to address the factors which contribute to employee turnover and job motivation, the present study focuses on retention strategies that have been identified by researchers as most effective. These strategies include the implementation of human resource management practices (HRM) like regular and competitive compensation packages; cash and non-cash incentives; reward programs; training and development programs; timely performance reviews; promotional opportunities; adequate staffing; flexible yet consistent scheduling; employee participation programs; practices which ensure a supportive work

environment; and the adoption of an organizational culture that engages employees at the basic level (Basnyat & Lao, 2019; Bonn & Forbringer, 1992; Cho et al., 2006; DiPietro & Milman, 2004; Dwesini, 2019; Santhanam et al., 2014). According to Cho et al. and Madera, et al. (2006; 2017), the effective implementation of HRM practices can have a notable impact on firm performance and hourly employee turnover rates in the F&B sector.

Employees' Perception of Retention Strategies

Although the proper selection of retention strategies is a critical step in reducing employee turnover rates within an F&B organization, current studies regarding employees' perceptions on the relationship between retention strategies and employee turnover found that how an organization's human resources (HR) department manages its procedures and encourages organizational culture can have a significant positive impact on employees' turnover intentions (Basnyat & Lao, 2019; Robinson, 2021). For example, if an organization fails to provide proper training in the beginning, it becomes a precedent, and will eventually lead to increased turnover intentions in the future (Basnyat & Lao, 2019; Robinson, 2021). Current research states that the implementation of effective retention strategies "typically rests with line managers who influence critical employee outcomes like, employee turnover intent, job satisfaction, job performance, and procedural justice perceptions" (Robinson 2021; Sikora & Ferris, 2014, p. 272). Therefore, F&B managers and employers must recognize their role in the successful implementation of retention strategies and not take for granted their guidelines regarding labor; training and development; employee participation programs; relationship building; respect; and a harmonious workflow (AlBattat et al., 2013; Khalid & Nawab, 2018; Madera et al., 2017; Robinson, 2021). Unfortunately, an F&B manager's ability and/or willingness to execute an organization's retention strategies is influenced by social context factors (Robinson, 2021; Sikora

& Ferris, 2014). These factors include “social interactions, organizational culture, organizational climate, and political considerations” (Sikora & Ferris, 2014, p. 272). Therefore, it is of utmost importance that an F&B organization’s owner or HR department ensures the effective implementation of retention strategies by its managers through the creation of an organizational culture that is supportive and an organizational climate that emphasizes strategy implementation, goals, and rewards (Robinson, 2021; Sikora & Ferris, 2014).

Effect on Turnover

Cho, Woods, Jang, and Erdem’s (2006) quantitative study regarding the relationship between HRM practices and organizational performance as “measured by turnover rates for managerial and non-managerial employees, labor productivity, and return on assets” (ROA) illustrated the positive effect retention strategies can have in reducing employee turnover rates within F&B organizations (pp. 262 & 274; Robinson, 2021). Examples of HRM practices that are effective in reducing employee turnover rates within F & B organizations include the utilization of regular and competitive compensation packages, employee participation programs, incentive plans, performance reviews, bonuses, opportunities for promotion, and comprehensive training programs (Cho et al., 2006).

Kadiresan, Selamat, Selladurai, & Mohamed’s (2015) qualitative study regarding the important role HRM practices have in establishing and sustaining an F&B organization’s competitive advantage determined that well-designed HRM practices not only enhance employee productivity and performance levels but can also positively affect employees’ attitudes and behaviors (Kadiresan et al., 2015; Robinson, 2021). They also determined that well-designed HRM practices can increase employees’ level of organizational embeddedness and commitment, in turn reducing employees’ turnover intention and mitigating high employee turnover rates

within an F&B organization (Kadiresan et al., 2015). HRM practices identified as effective in mitigating high employee turnover rates within F&B organizations include the utilization of employee participation programs, timely performance appraisals, comprehensive training and development programs, and regular and competitive compensation programs.

Dermody, Young, and Taylor's (2004) exploratory qualitative study regarding the identification of job motivation factors and their effect on employees' turnover intention illustrates the positive impact retention strategies like the utilization of regular and competitive competition packages, incentive pay programs, cash bonuses and non-cash prizes for good performance, flexible scheduling, comprehensive training programs, opportunities for raises and promotions, employee participation programs, and the creation of mentorship programs can have on employee job satisfaction and turnover rates in the F&B sector. Their study also identified compensation and monetary awards as the most important motivational factor for employees at both independent and chain restaurants (Dermody et al., 2004).

