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Talent management and retention strategies in luxury hotels: Evidence from four countries

Purpose
The purpose of this paper is to provide a definition of talent and talent management in the luxury hotel sector with a focus on talent retention strategies.

Design/Methodology/Approach
A qualitative approach was employed and 27 face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers in luxury hotels in four countries (US, UK, Australia, and Greece).

Findings
Talent refers to those who “go above and beyond”. Talent retention strategies in luxury hotels include a friendly, family-oriented and open access culture, teamwork, compensation, succession planning, and training and development. A hybrid exclusive and inclusive approach to TM is proposed with the implicit engagement of the individuals.

Practical implications
Luxury hotels should choose talent management practices that fit the organizational culture with a focus on retention strategies that are tailor-made to the individual or groups of individuals. Opportunities to progress, succession planning and employee participation to talent management are valued in the industry.

Originality / value
This study provides findings from empirical comparative research conducted in four different countries, whereas most published work on talent management focuses on bibliographic reviews. It provides a conceptualization of talent and talent management. This study frames the nature of TM in hotels, and advances the knowledge of talent retention strategies found to be effective in hospitality.

Keywords: talent, talent management, retention strategies, luxury hotels

Paper type: Research paper
Talent management and retention strategies in luxury hotels: Evidence from four countries

1. Introduction

The hospitality environment is complex and diverse, facing many challenges (structural and perceptual) relating to “low productivity, high levels of labour turnover, poor remuneration, demanding working conditions and limited opportunities of personal development” (Chung and D’Annunzio-Green, 2018; Baum, 2008, p. 725). The labor profile of the hospitality industry has changed over the years due to social, economic and political factors such as immigration, labour mobility, and Brexit among others. The hospitality and tourism industry has been considered as based on technical skills, where most of the work has been characterised as low value, demanding few conceptual or knowledge-driven attributes (Baum, 2008). Solnet et al. (2016) propose that hospitality customers seek to gain more power and control of their experience in view to the growing demand for the ‘experience economy’ which has an impact on customer-facing staff as they are now required to enable co-creation experiences. This adds to the technical skills required especially in knowledge based positions.

Clark et al. (2017) and Deery (2009) add low pay, seasonality, poor work-life balance as factors intensifying the challenges in the industry. One of the main challenges in the industry is high employee turnover, which is common due to working unsociable hours, high levels of casualization (Deery, 2009), and routinized jobs (Iverson and Currivan, 2003). The industry is also characterised by the use of migrant labour to address temporary needs making the challenges eminent and calling for solutions to human resource challenges. Competition for labour has grown and employers are looking to attract talent. The diversity of the workforce in terms of age, race and culture has put pressure on employers to implement diversity management in managing talent (D’Announzio, 2008). Baum (2008) proposes that talent in the context of hospitality and tourism does not necessarily have the same meaning as in other
sectors. Defining talent in this context is a challenging process, which should focus on inclusiveness and an open-minded approach to training and development (Baum, 2008). He also suggests that hospitality managers should adopt creative strategies to talent retention. This paper builds upon this argument with empirical evidence on providing a definition of talent and talent management in hospitality and more specifically in the luxury hotel sector.

Although talent and talent management (TM) have received increasing attention over the past decade (Scullion et al., 2016; Thunnissen, 2016), their lack of intellectual and theoretical foundations has been highlighted by many studies (Scullion et al., 2016). Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunissen (2016) propose that empirical research on TM is linked to the field of HRM. The field is considered to be young (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunissen, 2016) and there is a need for a consensus on a definition of talent and TM. Studies suggest that, although some policies have been presented, they differ from real practices in organizations (Vaiman et al., 2012). Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunissen (2016) claim that very few empirical studies discuss how organizations conceptualize talent and TM. Even fewer studies focus on talent retention strategies (Tlaiss et al., 2017), which is the key objective for TM. Chung and D’Annunzio-Green (2018), Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013), Collings and Mellahi (2009), and Nijs et al. (2013) suggest that more studies should be conducted on how talent is conceptualized, managed and retained. Deery and Jago (2015) state that there are very few studies of TM in hospitality. They report studies in hospitality by Solnet et al. (2013), Davidson and Wang (2011) and Lub et al. (2012). These authors agree that TM differs from mainstream management literature. The existing literature provides evidence mainly from the US context creating the need to explore different contexts and perspectives (Collings et al., 2011). Thunnissen et al. (2013) report that TM literature focuses on global multinational enterprises from the American context with less emphasis placed on organization in Europe and particularly the UK. The Boston Consulting Group (2007) reports that TM is one of the key
five challenges facing HR managers in Europe. Nevertheless, there is lack of empirical evidence of research on TM in this context. Thunissen et al. (2013) question whether approaches to TM investigated and proposed in different cultural contexts can be applied in an Anglo-Saxon context. Chung and D’Annunzio-Green (2018) conducted a study in the UK however they used small-and-medium enterprises, as they claim the outset of human capital in these organizations differs from multinational organizations. It is evident that great value is placed on TM, but little is known about how it works in practice (Thunnissen, 2016) especially in comparing different countries and TM practices. The aim of this paper is to explore how talent is defined in luxury hospitality organizations; how they practice TM; and how talent is actually retained with focus on retention strategies for reducing employee turnover. This paper begins by providing an overview of employee turnover and the challenges in hospitality management, followed by a review of the literature on talent and TM in hospitality especially with focus on talent retention. It provides empirical evidence from four different countries in the context of luxury hotels.

2. Literature review

2.1 Employee turnover in hospitality

A KPMG (2016) study stated that attracting and retaining talented employees is the biggest challenge for companies for the foreseeable future, including hospitality. Human capital has been identified as not only a way to cope with environmental uncertainty, but also as a source of competitive advantage (Meyers et al., 2013; Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Ratna and Chawla, 2012). The hospitality industry is characterised by high employee turnover, often losing talent that can contribute to its competitive advantage (Baum 2008; Dawson et al., 2011; Babakus et al., 2008; Christensen-Hughes and Rog, 2008). Indeed, ‘high employee turnover’ is considered as a reality of the industry and part of the hospitality’s organisational culture (Dawson et al., 2011). Various reasons are identified in the
literature contributing to high turnover rates in hospitality. For instance, employee turnover causes may relate to limited opportunities for career development, low specialisation of skills (Chalkiti and Sigala, 2010; Brown et al., 2015), poor pay, seasonality, unsociable and long working hours and poor work-life balance (Chalkiti and Sigala, 2010; Lee and Ok, 2012). Other reasons relating to high turnover are demographic variables such as age, job tenure, education and gender (Govaerts et al., 2011; Festing and Schäfer, 2014; Vaiman et al., 2012). High turnover may result in many disadvantages for the hospitality business. For example, turnover is associated with increased costs for the business, loss of expertise from experienced employees, negative impact on workplace efficiency and service quality (Chalkiti and Sigala, 2010; Davidson et al., 2010; Yang et al., 2012). An average hotel can spend A$ 109,909 to replace managerial and supervisory employees each year and A$ 9,591 operational staff (Davidson et al., 2010). Ongori (2007) provided a theoretical underpinning for factors that influence employee turnover and split them on two main categories: job related factors and organizational factors.

