

**How remote working impacts employee's engagement to company values and brand
promise of International Hotel Chains**

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ABSTRACT

The hospitality and tourism industry has experienced substantial growth over the last decade due to the improvement of transportation, accessibility, increase of disposable income as well as the interest of people to travel and experience the world. This scenario has brought a great interest of attention from governments and private sector investors who have identified an attractive opportunity for business growth.

These circumstances have positively influenced the creation of jobs globally and opportunity for the main hotel chains such as Marriott, Hilton, Hyatt, Intercontinental and AccorHotels to fastly develop their footprint and increase their global presence.

With the exponential growth of the international hotel chains they needed to restructure their job role organization and started one one side to outsource some of the administrative tasks and on another one implement the telework for some specific jobs. With the rise of the Covid-19 pandemic the hospitality industry and in particular the hotel sector was profoundly impacted which led the international hotel chains to expand the remote work option at a global scale.

Under this situation and due to the rapidly adaptability required by the corporations many employees had to nimbly adjust to the new way of remote work impacting their performance, productivity, life-work balance, social interactions and the overall way of work.

In this way, through this thesis I want to reflect the impact that corporations will have in the long run as some of the job roles within the most distinctive international hotel chains move into a remote work model which might imply a direct impact on the workers engagement to the company values and how they will deliver the brand promise.

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry has been showing a tremendous development over the past century and has become one of the main industries globally. During the past decade, the tourism industry has lived an exponential development and has served as a good source for employment and indirectly impacted economies of developed countries serving as a virtuous prospect of business development in emerging countries.

The fast growth of tourism and its potential has brought the attention and interest of many investors, capital funds and private equity that have identified diverse business alternatives providing a new source of income compared to other traditional formulas of investments. This has enhanced the proliferation of new hotel chains and the opportunity for growth of well-established hotel companies. Furthermore, other adjacent industries have benefited directly and indirectly from the exponential growth of hotel chains such as the transportation and construction industries, new opportunities for the technology sector with importance growth of OTA (Online Travel Agents), allowing new source of business arise like Airbnb (Home sharing Platforms) and locally impacting shops, restaurants and cultural events amongst others.

All of this has directly helped the creation of new jobs and promote new career opportunities for many people worldwide. According to the JLL report Destination 2030: Global Cities Readiness for Tourism Growth (Manzo & Smith, 2019) the tourism sector accounts for 10.4% of global GDP and 10% of the world total employment.

The structure of hotel chains has a traditional approach of manpower where many of the job requirements are operational which mandates the need for being present on property. However, the implementation of new technologies into the operations, outsourcing part of the business and geographically redistributing some of the administrative tasks have allowed the concept of teleworking to arise in the thoughts of the leaders of the main hotel chains.

If we add the current situation of Covid-19, the concept of working from home has speedily advanced bringing onto the market a new way of working which traditional hotel chains had to quickly adapt.

This has set a new work challenge that the industry is facing, in particular related to connectivity and engagement with the workforce coming from a traditional work perspective into an online environment. This directly impacts how employees relate to the company values and how they deliver the brand promise.

This will require a transformation and adaptability on how the work will be executed and how companies will need to engage with their employees. Companies will need laser focus to ensure a smooth transition and the change on how people will interact, relate, communicate and work so this variation doesn't affect the employee job satisfaction neither deteriorate the experience that guests will receive in the future.

The complexity and future progress of this situation has brought into me the interest to explore how the future will develop overtime. In this direction, it will be interesting to investigate how the manpower will be affected by working from home while staying engaged with the company values and delivering its brand promise. In this way, it deserves a good attention and consideration how communication, coordination, recognition and personal relationships will have a strong focus from its leaders in order to ensure that employees engagement remains a top priority avoiding potential consequences on staff turnover, productivity, deterioration of the brand or decline of guest loyalty to the brand itself and ultimate affect the financial performance of the hotel industry as a whole.

2. Aim and objectives

The principal aim of this thesis is to study how the phenomenon of remote working can influence the engagement level that workers will have to a specific brand and the corporate values. I have concentrated specifically within the tourism and hospitality industry with a concrete vision on the main global hotel corporations which are currently leading the industry.