DiPietro & Milman's (2004) qualitative study regarding the exploration of "employees' perceptions on employment characteristics that kept them from changing jobs" revealed that the most important characteristics are "nice people to work with, a humane approach to employees, and hourly wages" (p. 31). The identification of these characteristics are beneficial to the F&B industry because it will allow F&B "organizations to develop appropriate strategies to enhance retention among hourly employees" (DiPietro & Milman, 2004, p. 35). DiPietro & Millman (2004) also identify retention strategies that are effective in reducing employee turnover rates within F&B organizations. These strategies include the utilization of flexible yet consistent scheduling, regular and competitive compensation packages, performance reviews, bonuses,

benefits, advancement opportunities, comprehensive training, on the job education, prizes, paid time-off, and ensuring the human treatment of employees.

Khalid & Nawab's (2018) quantitative study regarding "the relationship between types of employee participation (delegative, consultative, worker director, and worker union) on employee retention and the moderation of employee compensation on this relationship" determined that "all forms of employee participation had a significant positive relationship with employee retention" (pp. 1 & 13). For example, when F&B organizations provide employees with opportunities of participation in decisions related to their job, employee retention increases (Khalid & Nawab, 2018). Their study also determined that to enhance employee retention within an F&B organization managers must "design both direct and indirect forms of employee participation and employee compensation vigilantly" (Khalid & Nawab, 2018, pp. 1 & 13-14).

Bonn & Forbringer's (1992) literature review regarding recruitment, selection, and retention programs offers a useful theoretical model for managers looking to take a strategic approach when determining what strategies are appropriate for reducing employee turnover rates within an F&B organization (Robinson, 2021). They also recognize the importance of identifying and analyzing the factors which contribute to high employee turnover rates within an F&B organization through internal analysis and exit interviews before selecting and implementing retention strategies (Bonn & Forbringer, 1992). By recognizing these factors, F&B organizations and managers can select strategies that are effective in reducing employee turnover rates. Examples of effective retention strategies include comprehensive training programs, and monetary and educational incentives (Bonn & Forbringer, 1992).

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that F&B owners and managers not only acknowledge the factors which contribute to job motivation and employee turnover within an

organization, but that they understand how to successfully select and implement HRM and retention strategies that are effective in increasing employee job satisfaction and reducing turnover intentions (Robinson, 2021). Through this comprehension, F&B managers have the capability to diminish employee turnover rates and ultimately, improve an organization's overall profitability.

Recommended Retention Strategies for the Future

Although current research identifies several retention strategies that are effective in increasing employee job satisfaction and reducing turnover intentions, F&B organizations have had to shift their HRM practices and retention strategies because of the COVID-19 pandemic. New retention strategies include avoiding layoffs via cost restructuring and salary cuts for upper-level management; the provision of temporary jobs with leading F&B organizations; and, supplying funds to cover employees without social security or medical insurance (Sogno, 2020). Retention strategies that have remained effective during the COVID-19 pandemic include the utilization of flexible scheduling, employee participation programs, regular and competitive compensation, performance appraisals, the creation of mentorship programs, opportunities for career development, raises, and promotions (Amador de San José, 2021; Halsey, 2020). These strategies have remained effective during the COVID-19 pandemic because they address key factors which contribute to employee job motivation and employee turnover within an F&B organization.

Methodology

Due to the fact that current research regarding the pervasive problem of high turnover rates; the identification of factors contributing to employee turnover and job motivation; employee retention strategies; employees' perception of retention strategies; the effect retention

strategies have on turnover; and, recommended retention strategies for the hospitality industry and F&B sector has been conducted through varied approaches, this study utilized a mixed methods approach when conducting research. A mixed methods approach is best suited to answer the questions, “What retention strategies have been most effective in decreasing employee turnover rates within the F&B sector both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic?”; and, “What strategies will remain effective in a post-COVID future?” because it allows researchers to utilize “philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of collecting, analyzing, and mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches” during each phase of the research process (Galt, 2009, p. 22; Robinson, 2021). The utilization of a mixed methods approach “also allows researchers to gain an understanding of the research problem as a humanistic or idealistic approach while gaining insights regarding employees’ beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions” (Pathak et al., 2013, para. 2; Robinson, 2021). Other benefits of utilizing a mixed methods approach include the fact that it allows researchers to collect, analyze, and mix both quantitative and qualitative data into the study, and examine the impact specific HRM practices and retention strategies have on employee job motivation factors and on mitigating the factors contributing to turnover within F&B organizations (Robinson, 2021). Therefore, researchers should begin a study which utilizes a mixed methods approach regarding the long-term effects retention strategies have on employee turnover rates within F&B organizations (Robinson, 2021).