On the other hand, turnover has also been associated with positive outcomes, such as contributing to idea generation through knowledge circulation (Chalkiti and Sigala, 2010). However, organizations must be cautioned on the importance of policies in retaining knowledge from employees leaving the organisation in order to avoid knowledge transferring to competitors. Despite this positive benefit employee turnover is considered as a major challenge for hospitality businesses, particularly due to high business costs (Brown et al., 2015; Robinson et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2012). High turnover is even more critical when it affects talented employees that can contribute to the current and future success of the organisation.

2.2 Luxury hotels

Schuler et al. (2011) propose that small organizations may not have TM due to their limitation on resources. Bolander et al. (2017) add that TM is a complex topic which is better investigated
in larger organizations where resources for adopting such practices are more possible to exist.

The luxury hotels industry has become a significant contributor to the broad hospitality industry, with forecasts of even greater expansion. Luxury hotels (4&5-star-hotels) are hard to define since the term luxury itself is vague (Sharma, 2016). They provide top-line service and facilities with difficulties in operating them and high degree of risk as they suffer in times of economic downturn (Sharma, 2016, p.119). Bernstein (2010) proposes that luxury is not only about the décor or amenities. It is a subjective notion as it depends on people’s perception of luxury based on their ethnical belonging, culture of origin, educational background and personal experience (Becker, 2009); the luxury hotel sector has become an outlet for travellers to dream of and fantasize about other lifestyles (Curtis, 2011), where customer-driven employees are valuable in providing the appropriate service and experience (Chung and D’Annunzio-Green, 2018). Despite the increasing significance of the luxury hotel sector in the tourism and hospitality industry as well as the general economy, a systematic review of TM related research has not been conducted. Most studies on talent management in hospitality have the context of small-and-medium enterprises (for example Chung and D’Annunzio-Green, 2018); therefore, this study provides valuable empirical research in this sector.

2.3 Talent and talent management in hospitality

Michaels et al. (2001) first referred to the ‘war for talent’, in defining talent; talent includes people’s abilities, skills, knowledge and potential for development. TM was firstly mentioned by McKinsey Consultants as a management concept (Horner, 2017). Talent is perceived as a strategic resource for the competitiveness of organizations, as human capital has been identified as a way for organizations to gain and maintain the competitive advantage (Meyers et al., 2013; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). Although TM has rapidly expanded globally there is a lot of academic debate about defining talent due to a lack of accurate and uniform...
definitions (Festing and Schafer, 2014). Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) suggest that talent definitions are based on individual perceptions of the nature of talent.

2.3.1 Talent

There is a range of issues considered in the conceptualization of talent. Two main approaches have been developed to define talent. The first refers to the debate based on the nature-nurture debate about whether talent is inborn and innate, whereas others claim that talent can be nurtured with proper training and development (Myers and van Woerkom, 2014). Conceptualizing talent as a natural ability has implications on how talent will be managed. On the one hand, skills and knowledge are easy to be developed and teach, but talent refers to characteristics much more unique (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013), hence Davies and Davies (2010) propose that talent cannot be managed. Similarly, Silzer and Dowell (2010) propose that it is difficult for HR practice to distinguish between innate and malleable components of talent. On the other hand, others claim that talent can be taught by experience and through training and development, research that has been found to overlap with literature on competence (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). In this case they continue, talent is defined by its outcomes, as some studies suggest some years of experience should be allowed to employees in order to measure their performance and label them as talent.

The second perspective refers to the inclusive and exclusive nature of talent. Some studies propose that talent refers to the inclusive nature of talent where the entire workforce may be included. Peters (2006) claims that all employees should be considered as talent. Most companies in Leigh’s (2009) study defined talent in an inclusive way. Buckingham and Vosburgh, 2001, p.22) defined the inclusive approach to TM as “the art of recognizing where each employee’s areas of natural talent lie, and figuring out how to help each employee develop the job-specific skills and knowledge to turn those talents into real performance”. Employees
create value and are seen to be the main determinant of organizational performance, so an inclusive approach guarantees an egalitarian distribution of resources across all employees in an organization. Although this approach is more cost-effective, the main criticism is that it refers to the whole workforce, implying that it is more a proper workforce management rather than TM and does not differ from strategic HRM (Garrow and Hirsh, 2008).

Others refer to the exclusive nature of talent where an elite group of the workforce may be included (Collings and Mellahi, 2009). The workforce in this approach is segmented into individuals who can make a difference to the organization. Within this approach, different authors have adopted different terms for talent such as ‘excellent abilities’, ‘key employees’ ‘high potentials’ or ‘those individuals with high potential who are of particular value to an organization’ (Thunissen, 2016). Others identify as talent the high-performing employees who demonstrate high potential (Collings, 2014; Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013; Meyers and van Woerkom, 2014). Schuler (2015) suggests that talented employees have behaviors aligned to the company’s values, and are hard to find. Organizations should identify what they consider as talent and know who their valuable employees are (Schuler, 2015). Each organization may have its own understanding of talent and identify the profile that fits their structure and culture (D’Annunzio-Green, 2008). The main criticism of this approach is that performance is not based on objective indicators, but rather reflects perceptions and judgements by managers (Pepermans et al., 2003). Similarly, there is the assumption that past performance predicts future performance, and that there is need for continuous support for acquiring certain performance levels (Martin and Schmidt, 2010). Finally, some studies propose that emphasis on individual performance undermines teamwork, runs the risk of creating a competitive working environment with damaged organizational morale as resources are spent on a small group of employees (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013).
Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) provide a conceptualised model of the meaning of talent as shown in figure 1.

**Figure 1**: Talent at work

*Insert Figure 1 here*

**Source**: Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013, p.297)

Baum (2008) suggests that there is need for talent and talent development in hospitality. Deery and Jago (2015) and Sheehan et al. (2018) suggest that TM and recruitment is a challenge for hospitality organizations. Methods for finding and keeping employees have changed in today’s complex and competitive environment (Baker, 2014; Baum, 2008). Recruitment and selection in hospitality are challenging due to the highly labour-intensive nature of the industry (Baum, 2008), the seasonal and cyclical nature of the industry (Sheehan et al., 2018), the dependency on peripheral and often young employees (Janta and Ladkin, 2009). The sector provides global labor mobility opportunities and has been a source of employment for migrants throughout the world. Migrants have been a good option for many employers as they can contract their workforce as per the demand fluctuation. However, migrants may not cover the skills gap that exists in the industry, as usually they acquire training and experience and move to other sectors. This may be detrimental to the quality of the experience delivered to the customers and to the long-term sustainability of hospitality organizations. Recruitment and selection for TM should be done with a focus on core values and culture of the hotel, with more formal, structured and strategically aligned approached to TM (Shaheen et al., 2018). CIPD (2016) suggests that effective TM includes the integration of the employment journey, with approached to attract, identify, develop, engage, reward and retain talented people, which may sustain the competitive advantage of the sector. Specific job analysis with skills gap identification may contribute to recruiting activities that align to the supply of talent and relevant skills. During recruitment,
potential employees should be able to see a clear occupation-career path in the organization, as
this is found to impact on employee commitment.

