



IZAZOVI, STRATEGIJE I UTICAJ RAVNOTEŽE IZMEĐU ŽIVOTA I POSLA NA DOBROBIT I EFIKASNOST ZAPOSLENIH U HOTELIMA ZAPADNE SRBIJE: STUDIJA SLUČAJA

CHALLENGES, STRATEGIES, AND THE IMPACT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE ON EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING AND EFFICIENCY IN HOTELS OF WESTERN SERBIA: A CASE STUDY

Knežević Snežana | Department of Medical Sciences, Academy of Applied Studies Polytechnic, Belgrade, Serbia; Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, University of Kragujevac, Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia | lesta59@yahoo.com |
ORCID 0000-0001-9137-2122

Vukolić Dragan | Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, University of Kragujevac, Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia; University of Business Studies, Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina | vukolicd@yahoo.com |
ORCID 0000-0003-3016-8368

Gajić Tamara | Geographical Institute „Jovan Cvijić” SASA, Belgrade, Serbia; Swiss School of Business and Management, Geneva, Switzerland; Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, University of Kragujevac, Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia; Institute of Environmental Engineering, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Moscow, Russia | tamara.gajic.1977@gmail.com |
ORCID 0000-0002-6364-9849

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Sažetak

Ravnoteža između života i posla predstavlja ključni izazov za zaposlene u hotelijerstvu zbog specifičnih uslova rada, uključujući duge smene, nepredvidivo radno vreme i sezonske oscilacije. Ovaj rad istražuje glavne izazove i strategije za postizanje ravnoteže između života i posla, kao i njen uticaj na dobrobit zaposlenih i radnu efikasnost. Kroz empirijsku studiju sprovedenu u hotelima u Zapadnoj Srbiji, analiziraju se ključni faktori koji utiču na zadovoljstvo zaposlenih, motivaciju i njihov učinak na radnom mestu. Istraživanje se oslanja na kombinaciju kvantitativnih i kvalitativnih metoda, uključujući upitnike i intervju sa zaposlenima i menadžerima hotela, kako bi se identifikovale strategije koje se koriste za unapređenje ravnoteže između života i posla. Rezultati ukazuju na to da adekvatne politike upravljanja radnim vremenom, fleksibilni radni aranžmani i podrška od strane poslodavaca značajno doprinose većoj dobrobiti zaposlenih i njihovoj produktivnosti. Zaključak rada naglašava važnost integrisanog pristupa upravljanju ljudskim resursima u hotelijerstvu, koji uzima u obzir potrebe zaposlenih i poslovne ciljeve. Preporučuje se primena specifičnih strategija prilagođenih lokalnom kontekstu, čime bi se unapredila radna kultura i smanjili negativni efekti preopterećenosti zaposlenih. Ova studija pruža relevantne uvide za menadžere i istraživače u oblasti hotelijerstva, sa fokusom na kreiranje održivih rešenja za poboljšanje dobrobiti zaposlenih i povećanje radne efikasnosti.

Abstract

Work-life balance represents a critical challenge for employees in the hospitality industry due to specific working conditions, including long shifts, unpredictable work hours, and seasonal fluctuations. This paper examines the main challenges and strategies for achieving work-life balance, as well as its impact on employee well-being and work efficiency. Through an empirical study conducted in hotels in Western Serbia, key factors influencing employee satisfaction, motivation, and workplace performance are analyzed. The research relies on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including questionnaires and interviews with hotel employees and managers, to identify strategies used to improve work-life balance. Results indicate that adequate working time management policies, flexible work arrangements, and employer support significantly contribute to greater employee well-being and productivity. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of an integrated approach to human resource management in the hospitality industry that considers both employee needs and business objectives. The implementation of specific strategies adapted to the local context is recommended to enhance work culture and reduce the negative effects of employee overload. This study provides relevant insights for managers and researchers in the hospitality field, focusing on creating sustainable solutions to improve employee well-being and increase work efficiency.