Results

The results of this study identify the most significant factors contributing to high employee turnover rates in the hospitality industry and F&B sector before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors include job satisfaction, retention programs, working

conditions, organizational culture, and compensation and benefit packages. The results also identify the most significant factors contributing to employee job motivation at independent and chain restaurants. These factors include management styles; compensation and benefits; cash and non-cash incentives; bonuses; work environment; opportunities for participation; training and mentorship programs; recognition; opportunities for promotion; relationships with coworkers; and, flexible yet consistent scheduling (Basnyat & Lao, 2009; Dermody, Younge, & Taylor, 2004; DiPietro & Milman, 2004; Khalid & Nawab, 2018). By recognizing the most significant factors contributing to high employee turnover rates and employee job motivation, hospitality and F&B professionals can select and implement strategies that are effective in mitigating employee turnover intention and reducing turnover rates within an organization. These strategies include the implementation of HRM like, regular and competitive compensation packages; cash and non-cash incentives; reward programs; training and development programs; timely performance reviews; promotional opportunities; adequate staffing; flexible yet consistent scheduling; employee participation programs; practices which ensure a supportive work environment; and, the adoption of an organizational culture that engages employees at the basic level (Basnyat & Lao, 2019; Bonn & Forbringer, 1992; Cho, Woods, Jang, & Erdem, 2006; DiPietro & Milman, 2004; Dwesini, 2019; Santhanam et al., 2014).

Although the results of this study identify strategies that have been effective in mitigating employee intention and reducing turnover rates within an F&B organization both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, it also identifies new retention strategies and strategies that will remain effective in a post-COVID future. These strategies include avoiding layoffs via cost restructuring and salary cuts for upper-level management; the provision of temporary jobs with leading F&B organizations; supplying funds to cover employees without social security or

medical insurance; the utilization of flexible scheduling; employee participation programs; regular and competitive compensation; timely performance appraisals; the creation of mentorship programs; opportunities for career development; and, the utilization of raises and promotions (Amador de San José, 2021; Halsey, 2020; Sogno, 2020).

Ultimately, the results of this study illustrates the positive effect retention strategies have in reducing employee turnover rates within hospitality and F&B organization's; determines that well-designed HRM practices not only enhance employee productivity and performance levels but also positively affects employees' attitudes and behaviors, which in turn reduces employees' turnover intention and mitigates turnover rates; illustrates the positive impact retention strategies have on employee job satisfaction and turnover rates; identifies compensation and monetary awards as the most important motivational factors for employees at both independent and chain restaurants'; reveals the most important characteristics as nice people to work with, a humane approach to employees, and hourly wages; determines that all forms of employee participation have a significant positive relationship with employee retention; recognizes the important role line managers have in designing both direct and indirect forms of employee participation programs; compensation packages; offers a theoretical model for line managers looking to take a strategic approach when determining what strategies are appropriate for reducing employee turnover rates within their organization; and, recognizes the importance of identifying and analyzing the factors contributing to high employee turnover rates within an organization through internal analysis and exit interviews before selecting and implementing retention strategies (Bonn & Forbringer, 1992; Cho et al., 2006, Dermody et al., 2004; DiPietro & Milman, 2004; Kadiresan et al., 2015; Khalid & Nawab, 2018; Robinson, 2021).

Limitations, Gaps in Knowledge, & Future Research Opportunities

Although this study explored the pervasive problem of high employee turnover rates in the hospitality industry and F&B industry, and identified the most significant factors contributing to high employee turnover rates; employee job motivation at independent and chain restaurants; HRM practices and retention strategies that were most effective in decreasing employee turnover rates both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic; and, HRM practices and retention strategies that will remain effective in a post-COVID future, it has several limitations. The limitations of this study include the fact that much of the research was conducted with small sample groups and in homogeneous geographic locations, like metropolitan cities located in the South-Eastern and Midwestern regions of the United States, and in countries like India, Malaysia, and Pakistan, making the results difficult to generalize and increasing the likeliness of bias and distortion; and, obtained utilizing a quantitative approach, which provides readers with a limited understanding of how to develop retention strategies while avoiding HRM practices that can lead to increased turnover intentions (AlBattat, 2013; Basnyat & Lao, 2019; Cho et al., 2006; Dermody et al., 2004; DiPietro & Milman, 2004; Kadiresan et al., 2015; Khalid & Nawab, 2018; Santhanam et al., 2014). Due to the limitations of this study, it is suggested that more research be conducted regarding the accuracy and generalizability of its findings.