2.3.2 Talent management

Beheshtifar et al. (2012) add that TM refers basically to the process of talent identification and
development through targeting people that can play the role of a leader in the future. Scullion
et al. (2010) describe TM as the systematic attraction, identification, development,
propose that TM is an intended strategy, in which related human resources practices are made
by top management in accordance to the organization’s objectives and overall strategy. The
main aim is to fulfil the needs for human capital and “to contribute to the overall firm
performance” where all stakeholders contribute to this outcome (Thunissen, 2016, p. 59). In
view to this, Collings (2014) argues that this rationale of TM may impact on effectively
managing and developing talent. Other factors such as market pressures, or other non-economic
objectives are largely ignored by the TM literature (Thunnissen et al., 2013).

According to CIPD (2006, p.1) TM is “concerned with…identification, development,
engagement/retention, and deployment of ‘talent’ within a specific organisational context”.
CIPD (2006) also suggests that TM is nowadays used as a way of managing succession
planning. The “hard approach” to TM is based on McGregor’s theory X where “employees are
seen as objects that need to be controlled and managed effectively; The focus is on measuring,
controlling employees’ performance and productivity” (Thunissen, 2016, p. 60). On the other
hand, the “soft approach” is based on McGregor’s theory Y where employees are seen to have
their “own emotions and needs that direct their behaviour…their interests are parallel to the
interests of the organization”, where managers focus on practices that “enhance commitment
and personal and professional development” (Thunissen, 2016, p.60). In any case, there is
little empirical information on differences between the intended and the actual TM practices.
2.4 Talent retention strategies for hotels

A number of factors and strategies have been identified in the literature to contribute to the retention of hotel employees. Training and development; opportunities for career progression (Monczra et al., 2009; Deery, 2008; Bharwani and Butt, 2012); compensation (Deery, 2008); and challenging work (Yang et al., 2012) are organizational strategies. CIPD (2006) adds in-house development programmes on coaching, mentoring and buddying in the UK context. Lee and Way (2009) propose that positive interactions and communication between managers and employees contribute to retention. Effective recruitment is also important to ensure potential employees have realistic expectations of hospitality work; will demonstrate suitable personal characteristics for the job; and will fit with the organizational culture (Moncarz et al., 2009; Pizam and Shani, 2009). Festing et al. (2013) propose that TM retention practices differ depending on the organization. They suggest that large organizations invest heavily on practices such as identifying young talent, employee training and development, career planning and succession planning.

Employee related factors include age, seniority, level of education and gender (Govaerts et al., 2011). Mayers and van Woerkom (2014) propose generational differences in employees’ expectations and retention strategies. Younger employees (Generation Y) demand career advancement opportunities more than Baby Boomers. These younger employees are attracted to the social environment in organizations (Scott and Revis, 2008). Moreover, Thunnissen et al. (2013) add emotional and cognitive aspects. The context of luxury hotels and their approach to talent and TM has been the focus of this study in an effort to provide suggestions on talent retention strategies that are important for organizational success.
3. Methods

3.1 Data collection

This study used an exploratory qualitative approach to collect data on TM and retention strategies in luxury hotels. Hatoum (2010) emphasizes the role of top management in the process of TM. Consequently 27 in-depth semi-structured exploratory interviews were conducted with Hotel General Managers, HR Directors / Managers and Line Managers at 27 different luxury hotels (independent operators and local chains). To ensure validity of the data and in an effort to do a comparative study, this research used data collected from four different countries: the US, the UK, Australia and Greece. Cross-national comparative research seeks to make comparisons across countries and in some cases of cultures with a purpose to identify similarities and differences in the phenomenon under investigation (Hantrais and Mangen, 2010). The purpose of this study was to explore whether talent and TM as well as retention strategies were similarly developed and applied to different contexts, hence a comparative study was adopted. Criticism on the comparative approach refers to the issue of data comparability due to the mix of countries (Hantrais and Mangen, 2010). Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunissen (2016) propose that the Anglo-Saxon countries dominate research in the field of TM, therefore these countries were comparable in terms of context and culture. Similarly, in their bibliographical search, they found that most of the studies on talent are conducted in the USA (46 articles), and some in Australia (28 articles). Akrivos et al. (2007) proposed in their study that career strategies in Greece had many similarities to the UK and Australia, hence they did not identify differences according to country or nationality. There is a call for more research on TM in different contexts (Davidson et al., 2010; Tlaiss et al., 2017); however, no studies were found to provide such comparison. Most studies collected empirical data by people living in the region rather than outside (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunissen, 2016; Stahl et al., 2012). The comparative research strategy allowed the authors to identify gaps in knowledge and sharpen the focus of analysis by suggesting new theories and perspectives in TM (Hantrais and...
Mangen, 2010). The aggregate level approach strategy was adopted in order to improve international understanding of talent and TM, and examine transnational processes across different contexts. The nations were seen as the context of the study, but also as a unit of a larger system (Kohn, 1987), namely the hospitality and tourism industry.

Paauwe and Boseli (2005, p. 58) propose that cross national studies and comparative research is effective when studying homogeneity of HRM practices across organisations; Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunissen (2016, p.36) propose that “TM is linked to the academic field of HRM”. In view to this, luxury hotels were part of the sample; as studies propose the hotel size may be a factor to consider since “larger hotels are more likely to adopt HRM strategies and practices reducing turnover rates, especially at the luxury hotel sector” (Davidson et al., 2010, p. 456). In comparative studies, comparable measures should be set in studying the phenomenon (Hantrais and Mangen, 2010; Gharawi et al., 2009). In this study, the same hotel class and participants’ positions in the hotels were the comparable measures (details provided in Table 1). Stahl et al. (2012) suggest that it is difficult to define luxury hotels due to what the term luxury entails. The World Luxury Index (2017) provides three types, the upper scale brand, the luxury major integrated chain and the luxury exclusive small medium sized hotels. The hotels in the sample belong to these three categories. The global luxury hotel market size was valued at USD 83.10 billion in 2017 (Grand View Research, 2018), therefore such organizations would benefit from retaining talent and hence they would have HRM policies on TM with retention strategies in place. All studies on talent and TM focus mainly on small and medium enterprises looking at TM at the macro level of a country (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunissen, 2016, p.40). The value of this research is the focus on luxury hotels as no other studies with similar context were found and TM issues at a group level i.e. job/sector are underexplored (Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunissen, 2016, p.40).
The interviews were conducted by one of the authors and a research assistant to enhance research triangulation (Tlaiss et al., 2017), and to ensure consistency in data collection in comparative studies (Hantrais and Mangen, 2010). The 27 interviewees held managerial positions in the 27 hotels within the sample, and included male and female managers of different ages. As high matching of participants should be maintained in comparative research, personal contacts were essential in obtaining the required data (Teagarden et al., 1995).

Non-probability sampling – specifically, convenience sampling – was used where subjects were selected based on their accessibility, proximity to the researchers, and their willingness to participate at the study (Etikan et al., 2016). The subjects of the population were easily accessible to the researchers (Etikan et al., 2016) in the case of the UK and Greece. The first six participants (2 from the UK and 4 from Greece) were acquaintances of the researchers. With snowball sampling the researchers were introduced to others willing to participate in the study. In total, twelve participants were identified by this method. The remaining nine participants were identified based on judgemental sampling, by the authors’ network through LinkedIn, again with convenience sampling. Emails were sent to participants informing them about the study and those who responded were added to the interview list. Participants in this case were chosen based on the profile and the position they hold in different luxury hospitality organizations in any of the four countries. The target population was considered to be homogeneous. They were chosen due to their suitability to the purpose of the study. All participants in the study were likely to have power to influence retention strategies and/or were involved in TM (Preece et al., 2013). The selection and definition of objects in this comparative study were done in a systematic way in order to produce and analyse the data in a comparative
way (Gharawi et al., 2009). In order to address the criticism of the sampling technique and whether it used samples representing the population (Etikan et al., 2016), the individuals were selected based on the following criteria: their background; their position in the hotel and their access to information; their impact on TM and retention; and their willingness to participate to the study and share knowledge with the researchers. Although the results may not be representative of the population, due to the sample size, this exploratory study relied on analytical generalization, as the authors tried to generalize the results to some broader theory (Yin, 1989).