Ključne reči: *ravnoteža između života i posla, hotelijerstvo, radna efikasnost, dobrobit zaposlenih, strategije upravljanja, Zapadna Srbija*

Keywords: *Work-life balance, hospitality industry, work efficiency, employee well-being, management strategies, Western Serbia*

Introduction

The hospitality industry is renowned for its dynamic work environment, characterized by unpredictable working hours and high demands. These factors present significant challenges to achieving work-life balance for employees [1]. The absence of this balance can lead to stress, decreased motivation, and burnout, ultimately harming employee well-being and job performance. In an industry where service quality directly correlates with employee engagement, maintaining psychophysical stability becomes crucial for business success [2][3].

This study investigates the primary challenges faced by employees in work-life balance. Emphasis is placed on identifying effective strategies to mitigate these challenges, such as implementing flexible working hours, adequate shift planning, and securing institutional support from management. Furthermore, the research analyzes the impact of work-life balance on various aspects of employee well-being, including mental health, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life. It also examines how these strategies positively influence work efficiency by reducing absenteeism, enhancing motivation, and improving service quality [1][2][3].

Focusing on hotels in Western Serbia as a case study, this research addresses specific challenges within the region's hospitality sector, including seasonal fluctuations in guest numbers and limited resources for human resource management [4]. Empirical data gathered through questionnaires and interviews with hotel employees and managers will provide comprehensive insights into current practices and inform recommendations for improvement [5][6].

The objective of this paper is to identify effective strategies for establishing work-life balance, enhancing work efficiency, and improving employee well-being in the hospitality sector. The findings aim to contribute to the development of sustainable solutions and best practices in the hospitality industry, applicable not only at the regional level but also in a broader context. By addressing these critical issues, this study seeks to foster a healthier work environment that benefits both employees and employers, ultimately leading to greater success in the hospitality industry.

Literature review

Work-life balance is a significant challenge within the hospitality industry, characterized by unique working conditions that can disrupt personal and professional equilibrium [7][8]. Employees in this sector frequently contend with irregular shifts, including night hours, weekends, and holidays, making it difficult for them to schedule personal activities and maintain a stable family and social life [9]. This demanding work dynamic can lead to mental and physical fatigue, stress, and burnout, which, in the long run, negatively impact employee motivation and job satisfaction. A disrupted balance between professional responsibilities and personal obligations can substantially reduce employees' quality of life, increase absenteeism, and contribute to workforce turnover [9][10]. In an industry where business success hinges on service quality and guest satisfaction, maintaining the mental and physical well-being of employees becomes essential for achieving organizational goals [8][11].

A particularly challenging aspect of achieving work-life balance is the seasonal nature of tourism, notably experienced in Western Serbia. During peak tourist seasons, the workload intensifies significantly, and the demand for labor surges [9][12]. In these circumstances, employees often face limited opportunities for time off during critical periods, further complicating the alignment of personal and professional obligations. The pressure to deliver exceptional service to guests with minimal resources and maximal employee engagement often leads to exhaustion, adversely affecting service quality and the hotel's reputation [13].

However, various strategies can mitigate these challenges and foster work-life balance. Key strategies include flexible work scheduling, which encompasses shift rotation, the option for reduced working hours, or allowing employees to choose their days off during the off-peak season [14][15]. Flexibility in the workplace enables employees to align their professional responsibilities with personal needs, reducing stress and enhancing the work environment. Moreover, developing mental health support programs and offering benefits such as additional days off and paid vacations are vital. By doing so, employers can cultivate an environment that promotes productivity while safeguarding employee well-being [7][14][15].

Hotel managers play a crucial role in fostering a positive work culture that encourages employees to achieve work-life balance. Their responsibilities include ensuring optimal human resource management and adapting working conditions to the specificities of the local context [16]. In Western Serbia, where hotels often contend with limited resources and seasonal business dynamics, tailored strategies can significantly enhance employee satisfaction. Improved shift planning, organizing team-building activities, and providing support for professional development are practical measures that can boost work efficiency and alleviate stress-related issues [16][17].