The results of this study identifies gaps in current knowledge and identifies opportunities for future research. Gaps in current knowledge include a lack of qualitative data regarding the effect HRM practices and retention strategies have on an organization's financial performance; and the application of organizational level measures like, high-involvement work systems from CEOs and other top executives (Basnyat et al., 2019; Madera, 2017). Therefore, the results of this study suggest the need for hospitality and tourism researchers to examine performance; strategic HRM at the organizational level; a complete conceptual model linking organizational-

level strategic HRM and firm performance; and the need to design longitudinal and casual studies (Madera et al., 2017). Other future research opportunities include studies regarding the effect of performance appraisal on employee job satisfaction and retention regarding the contributing factors of turnover; HRM practices at the organizational level; the effects of HRM practices on employee performance; the financial outcomes of utilizing effective HRM practices; the integration of both macro and micro domains; and, the long-term effects of HRM on organizational performance (Cho et al., 2006; Kadiresan et al., 2015; Madera et al., 2017).

Implications

The results of this study are important for the hospitality industry and F&B sector because they provide significant new insights into existing knowledge regarding HRM practices and retention strategies, allowing hospitality professionals to address employees' needs more effectively. They are also important because they provide a "a suitable system to build a commitment to organizational employees relations and quality of service provided to ensure guest retention"; help HR practitioners understand the factors influencing line managers' HR implementation decisions and efforts; acknowledge the significance of considering employees' perception HRM practices; provide better insight into factors influencing line managers' HR practice implementation efforts, and the resulting employee outcomes; provides better insight into the factors potentially influencing line managers' HR practice implementation efforts, and the resulting employee outcomes; aid F&B professionals in the successful selection, planning, and implementation of HRM practices and retention strategies that are most effective; have a positive effect on employee job motivation and turnover intention; mitigate high employee turnover rates; and, positively impacts an organization's performance and overall profitability

(AlBattat, 2014, p. 49; Basnyat, 2019; Bonn, 1992; Cho et al., 2006; Madera et al., 2017; Santhanam et al., 2014; Sikora, 2014).

The results of this study can be utilized by F&B owners, hospitality professionals, and HR managers to successfully select and implement HRM practices and retention strategies that are effective in improving employee satisfaction, increasing employee job motivation, mitigating employee turnover rates, positively impacting firm performance, and improving an organization's overall profitability. They can also be utilized to more effectively target implementation efforts to address significant implementation gaps which in turn, leads to improved employee and organizational performance. An increased understanding of the factors contributing to line managers' implementation decisions also aids HR managers in focusing new HRM practices and retention strategies. The results of this study also provide industry professionals, line managers, and HR managers with better insight into line managers' perspectives of HRM practices and retention strategy implementation, therefore allowing HR managers to work more effectively with line workers (Robinson, 2021; Sikora, 2014). Finally, this study informs hospitality and F&B professionals of the effect HRM practices and employee retention strategies have on organizational commitment and employee turnover intentions and serves as a reference for researchers when conducting relevant future studies (Kadiresan et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Ultimately, this study examines the pervasive problem of high employee turnover rates in the hospitality industry and F&B sector, and answers the questions: "What retention strategies have been most effective in decreasing employee turnover rates within the F&B sector both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic?"; and "What strategies will remain effective in a

post-COVID future?” The results of this study determine the most significant factors contributing to high employee turnover rates and employee job motivation; identifies effective retention strategies; discusses employees’ perceptions of retention strategies; and analyzes the effect retention strategies have on employee turnover rates. Retention strategies that were identified as effective before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic include the implementation of human resource management practices (HRM) like regular and competitive compensation packages; cash and non-cash incentives; reward programs; training and development programs; timely performance reviews; promotional opportunities; adequate staffing; flexible yet consistent scheduling; employee participation programs; practices which ensure a supportive work environment; and the adoption of an organizational culture that engages employees at the basic level (Amador de San José, 2021; Basnyat & Lao, 2019; Bonn & Forbringer, 1992; Cho et al., 2006; DiPietro & Milman, 2004; Dwesini, 2019; Santhanam et al., 2014). New retention strategies that were identified to remain effective in a post-COVID future include avoiding layoffs via cost restructuring and salary cuts for upper-level management; the provision of temporary jobs with leading F&B organizations; and, supplying funds to cover employees without social security or medical insurance (Amador de San José, 2021; Halsey, 2020; Sogno, 2020). Finally, this study is significant for the hospitality industry and F&B sector because it provides researchers and professionals with important information regarding the successful selection and implementation of effective retention strategies.

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