The interviews took place in the participants’ office to ensure privacy and to avoid losing interest and interruption (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008). They lasted between 50 to 135 minutes and all were conducted in English except those in Greece that were conducted in Greek. The interviews in Greek were translated after they were transcribed. The translations were checked by the authors and the research assistant who were all fluent in Greek and English. Language is an issue on comparative research, but in this study only in the case of Greece. The challenge of translation was overcome as the authors were native speakers, they were knowledgeable of the culture, with specialization on the area and no translation cost was associated with this task (Gharawi et al., 2009, p.4).

With the permission of participants, the interviews were recorded, and the researchers also took notes. At the beginning, all participants were informed about the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviews. The initial template which was shared with participants by email prior to the interviews included four main categories of questions. The questions for the semi-structured interviews were based on the research questions developed by the authors after having read the relevant literature. The first category included general information on turnover and turnover reasons in hospitality in order to identify any turnover issues in the sample hotels. The second
category included constructs to identify and define talent in order to explore how the participants in the study understand talent and in an effort to conceptualise and provide a definition of talent in hospitality. The third category included questions to identify TM practices. Finally, the fourth category pertained to strategies, initiatives, policies and/or practices to retain talent in the hotels of the study.

Bryman (2008) claims that it is impossible to determine the number of interviews needed for a study, but he proposes that a minimum of 20 may be adequate. Data collection stopped when the researchers observed saturation and repetitiveness was evident in the responses (Fontaine et al., 2013) with 27 complete interviews. Even when 17 interviews were conducted the researchers noticed repeating issues identified by participants. In addition, there were limitations in terms of time as the data collection had to be completed within a time frame of two months due to funding conditions.

3.2 Data analysis

The recordings and the notes taken during the interviews contributed to the data analysis and informed the three themes and discussion points that emerged from the interviews. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was adopted to determine, analyse and report patterns (themes) in the data. Themes are patterns identified in the data that aid in the description and explanation of the phenomena under investigation, in this case TM and talent retention. Six stages were utilised to identify the themes that aid in explaining TM and talent retention in the hospitality industry. The interviews were transcribed, and then through repeated reading initial ideas were noted. Coding then took place, putting these initial ideas into sub-themes. Each sub-theme was reviewed based on their meaning and relationships with a focus on talent and talent retention. The nurture/nature and exclusivity/inclusivity perspectives were the themes in the initial codes given the current literature on talent and TM. Naming themes subsequently took
place and finally each theme was refined with its relevance to the project. Kohn (1987, p.714) proposed that in “cross-national research such as that in which “[…] comparable data from two or more nations are systematically used”. Therefore, the analysis provided discusses findings from a comparison among the four countries in the sample population.

4. Findings and Discussion

Three key themes emerged from the data analysis. The first was on factors that contribute to employee turnover in the context of luxury hotels. The second included organizational definitions of talent and TM. The third provided the elements of TM within the organizations in the study, and talent retention strategies used in luxury hotels. Scott and Revis (2008) proposed that although some TM studies focus on multiple countries there are no studies explaining the differences if any between the countries involved. Thus, the data analysis was undertaken in a comparative way among the four countries.

4.1 Employee turnover

The authors wanted to explore whether employee turnover factors accorded with the key issues identified in the academic literature. Participants were asked to identify the reasons why their employees leave. The main factors identified included (in order of importance); lack of progression opportunities; organizational culture and organizational fit including required attitudes towards work in hospitality; the management team; salary; the working conditions; generational characteristics; the location of the establishment; career change; and the seasonal operation of the particular businesses (mainly in the case of Greece).

Lack of progression opportunities for talented employees was a key factor that contributed to turnover and was evident across all countries. Talented employees seek a challenging work environment and were looking for opportunities for progression and development to reduce
their intention to leave. These opportunities can be offered through providing employees with internal promotions and/or opportunities to engage in activities that enhance their professional experience, learning and development (such as hotel openings). One reason for lack of progression opportunities contributing to turnover was that talented employees pursued career development. As such they became impatient in waiting for advancement opportunities, particularly in relation to promotions within their own organizations.

Another issue raised was organizational culture and culture fit. Although organizations in the study provided training and development opportunities for cultural awareness, these were not designed for individuals. They were rather one-size-fits-all sessions, which were not well accepted by employees, who consequently found it difficult to fit into the organizational culture. Other turnover issues included poor or lack of communication, unfair treatment and lack of support and guidance by the management team towards talented employees.

The remuneration offered to talented employees was another factor identified that contributing to turnover. Most participants noted that their organizations strive to offer a higher salary than other businesses in the market, to offer a more attractive employee package. However, the analysis indicated that the salary factor was of less importance in comparison to offering progression opportunities and a good organizational culture in talent retention. On the other hand, salary was mentioned as a contributing factor to career change and a move to other industries (in the US and Australia) or to companies that offered a higher salary (in the UK and Greece). Poor pay in hospitality is often cited as a factor that contributes to the high turnover of the industry (Baum, 2008; Horner, 2017). However, this is an industry-wide issue that is beyond the scope of this study, since the focus of this paper is on retaining talented employees seeking a career in hospitality.
4.2 Defining talent

Interestingly all participants in the study shared similar views on what they considered as talent in their organizations. They all consider talent those ‘Who take a step further...those who go above and beyond’ (PUS5), or according to another participant: Talent is someone who thinks outside the box, who finds solutions, it is combination of knowledge and experience, who is looking for results... (PUS6).

Each organization has its own culture and employees are required to fit in this culture. On this note, a talented employee was defined as: Someone who has the knowledge and skills to excel at the job, has the potential for growth and development. Someone who gives opportunities to people to grow within the company. Someone who shows the potential for future development, who fits the organizational culture and hence we can invest in them (PUS19).

Others referred to personal characteristics. For example, a participant in Greece noted when identifying a talented employee: She was very driven to learn and she was intelligent. Of course, you can be intelligent but you might not be a talent; she was driven, she wanted to learn. It is very important to hold on to such employees. These employees love their work, they will give it their all, they love the job they love the customer and they love the organization and they will give it their all (PGRI).

In the Greek context participants referred to talent as people who demonstrate consistency in their performance and have goals. PGR2 stated: An individual must be extrovert, methodical, hardworking, to be able to be part of a team, and work as a team, be consistent in their performance. A talented person must have goals and express these goals.
Interestingly another interviewee (PGR4) noted the need to understand the working environment and the conditions in the industry: *A talented employee is someone who has the intelligence and he maturity to understand his/her working environment, meaning his/her colleagues and clients, and to adjust his/her knowledge and skills with the goal to satisfy both colleagues and clients.*

In the Australian context participants shared similar views on talent. They identified talent as those with the right personality to work in the industry and show pride in their organization: *Personality does win over the degree in all occasions...the talented are those who show pride of their organization* (PAU11).