Employee well-being has a direct influence on work efficiency and overall hotel performance [18]. When employees feel supported in achieving a work-life balance, their motivation increases, resulting in higher productivity and improved service quality [19]. In such a supportive environment, employees are less likely to be absent or experience turnover, contributing to workforce stability and the long-term sustainability of the business. Conversely, a lack of support and an imbalanced work-life dynamic can lead to dissatisfaction, decreased motivation, and poorer performance, adversely affecting guest experiences and the hotel's reputation [7][20].

Maintaining work-life balance transcends individual well-being; it is also a vital business imperative. In the hospitality industry, where service quality directly correlates with employee satisfaction and engagement, employers must proactively work to enhance workplace culture [21]. Implementing effective strategies for achieving balance can not only improve the work environment but also enhance team collaboration, leading to long-term business stability. For hotels in Western Serbia, the application of such strategies can significantly improve employee experiences and enhance their competitiveness in the market [22].

This literature review underscores that work-life balance critically impacts employee well-being, work efficiency, and business sustainability within the hospitality industry. By analyzing the challenges and strategies for improving work-life balance, the paper emphasizes that achieving this balance is not merely an individual issue for employees but also a strategic responsibility for management [22][23]. Through effective planning and the adaptation of work practices to local conditions, hotels can create a work environment that simultaneously addresses employee needs and supports the achievement of business objectives. The case study of hotels in Western Serbia provides concrete insights and actionable recommendations for enhancing workplace practices, ultimately aiming to increase employee satisfaction and improve business outcomes [24].

Accordingly, two research questions are posed:

RQ1: How do the challenges in achieving work-life balance affect the well-being of employees in hotels in Western Serbia?

RQ2: Which strategies for establishing work-life balance contribute the most to improving employee work efficiency in the hospitality industry in Western Serbia?

This study explores two key dimensions of achieving work-life balance among employees in the hospitality industry in Western Serbia. The first research question focuses on identifying the challenges employees face in balancing professional and personal obligations, as well as how these challenges affect their well-being. Specifically, the analysis examines the impact of working hours, shift work, seasonal fluctuations, and workload on emotional exhaustion, stress, and employee satisfaction. It is anticipated that these challenges will negatively affect employees' mental and physical health, as well as their motivation [15][16][25].

The second research question investigates the strategies that most effectively enhance employee work efficiency. This study analyzes the effects of flexible work arrangements, shift rotation, management support, and mental health programs on productivity, work quality, and job satisfaction. The aim is to identify best practices that maintain work motivation and high service quality while simultaneously preserving employee well-being. The empirical data obtained from this study will provide guidelines for improving workplace practices in the hospitality sector of Western Serbia [7][9][15][24].

Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research methodology, utilizing a survey directed at hotel employees in Western Serbia. The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire featuring Likert-scale questions ranging from 1 to 5. These questions addressed the challenges of achieving work-life balance, the strategies employed to mitigate these challenges, and employees' perceptions of their well-being and work efficiency. The questionnaire was organized into several sections, encompassing topics such as working hours, shift patterns, seasonal fluctuations, flexible work arrangements, mental health support, and management involvement. The survey was developed based on prior research in this area, drawing from works by authors such as [26][27][28].

Quantitative data analysis was conducted to explore correlations between various factors, employing statistical techniques such as descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The target population for this research included both hotel employees and managers who play a role in planning and executing work tasks. The initial goal was to survey at least 150 to 200 respondents; ultimately, the sample comprised 185 participants, ensuring a robust dataset for analysis. Data collected from the questionnaires were processed using SPSS software, facilitating descriptive statistics to elucidate the sample's basic characteristics and regression analysis to identify key determinants influencing employee well-being and work efficiency.

To enhance the validity of the research, a pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted, ensuring the relevance and clarity of the questions. The reliability of the scales utilized in the questionnaire was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which assessed internal consistency. Additionally, a qualitative component was integrated into the research to supplement the quantitative findings and identify context-specific factors that may not have been captured in the survey.

All ethical guidelines were meticulously followed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the research objectives before their involvement, with an emphasis on the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Additionally, it was ensured that the study complied with data protection laws, ensuring participants' rights were upheld throughout the research process.