Similarly, participants in the UK mentioned drive, and the potential for the future. For example, PUK14 said: *I think it is someone that you see an element of potential in them, you see a drive. It is a little bit difficult [...] I think it is what is their potential for the future, which is either seen or unseen, by other people or by themselves sometimes.* PUK21 argued that ‘talent starts with the want and the passion to put yourself out and to listen and take these corrections on board’.

Talent was conceptualised in terms of specific characteristics and traits people have, which were either nurtured or developed in the company. More specifically, personality was identified as the main characteristic of talent. All participants acknowledged the proper personality as a key characteristic for employment in hospitality. They recruited people who demonstrated attitudes and behaviours they found appropriate such as smiling people, who were service-oriented and showed a willingness to pursue a career in hospitality. Other qualities included a drive to succeed and willingness to go above and beyond their main responsibilities, being service oriented, and showing the potential and willingness to grow and be further developed.
These elements of talent accord with definitions in the literature highly influenced by the specific industry (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013).

4.3 TM and talent retention strategies in luxury hotels

The findings of this study suggested that luxury hotels take both an exclusive and inclusive approach to talent (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2013). On the one hand, all participants proposed that in their organizations they assume that all employees have talents that can be used in the organization (inclusive approach). On the other hand, they stated they identify those with the talent as those in special groups of individuals in the organization who are considered to have strengths and the ability to be talented at their chosen job roles (exclusive approach) when deciding on giving opportunities for further development. For example, PUK14 stated:

_I do perceive all our colleagues as talented, because we also appreciate that there is a number of colleagues who are extremely passionate about the role that they do. They are happy with the role and don't seek to progress further._

Hence, they provide all employees with the opportunity and it depends on those who were aspirational and willing to take up these opportunities to be included in any TM programme. All organizations in the study adopted a hybrid approach and offered TM programmes at different levels. They offered programmes designed for all employees and others bespoke to their most talented employees talent. One reason for this ‘hybrid’ approach (Stahl et al., 2012) may be that the majority of participants stated that talent needs to be nurtured. In other words, although an employee may be considered as talent or potential talent, this talent needs to be furthered nurtured and developed, through constant training and learning, in order to grow top talent for the organization. Therefore, the fact that some talented employees were differentiated (exclusive approach) and offered further opportunities not available to all employees was not surprising. Organizations in the study aimed to invest and provide opportunities for potentially talented employees to develop into top talent. For this purpose, some participants stated that they monitor their turnover rates on a monthly basis.
TM for participants started with job design and the recruitment process. Emphasis was placed on personality rather than the technical ability, experience or relevant degrees, confirming Barron et al.’s (2014) study. A participant from Greece (PGR22) stated:

The difficulty of an interviewer in a job interview is that in the first ten minutes the interviewer must understand the personality of the interviewee, to understand whether this person is a good fit for you.

Respondents from the US and the UK also emphasized the personality identification with a 2-3 minutes talk when they ask candidates to talk about themselves and their views and opinions about work in the industry. They adopted a behavioural interview style during which they tried to identify a potential match of the candidate to the organizational culture. In the same context participants highlighted the benefits of developing a successful brand in terms of human resources management. They proposed that if their brand is successful people (and therefore talent) will want to work for them providing them with a larger pool of talent. Many discussed the challenge of people’s perception of work in the hospitality industry, hence they tried to instil pride in the company and create awareness of their good human resources practices in the labor force to attract talent. PUK17 mentioned that: Unfortunately, in the UK, hospitality is seen as like a second-class industry to go into due to labels such as long hours and low pay. Which is a huge shame, as there is so much potential for a great career. PAU10 said that: ...people come to work with us because of our reputation as employers, they know what they will get and our brand provides them with some security and safety in their employment. PUS27 argued that: We may also just be looking for the right people at the right time at the right place. For us is very important our brand, and our own individual brand is well looked after because it is harder for us to attract people, no one is going to put our name in google, it is not well known outside our area, so if we get that [our reputation] wrong it will be quite difficult for us to attract people.
This study confirms King’s (2010) proposal that employees need to have information and knowledge of the company’s brand in order to be able to exhibit desired behaviours (p.519). Brand knowledge has also been found to reduce employee turnover in hospitality (Kazlauskaite et al., 2006), and contributes to role clarity and brand commitment among employees (King, 2010).

Although participants in the study agreed that TM is a regular, daily process only a few organizations seemed to have an explicit retention scheme. The majority described an *ad hoc* approach. The cases where TM was planned and systematic were identified only in the UK context. Participants from the US, Australia and Greece acknowledged the importance of TM. However, in all cases in these three countries any strategies were decided during the annual performance process. Following a ‘hard’ and inclusive approach most practices were imposed by top management with limited consideration of employees’ personal drives and views on their development. This finding contradicts findings by Thunnissen (2016), who found exclusive programmes offered, perhaps because her study was among academics and not hotels. On the contrary, examples from UK hotels suggested they had systematic planned approaches to TM, which were regularly communicated to employees.

Several talent retention strategies were identified. These strategies were divided in two categories. The one that includes employees’ practices and the other that refers to employee relationships. In terms of employee practices, the organizational practices and organizational culture influence the experience employees have with the company on a daily basis. Various elements of organizational culture were identified with one predominant in all four countries: the opportunity for flexibility regarding work schedules. Rotas were available to staff and they were given the freedom to make changes upon agreement with their supervisors. This created a friendly, family-oriented working environment where good relationships were developed,
and led to staff satisfaction and motivation. A participative management style was evident among all managers, which provided evidence of an inclusive approach and an organizational culture that provides flexibility and interactive relationships (Akrivos et al., 2007). Another hotel in the UK offers child care for their employees with families. Their hotel is located in London making it difficult for their employees to take care of their children when they finish school, hence they provide such facilities for free. Moreover, they offer excellent staff facilities (PUS19), and even allow staff to use the hotel gym upon registration (PUK14).

Succession planning strategies were evident only in the UK context. As already discussed organizations in the UK seemed to be more organized and proactive. They had specific management programmes to support succession planning. For example, PUK16 mentioned an apprenticeship management development programme, and an internal management development programme. With the latter talented employees were given the opportunity to travel abroad to attend industry specific conferences, network with industry people, and observe competition.

Training and development were valued by participants. In most cases, training took the form of ad hoc programmes offered by consultants in the region, for example the case of Greece. They were mainly generic i.e. on sales, or customer service. In the US and Australia training programmes were general for all in the company and most of them were agreed during the annual performance activities. However, in the UK the training programmes available were planned and tailor-made to individuals. These programmes included leadership and management training offered by universities, such as the programmes offered by the Institute of Leadership and Management (L3 and L5) (PUK21). PUK12 stated: So it is quite a robust programme, we manage it ourselves based on each individual and what they want to get out of it.
Challenging work with opportunities to learn were promoted and encouraged. Feedback and performance appraisal was done on an annual basis but also more often to discuss progress and development opportunities. PUK14 stated: *After those meetings, we also have talent meetings twice a year where all of us as managers we sit together for a couple of hours and we discuss all the individuals within their teams, so they are able to get feedback from everybody.*

Compensation was discussed by all participants. In the US, the UK and Australia organizations in the study pay their employees above the average in the sector in their regions. Hence, employees rarely use their salary as an excuse to look for employment elsewhere. In Greece, salaries were an important issue due to the financial situation in the country. All managers repeatedly said, “*we pay our employees on time*” (PGR2), “*we pay what we promised*” (PGR4), “*we secure their jobs*” (PGR24). Other monetary awards were discussed such as benefits, discount vouchers, discounts for family and friends to stay at the hotel, and prizes.

*In terms of employee relationships engagement was the main issue.* Engagement activities were discussed. Engagement and retention are found to correlate in many studies (Christensen-Hughes and Rog, 2008). Empowering talent has been a priority in luxury hotels in the study. All participants agreed that participation at decision-making, allowing people to take initiatives were important to developing talent. They allowed employees (especially departmental managers) to take part at the recruitment process. Team spirit and team building activities such as parties, clubs and sports engaged employees in socializing activities as managers believed these increase loyalty and commitment to the organization, as they all feel part of a ‘family’. PUK 15 claimed they had an ‘Engagement calendar’ with activities planned and organised by employees (which included birthday cakes, fun days, a national pizza day, games and quizzes), charity and community work, as well as meetings with non-managerial staff every four months.
to explore opinions on various issues. Interestingly, PUK26 said that: *At orientation people spend the night at the hotel and are given £50 to spend on food, breakfast is offered as well.*

A message that came across was that people were valued, and during such events they participated at setting organizational goals, as well as goals for personal development. A participant (PUS8) said: *We recognise those who go above and beyond, colleagues of the month, quarter usually those are nominated by their peers. We engage staff in the hiring process, recruitment is initiated by the department, and HR does the screening it is an inclusive process.*

Empowerment and acknowledgement of achievement were prominent factors. Participants proposed that organizational policies are in place to praise employees and acknowledge achievement. They provide them with autonomy and ensure that their ideas and opinions were heard. Nevertheless, participants valued this talent that had the drive and interest in having a career in hospitality. PUK16 offered what they call the ‘Entrepreneur scheme’ open to external candidates. This is a six months programme where talent works on a project for one of the hotels in the company. At the end, they write and present a report in an effort of the company to encourage the candidates to work in the sector. Other activities identified by PUK21 were employee of the year, employee of the quarter, and ‘thank you’ dinners. PUK25 added the wow story of the month (from TripAdvisor or customers feedback) with a prize of £100.

Effective communication between the management and talent was found to be significant. Regular meetings, briefings, dissemination and sharing of information were discussed by the participants. PAU7 said they hold “daily meetings”. Such communication worked in favour of the company as they had direct access to people, and they became aware of intentions to leave early (which allowed proper planning) and at the same time employees felt they were valued,
developing rapport and low power-distance relationships which contribute positively to retention and leads to an engaged workforce (Christensen-Hughes and Rog, 2008).

Coaching and mentoring were also offered; only one hotel in the US offered a ‘buddy scheme’ where experienced members of staff were linked with newly appointed or less experienced employees. In the UK, ‘In-your-shoes’ a two day shadowing programme was offered as part of management trainee programme for succession planning (PUK15), but no other reference was made to similar strategies.

Some other general strategies were presented. Work-life balance was an issue especially for younger employees (Thunnissen, 2016) and those with families. Flexible schedules and child care were introduced to help talented employees recharge emotionally and psychologically. Workload was also managed with regular breaks for coffee (PAU7). It should be noted that many participants conduct exit interviews in order to identify the reasons why people leave and perhaps try to convince them to stay with alternative opportunities and offers.

Some participants in the study articulated issues in attracting talent. They expressed their concern about the need for luxury service awareness and the need to hire people who would be able to deliver such service. They acknowledged the need to be proactive in identifying talent and in TM, which could be used as a selling point to attract talent. PAU9 stressed the need to have discussions with industry stakeholders to identify difficulties in finding talent. All of the above are summarized in the following figure adapted from Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) based on the findings of this study.

**Figure 2: Conceptual model from findings**

*Insert Figure 2 here*
5. Conclusions

Talent and TM have not been widely researched in the hospitality context, hence this study provides an insight of talent definition and TM and retention strategies using empirical evidence from a comparative study in luxury hotels in four countries. This paper builds on the TM model proposed by Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) and contributes with a conceptual framework provided in Figure 2 which demonstrates how the model is adapted in hospitality. More specifically, professionals provided a definition of talent and they consider talent as those who are special, have competencies valued by the company, behaviors aligned with the company’s values and culture, are hard to find, are hard to replace, can add a great deal of value to the company, have options to leave at any time, and can help shape future strategic directions of the company. But more importantly, according to this study’s participants ‘talent refers to those who take a step further’ and ‘go above and beyond’. Therefore, talent in this study is identified as ‘the employee who thinks outside the box and can make decisions, has knowledge and expertise in his/her area, is willing to learn and progress in his/her career, is adaptable to various circumstances with a customer-driven personality and may fit the organizational culture’.

The most important finding of this study is that UK hotels were found to offer human resource practices in TM and retention which were more effective, systematic and planned in comparison to the other three sample countries. Hughes and Rog (2008) and Baum (2008) proposed that recruitment and selection in the hospitality industry in the UK has been an issue. Hotel managers are challenged by the scarcity of trained experienced employees and staff retention; hence they were forced to develop HR practices to address these issues, which perhaps may justify the rapid TM development in HR in hospitality.
This study proposes that luxury hotels adopt a *hybrid* TM approach in an effort to be inclusive and implement diversity management strategies. They have both an exclusive and an inclusive approach with the implicit engagement of the individuals as well. In terms of inclusivity, TM is seen as a continuous systematic process with a strategic approach to training and development of talent with the potential to provide opportunities to employees to grow and progress in the organization. **They offer opportunities to all employees to be developed as they believe that depending on the positions and employees’ characteristics they may demonstrate talent in what they do.** At the same time, they identify specific talent to individuals who have the potential to progress and have a career in the organization. Following an exclusive approach hospitality organizations personalize the talent development process for effective retention. Organizations in this case do not focus on a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach in TM, but, aim to understand the development needs of each talented employee and offer the appropriate opportunities to achieve that.

In each approach, they use a number of employee practices or strategies that impact on employee relationships. In any case they develop a culture in which talented people are top priority (Steward and Rigg, 2011). This is building an effective HR systems where employees show high levels of engagement that maximizes employee commitment to the organization and in most cases reported reduces employee turnover. Interestingly, their main concern is organizational performance matched with employee well-being.

The main strategies to retain talent in the luxury hotel sector in the Western context include a friendly, family-oriented and open access culture, teamwork, mentoring, leadership, compensation, succession planning and training and development in agreement to other studies (Deery, 2008; Hughes and Rog, 2008; Barron *et al.*, 2014; Hejase *et al.*, 2016). The findings of this study accord with those of Scott and Revis (2008) in proposing that hospitality managers
should ensure that talented employees remain loyal with increased job satisfaction by creating such an environment where people have the feeling of a family and therefore are more committed. In line with Deery and Jago (2015), this study also proposes that hospitality organizations should create brand knowledge and awareness of their HR practices in order to attract talent. Organizational policies should promote the empowerment of talented employees by offering a certain level of autonomy, and the feeling their ideas and opinions are heard. Similarly, a good work-life balance is also found to contribute to talent retention, especially for the millennials (see also Deery and Jago, 2015).