Results

Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the research sample, providing essential insights into the respondents' gender, age, educational level, and place of residence. A total of 185 participants were included in the study, with a slightly higher representation of women (53.0%) compared to men (47.0%). This gender distribution is indicative of the hospitality industry's workforce in the region.

In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents fall within the 25 to 34-year age group (32.4%), suggesting a young and potentially dynamic workforce. Conversely, the smallest demographic segment consists of individuals over 55 years old (12.4%), reflecting a lower representation of older workers in this sector.

Educationally, the largest proportion of respondents holds a bachelor's degree (37.8%), while those with completed master's or doctoral degrees constitute the smallest percentage (10.8%). This educational profile indicates a predominantly well-educated workforce, yet still developing in terms of higher academic qualifications.

Regarding permanent residence, the data show that the majority of respondents hail from urban centers, particularly Belgrade (34.59%) and Western Serbia (26.49%). This geographical distribution highlights the significance of these regions within the tourism and hospitality sectors, offering valuable context for understanding the experiences and perceptions of employees concerning work-life balance.

The analysis of work experience reveals that 25.9% of respondents have between 1 and 5 years of experience, indicating a relatively high proportion of newcomers to the industry. This group likely includes younger workers at the beginning of their careers in hospitality, which may influence their motivation and perceptions of work efficiency. The second largest category comprises individuals with 6 to 10 years of experience (23.8%), suggesting a cohort of employees who have progressed beyond initial adaptation stages but are still in the process of honing their professional skills.

Additionally, 20.0% of respondents have between 11 and 20 years of experience, indicating the presence of more seasoned workers who likely possess stable careers in the hospitality sector. A smaller segment of respondents (16.8%) reports having 21 to 30 years of experience, while the least common category includes participants with over 30 years of experience (13.5%). This distribution underscores a workforce with varying levels of expertise, highlighting the blend of new entrants and experienced professionals in the industry.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of respondents

Category	Subcategory	Respondents (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	87	47
	Female	98	53
Age	<25	42	22.7
	25-34	60	32.4
	35-44	35	18.9
	45-54	25	13.5
	55+	23	12.4
Education level	Secondary Education	40	21.6
	College	55	29.7
	Bachelor's degree	70	37.8
	Master/PhD	20	10.8
Permanent residence	Belgrade	64	34.59
	Western Serbia	49	26.49
	Vojvodina	21	11.35
	Eastern Serbia	19	10.27
	Southern Serbia	15	8.11
	Central Serbia	13	7.03
	Kosovo and Metohija	4	2.16
Years in hospitality	1-5	48	25.9
	6-10	44	23.8
	11-20	37	20.0
	21-30	31	16.8
	+30	25	13.5

Source: Author's research

These findings may indicate a decline in the number of employees with very long tenure in the hospitality industry. This trend could be attributed to the demanding nature of the job and the increasing challenges associated with shift work, which become more difficult to maintain over extended periods.

To assess the reliability of the questionnaire utilized in this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for each dimension of the instrument. This analysis aimed to determine the internal consistency of the scales measuring key aspects of the research, including challenges in achieving work-life balance, applied strategies, work efficiency, and employee well-being. According to established literature, Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.7 are considered satisfactory for research in the social sciences. The results revealed that all Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.844, confirming that the internal measurement instrument is reliable and demonstrating consistency among the items within each dimension. Thus, it can be concluded that the questionnaire is suitable for further analysis and interpretation of the research findings.

Additionally, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify the latent dimensions that group the questionnaire items and to confirm the construct validity of the instrument. Factor analysis serves as a valuable technique for reducing a large number of variables and clustering related items into factors that represent the key aspects of the research. This study specifically analyzed data concerning challenges in achieving work-life balance, the application of strategies, employee well-being, and work efficiency (refer to Table 2 for details).

Table 2. Factor analysis of challenges, strategies, employee well-being, and work efficiency

Factor	Description	Eigenvalue	Variance (%)
Factor 1. Challenges in achieving balance	Work hours, shift work, seasonal fluctuations, and overload	3.45	28.7
Factor 2. Application of strategies	Flexible working hours, management support, mental health programs	2.80	22.5
Factor 3. Employee well-being	Job satisfaction, emotional state, balance between personal and professional life	2.15	17.9
Factor 4. Work efficiency	Productivity, service quality, motivation to work	1.20	9.4

Source: Author's research

Before conducting the factor analysis, the adequacy of the sample was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The KMO coefficient was calculated to be 0.82, which is considered satisfactory as it exceeds the threshold of 0.6. Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded a chi-square statistic of $\chi^2 = 412.87$, with 66 degrees of freedom and a p-value of less than 0.001, indicating statistical significance. These results confirm that the sample is adequate for performing factor analysis and that the variables are interrelated.

The Principal Component Analysis method was utilized for factor extraction, employing Varimax rotation to facilitate easier interpretation of the factor structure. The Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue > 1) was applied to determine the number of factors to retain. The analysis revealed four primary components that collectively explain 68.5% of the total variance in the data.

Factor analysis identified four key dimensions that elucidate the challenges and strategies associated with achieving a balance between work and personal life, as well as their impact on employee well-being and work efficiency. As shown in Table 2, these factors collectively account for 68.5% of the variance, underscoring their effectiveness in capturing the main themes of this study.

Challenges in Achieving Balance (Factor 1) emerged as the most significant factor, with an eigenvalue of 3.45. This factor encompasses items related to unpredictable working hours, seasonal fluctuations, and employee overload. The results confirm that these specific job demands within the hospitality industry serve as primary sources of stress and exhaustion. The high frequency of these challenges may hinder employees' ability to effectively balance their personal and professional obligations, ultimately detracting from their job satisfaction and motivation.

Implementation of Strategies (Factor 2), with an eigenvalue of 2.80, pertains to the measures taken by management to enhance work-life balance. Strategies such as flexible working hours and mental health support enable employees to better manage stress and align their work responsibilities with personal commitments. This factor illustrates that hotels actively employing these strategies foster greater employee loyalty and engagement, thereby enhancing the work environment and reducing turnover.

Employee Well-Being (Factor 3), with an eigenvalue of 2.15, reflects the level of job satisfaction and emotional health among employees. When provided with adequate support and the opportunity to establish a balance between work and personal life, employees report higher satisfaction levels, reduced emotional exhaustion, and increased motivation. This factor is critical as it highlights the connection between workplace culture and the psychological stability of employees.

Work Efficiency (Factor 4), with an eigenvalue of 1.20, relates to employee performance metrics, including productivity, service quality, and overall motivation. Employees who feel supported and are motivated tend to deliver superior service, which directly contributes to guest satisfaction. Conversely, those experiencing stress and lacking adequate support may face a decline in productivity, negatively impacting the hotel's reputation.

Overall, the analysis reveals that Factor 1 is the most significant in explaining the challenges employees face, while the other factors provide valuable insights into how effective strategies and enhanced well-being can contribute to improved work efficiency.

Based on the factor analysis and the research questions posed, a regression analysis was conducted to examine how challenges and strategies influence the well-being and work efficiency of employees in hotels in Western Serbia. This regression analysis is essential for identifying significant predictors and assessing the strength of their impact on the dependent variables: employee well-being and work efficiency (Table 3).

Table 3. Regression analysis results for employee well-being and work efficiency

Parameter	Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value
Intercept (β_0)	3.12	9.45	< 0.001
Challenges (β_1)	-0.41	-4.87	< 0.001
Strategies (β_2)	0.49	5.63	< 0.001

Source: Author's research

The results of the regression analysis indicate that both challenges and strategies are significant predictors of employee well-being and work efficiency. The coefficient $\beta_1 = -0.41$ for challenges suggests that an increase in challenges negatively impacts employee well-being and efficiency, confirming that stress and workload overload impede the ability to maintain a work-life balance, ultimately reducing performance. In contrast, the coefficient $\beta_2 = 0.49$ for strategies demonstrates that the effective implementation of measures designed to facilitate work-life balance significantly enhances employee efficiency and satisfaction.

The regression model explains 42% of the variance in the dependent variables, indicating a substantial level of predictive power. The remaining variance may be attributed to other factors not included in this model; however, the findings remain grounded in the key research variables under investigation.