This paper proposes two categories of talent retention strategies, the employee practices and employee relationships strategies. The data analysis indicated that organizational practices should strive to develop an organizational culture that incorporates flexible work schedules, a friendly open environment and good internal communication. Intrinsic motivation with staff empowerment and achievement recognition activities were also discussed. Monetary awards and compensation are used in luxury hotels. However, in agreement to Yang et al. (2012) a large majority of employees in this study left because they were offered a better position or better employment conditions rather than because of remuneration issues. Engagement activities allowing participation at decision-making, taking initiatives, including employees in planning and organizing team building activities were also recommended. Training and development should be strategically and systematically designed for individuals though performance appraisal and other informal discussions with talent. Sophisticated systems should be in place preparing employees for the transition period to promotion and/or professional development. Other strategies could be introduced such as child care. Interestingly, succession planning was identified as a systematic approach of retention and of talent progression only in the UK context.
5.1 Theoretical implications

Summarizing the above, this study is the first to provide a theoretical approach to talent and TM in hospitality with evidence from four different countries addressing the need identified by current studies on universal modes to explain TM (Tlaiss et al., 2017). The authors suggest that there is uniform definition of talent in all four countries which includes personality, a drive for success, a service-orientation and a willingness for personal development. The authors argue that this could be a definition of talent in hospitality, which is organizationally specific and influenced by the characteristics of the hospitality industry. People with these characteristics are valued in the industry and are perceived as talent, which interestingly is a challenge for managers to find. This study proposes that participative management styles are found to be valued in luxury hospitality organizations, with talent retention initiatives that provide flexibility and highly interactive relationships, and work structures that facilitate work-life balance for high performance organizations with reduced staff turnover.

5.2 Practical implications

This study proposes that that key factors in retaining talent in hospitality include challenging and new opportunities for employees to grow with an organizational culture and a brand that may influence the retentions of talented employees. Employers in hospitality should enhance the work environment in terms of conditions and remuneration (Baum, 2008) and determine talent in their organizations. TM should be a proactive practice, recognized and valued by hospitality organizations. Hospitality managers should recognize talent in the process of recruitment, retention and development for effective operation (Baum, 2008). The authors suggest that a soft exclusive approach could be adopted in TM by involving talent in the decision of their training and development programmes. Criteria should be linked to performance appraisal, to job satisfaction interviews, and discussions with talent.
Individuals seem to look internally for further development and progressing with their careers and if these opportunities are not available they will search externally (as noted by Akrivos et al. (2007). This study in agreement to others (Akrivos et al., 2007; Ladkin, 2002) proposes that human resource managers could use internal promotions as a way of retaining talent and from keeping the employees who are valuable to the organization from moving to another company.

Career management is important in TM. A systematic approach is required to facilitate a long-term approach to employee development. Individuals may benefit from a career plan developed for them and the business may be able to proactively manage succession planning (Thunnissen, 2016). Such practices may contribute to the identification of talent and future leaders in hospitality management, filling vacancies from within the organization rather than looking to external sources; a practice that is cost effective (Cannell, 2007).

Succession planning may help motivate, engage and identify people’s potential, propose development and promotion and hence show talented employees the potential for remaining in the organization. The authors propose that hospitality organizations should develop such business aptitude to connect the organizational cultural values to the cultural fit of talented employees, mix experience, learning and coaching, involve talent in various projects in order to prepare them for career opportunities and promotion in the organization. The challenge in the industry is to retain talent, ensuring that appropriate recruitment, selection and career management may contribute to appropriately skilled and motivated employees who are more likely to be retained (Thunnissen, 2016). The organization should recruit high achievers, invest in their training and support them to develop their career by creating leaders which strengthens the human capital and builds on the organization’s human resources competitive advantage.

The findings propose that recognition of any generational differences is required for TM in hospitality. Younger employees (and/or those with families) are interested in autonomy, flexible work arrangements, an inclusive management style and organizational cultures that
facilitate a good work-life balance. The authors suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate for TM and retention strategies, as these should be tailor-made to the individual.

5.3 Limitations and future research

In terms of further research, studies should be conducted to explore human resource practices in TM and retention at the level of individual personality characteristics, and at different organizational levels and structures. The literature emphasises the importance of TM in an organisation’s success, especially in the labour-intensive services sector (i.e. Baum, 2008). In the hospitality industry context, it is critical to retain talented employees through effective talent retention strategies (Watson, 2008; Maxwell and MacLean, 2008). The definition of talent from a hospitality industry perspective may have a different meaning from other sectors of the economy (Baum, 2008). Gallardo-Gallardo and Thunissen (2016) propose that there is little work published on line managers’ perception of talent and TM. There is also a paucity of empirical findings on TM (Thunnissen, 2016) hence this study also supports the need for further research especially on the perception and views of employees regarding TM and retention practices in hospitality.

The context of the luxury hotel sector was used for this study. The challenges in hospitality underpin its operations and particularly influence the way human resources are managed (Gannon et al., 2015). Powell et al. (2013) highlight the dominance of large, private organizations in TM research. The authors propose further research should be conducted in SMEs as the context may impact on retention strategies. Also, a comparison between different types of organization could provide more information and knowledge on retention strategies. Although, the hospitality sector has been characterised as a low skills sector with the Western-centric perception of work and skills (Baum, 2008), this paper provides a more rounded evaluation of talent and TM in hotels in a Western context with evidence from four countries.
This study did not investigate the reasons behind the absence of formal talent retention strategies, but further research could identify whether these should be sector or organization specific.

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World Luxury Index (2017), The world luxury index, the most sought-after luxury hotels. Available at: http://www.digital-luxury.com/reports/World_Luxury_Index_Hotels_by_Digital_Luxury_Group.pdf


Figure 1

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Figure 2

276x131mm (300 x 300 DPI)
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Note: the participants’ coding was conducted based on the interviews’ order

Table 1

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When revising your paper, please prepare this report explaining how you have responded to each reviewer’s comments and suggestions specifically.