The analysis reveals that increased challenges, such as workload overload and seasonal fluctuations, adversely affect employee well-being. Conversely, the implementation of appropriate strategies, such as flexible working hours and mental health support, substantially enhances job satisfaction and mitigates emotional stress. Overall, these results highlight the importance of addressing challenges in the hospitality industry while simultaneously implementing effective strategies to improve productivity and service quality.

Discussion

The analysis results indicate that implementing strategies to establish a balance between work and personal life significantly enhances employee efficiency in hotels in Western Serbia. Flexible working hours, shift rotation, and mental health support have been shown to contribute to increased productivity and improved quality of services provided to guests. These strategies empower employees to better manage their professional and personal obligations, leading to heightened motivation and reduced absenteeism.

These findings align with existing research that emphasizes the importance of managerial support and flexible work arrangements in maintaining work efficiency. When employees perceive that they have the support necessary to achieve a healthy work-life balance, they tend to exhibit greater loyalty and engagement, which positively influences the overall performance of hotels in Western Serbia. While challenges negatively impact employee well-being, the application of effective strategies can mitigate this negative effect and enhance work performance. These results indicate that successful human resource management is crucial for the hospitality industry. Hotel management should recognize the challenges employees face and actively implement strategies that will help them manage their work responsibilities more effectively.

The regression analysis model explains 42% of the variance in employee well-being and efficiency, indicating that while challenges and strategies play a significant role, they do not fully account for all influencing factors. The remaining 58% of the variance may be attributed to other elements, such as organizational culture, individual employee characteristics, and guest satisfaction, which warrant further investigation.

Implications and limitations of the research

The results of this research make a significant contribution to both theory and practice in the field of human resource management within hospitality, particularly regarding the work-life balance. The theoretical contribution lies in confirming established assumptions about the negative impact of work-related challenges on employee well-being and the positive influence of supportive strategies on work efficiency. This study enriches the existing literature in hospitality by emphasizing the importance of managerial strategies aimed at reducing stress and enhancing employee performance, specifically within the context of Western Serbia.

From a practical standpoint, these findings offer crucial insights for managers in the hospitality sector. The identified challenges, unpredictable working hours, seasonal fluctuations, and job overload, significantly affect employee well-being. Conversely, the implementation of flexible work arrangements and mental health support can substantially boost motivation and job performance. Based on these results, hotel management should prioritize optimizing work shifts, developing comprehensive mental health support programs, and promoting work flexibility as essential strategies for improving employee satisfaction and reducing turnover. These measures not only enhance service quality but also positively impact guest satisfaction and contribute to the long-term sustainability of the business.

However, this study has limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the sample is confined to hotels in Western Serbia, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or industries. Secondly, data collection occurred during a specific period, raising the possibility that seasonal effects influenced employees' perceptions of work challenges and strategies. Future research should be conducted across different times of the year to account for these variations. Additionally, while the regression analysis reveals a significant impact of challenges and strategies, the model only explains 42% of the variance, indicating that other factors may also affect employee well-being and efficiency.

Future research could be expanded to encompass a broader range of regions and industries, as well as incorporate additional factors such as guest satisfaction, organizational culture, and individual employee characteristics. This approach would facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing employee well-being and efficiency. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the long-term effects of challenges and strategies on employee performance across various seasons and business cycles.

Conclusion

The challenges of work-life balance for employees in hospitality are manageable through effective management strategies. Implementing managerial practices that promote work-life balance not only reduces employee stress but also enhances work performance. This improvement directly impacts the quality of services provided and guest satisfaction, both of which are critical for the success and sustainability of hotel operations. The findings of this study highlight the necessity of an integrated approach to human resource management. Hotel management must recognize and address the challenges faced by employees while simultaneously developing robust support programs to enhance their well-being and efficiency. This research offers valuable insights for hospitality managers, underscoring the importance of flexibility in work processes and support for mental health as essential factors in improving employee satisfaction and performance. By adopting these recommendations, hotels can foster a more positive work atmosphere, reduce employee turnover, and ultimately achieve long-term stability and success in hospitality.

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