### REVIEWER A: Minor revision

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<td>1. I would like the authors to elaborate more how interviews were conducted and more about the questions that were asked.</td>
<td>Please see highlighted changes in section 3 (Methods)</td>
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<td>2. Also, on page 8 the World Luxury citation stating the global market share is 40.5% is from 2013, since that figure is 5 years old, the citation should be updated with a more current one.</td>
<td>Corrected with more updated information please see added section 2.2 as well as discussion in section 3.1 p.13</td>
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<td>3. The last paragraph addresses hospitality programs. I would prefer the authors specify what the &quot;toolkit&quot; for talent identification includes. And also, hospitality programs all use guest speakers and lecturers, the sentence implies they should, so the authors should change that to &quot;continue to use....&quot;. I believe hospitality programs are doing all they can to work with industry, so unless the authors are going to really give us something we can use in the paragraph then they should just eliminate it altogether as it does not reveal any valuable information.</td>
<td>Taking on board the comment this section has been deleted.</td>
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### REVIEWER B: Major revision

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<td>1. This is an interesting and topical subject and likely to be of interest to the journal readership. However, I feel that the focus of the paper could be improved in order to reveal the particular original features of the research and to better highlight the contribution. For example, little is made of the international comparisons, which might offer insights into the nuances between the geographical locations.</td>
<td>Discussion has been added on the geographical locations and research conducted in the four countries in terms of talent management. Since this topic is considered to be new in hospitality there are not many studies done in the industry to provide more literature. However, relevant discussion has been added throughout the paper.</td>
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<td>2. Likewise the luxury hotel aspect, which isn’t really explored in terms of the particular issues in this part of the sector. So if these such aspects were developed more fully then the paper might well make new and significant information available, but it doesn’t at present.</td>
<td>More details on the luxury hotel sector are added in: The literature review section 2.2 (p.5) Methods (p.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. There is certainly some relevant material within the literature review, though also some gaps. For example, I might have expected to see some coverage of recruitment, not in great depth, but certainly to set the context.</td>
<td>More discussion on recruitment and recruitment challenges has been added to section 2.3.1 pp.9-10</td>
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<td>4. Similarly there is little on the specifics of the luxury hotel setting - even if just to comment that this hadn't been addressed in previous research - and to highlight the value of this research.</td>
<td>Please see comments in section 3, part 3.1, p13. before table 1 Some discussion is also provided in the literature review in section 2.2, p.5</td>
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<td>5. There isn't anything on turnover and yet this appears in the discussion of the findings, so really it should feature in the LR.</td>
<td>Discussion on employee turnover has been added in section 2 Literature review (2.1 Employee turnover in hospitality) pp. 4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Overall I'd say that this section seems brief and lacking in overall content and specific detail, while the Findings seem long and lacking in contextual material.</td>
<td>This has been addressed with further discussion provided on the key literature in the section. Discussion on talent definition, on TM various approaches as well as strategies. A model is shown as per Gallardo-Gallardo et al (2013) which is then used for further discussion of findings and the development of a conceptual model.</td>
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<td>7. The methodology and methods are covered in a relatively light manner, with little on the sample or comment on the comparative approach. If the findings are to be discussed in terms of comparison then there should perhaps be some discussion of the value, issues and so forth of this as an approach.</td>
<td>More details are provided not only on the data collection justification as well as the analysis part. Please see methodology section (section 3, highlighted paragraphs) for more details. Details are provided on the comparative strategy as well as the challenges and benefits of such methodology. Justification is also provided on the sample choice and the participants.</td>
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<td>8. The discussion of the questions is logical, though some questions focus on aspects that haven't been covered in the LR e.g. turnover. If they are significant enough to be commented on here, then should this topic not feature earlier?</td>
<td>Discussion on employee turnover has been added in section 2 Literature review (2.1 Employee turnover in hospitality) pp. 3-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The sample looks to be interesting, might it be worth further explanation of the role of the participants that you sought out - direct involvement in talent management or oversight? It is difficult to appreciate the findings without knowing more of the participants and their suitability.</td>
<td>Explanation has been provided in section 3.1 under table 1 p.13 Some further information on the basis for choosing the sample are also discussed in section 3, p.10-13</td>
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### 10. This is an in depth section, perhaps too long and trying to cover too many areas? I wonder if it might be better to focus on a smaller number of points (not 6), in order to enable deeper critical discussion and reflection on the LR?

It is not very clear comment and the authors would appreciate some further clarification. 6 are the key groups of talent retention strategies which are now reduced to 4 as three categories were merged into 1. See discussion in section 4 p.23. The themes discussed are 3 turnover, definition of talent and TM strategies. Reflection on the LR is enhanced with additional discussion on turnover and the lack of talent definition in hospitality.

### 11. So there is a section on turnover and yet this hasn't been set up in the LR.

Discussion on employee turnover has been added in section 2 Literature review (2.1 Employee turnover in hospitality) pp. 4-5.

### 12. There are new points being raised in the Conclusion that really haven't been discussed earlier in the paper and it would be good to see more linkage between the LR, Findings and Conclusions.

All have been checked and now covered in the literature review section.

### 13. If there is a clearer focus on the international comparison or more on turnover, then the paper might offer some great examples of theory and practice. It doesn't currently do that very well, but the opportunities are there.

Please see revised section 5.

### 14. I'm not at all sure about the position or basis of the comments on involving academic institutions. While I totally agree with the sentiments, they don't seem to evolve form the paper at all and appear to be a little ‘random’.

Taking on board the comment this section has been deleted.

### REVIEWER C: Minor revision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestions/comments from the Reviewer</th>
<th>Response from the Author(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The findings could be presented in the form of a framework and linked to an existing theory. As Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013), cited in the paper, strongly advocate developing theory, the authors should use their findings to build stepping stones for theory in this field.</td>
<td>This has been addressed with further discussion provided on the key literature in the section. Discussion on talent definition, on TM various approaches as well as strategies. A model is shown as per Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) which is then used for further discussion of findings as a model has been added see p.27.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The sampling method is explained yet it is not clear. Convenience and snowball sampling is mentioned but there is also a hint of judgmental</td>
<td>We agree with your comment and we added the phase where judgemental sampling was implemented. Please see section 3 p. 14.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The study does not provide the source of questions. If the questions were developed by the author/s, then what method was used, literature review or qualitative research. If literature was used, then the references of those studies should be provided.</td>
<td>Please see highlighted section in p.15</td>
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<td>4. The results are presented and discussed adequately by identifying three major themes. However, it might be better to summarize the results in the form of a framework or propositions</td>
<td>Manuscript amended as per the reviewer’s comment, please see p.27.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. The author/s have done a good job of delineating implications for practitioners but implications for theory are not sufficiently discussed.</td>
<td>Implications for theory are presented in 5.1 The main “new” theory-related finding is that in hospitality a hybrid model is used to accommodate all employees’ potential and for TM.</td>
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<td>6. Normally, qualitative research is theory developing as opposed to quantitative, which is mainly theory testing. The author/s need to highlight if this research can help clarify the definition of talent, the starting point for construct development, or identify dimensions of talent retention construct.</td>
<td>Some further discussion is provided in the literature review but mainly in conclusions were the definition of talent and the dimensions are clearly presented. This is also evident in the model as it emerged from the findings Please see p.27.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. The author/s have not sufficiently built upon good research and findings. The author/s can also discuss how this research enhances the existing theory.</td>
<td>The model developed from data analysis as shown in figure 2 provides a clear overview of how Gallardo-Gallardo et al. (2013) model applies in hospitality and more specifically in luxury hospitality.</td>
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<td>8. The author/s can also explore if personality characteristics of highly talented employees could be related to Big Five personality traits. In addition, the author/s can look into the possibility of linking the findings to high context and low context culture since the data was collected from four countries.</td>
<td>Very interesting idea proposed however due to size limitations it is not feasible to tackle in addition to the discussion already provided the personality traits and the impact of culture on talent and talent management. However, it proposes a good idea as there is material to discuss these in another paper.</td>
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<td>9. In the abstract, the author/s state that “The purpose of the paper is to provide an overview of talent management...”. The word “overview” gives connotation of a literature review even though this is an empirical study.</td>
<td>This part in the abstract has been changed. Please see highlighted area.</td>
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</tbody>
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