There have been several studies carried out about teleworking and remote working as well as a wide amount of researchers completed on engagement level. However it has not been identified a specific study which relates the connection of remote working for employees working in international hotel chains and their engagement impact on delivering the company brand promise and personally relate to the corporate values.

In order to achieve the aim of this study there has been a selection of objectives that has been set:

- Explore the impact that remote work has on employees engagement with the brand and corporate values of the company that they represent.
- Examine how the main international hotel chains are adapting and adjusting to incorporate the remote work format into their work environment.
- Assess the benefits and disadvantages that remote work will bring into the international hotel chains.
- Identify the main differences that are considered from the company internal organization perspective between remote workers and on site employees.
- Review the impact that leaders will play on the implementation of the remote work model within the company organizational environment.
- Evaluate the prospect development of remote work within international hotel chains.

Within the section of the research methodology has been detailed how the data will be collected and the sample of the study will be structured.

3. Literature Review

According to the UNWTO annual report of 2019 the tourism industry has projected a positive and constant growth since the year 2010. There have been many reasons why this development has taken place including but not limited to increase of disposable income, development of air travel, government support, marketing evolution, social landscape, economic trends and technology advancements (World Tourism Organization, 2019).

Tourist arrivals in advanced economies have increased from 430 million in 2000 to 730 million in 2017 as reflected in the report from UNWTO Tourism Highlights 2018 Edition. Besides, international tourist arrivals are expected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030 according to the World Economic Forum 2019. In particular, developed economies were able to attract more tourists than emerging ones (FD Intelligence & Fingar, 2018). This situation has directly and indirectly impacted the labor market and promoted new investments in those areas. For this reason, many governments incentivize the foreign direct investment (FDI) in order to create prosperity in their environment allowing their economies to evolve over time.

Specifically, the hotel industry itself in 2018 reached across the globe a total of \$540 billion from which \$43 billion corresponded to the top five hotel chains (Marriott Hotels, Hilton Hotels, Intercontinental Hotels, Accor and Hyatt Hotels) which comprised 191.000 hotels worldwide with over 17.6 million rooms (Craft, 2019). Furthermore, new online platforms such as Airbnb or holiday rentals have changed the traditional perspective of the lodging industry. For instance, Airbnb has the ability to offer 7 million accommodations globally in more than 200 countries and allowing local entrepreneurs to financially benefit by renting their accommodations (Airbnb, 2020).

In this instance, hotel chains can influence local communities while improving their services, infrastructures, environment, generating prosperity and a wide range of employment opportunities. Currently, cities are serving as working hubs and it is estimated that by 2050, 68% of the population will be living in metropolitan areas. This situation results in an exponential employment growth contribution from the lodging and food service sector compared to other industries. The main incremental employment in hospitality from 2010 to

2018 has taken place in Asia Pacific followed closely by Africa and Middle East (UNWTO, 2020).

The unprecedented importance of tourism has brought the attention and interest of many governments as tourism promotes economic growth which has led to different studies and researches. The outcome has been studied and verified by the tourism-led economic growth hypothesis (TLGH). Documentation on TLGH was firstly published on 2002 with the intention to study the correlation between tourism and economic growth (Brida, Cortes-Jimenez & Pulina, 2016) and has raised as an alternative from the traditional approach of export-led growth hypothesis (ELGH) that mainly focus on exports resulting on incremental of capital investments and employment (Risso, Wiston & Brida, 2008).

In this way, the tourism industry has positioned itself as a leading industry serving as a structural support for the country's economies, generating opportunities for new business and serving as a new source of income for investors. Even if developed countries are not mainly dependent on tourism itself, its influence has a significant impact in areas such as commerce, transportation, local shops, construction and technology amongst others (FD Intelligence & Fingar, 2018).

There is a correlative dependency between the tourism sector and the hotel industry as both need each other and depend on one another (Popşa, 2018). Consequently, the favorable performance of the tourism sector has enabled the expansion and development of new hotels globally allowing international hotel chains to rapidly grow and strengthen their brands positioning across different markets.

Looking at the trends seeing within the hospitality industry and in particular within the hotel brands, there has been a consensus approach from leading hotel chains on the development, investment structures and execution of owners contracts through management agreements or alternative franchise operations (Ilie, 2015). These business models have allowed an agile acceleration growth for international hotel chains which by using non-equity agreements such as leasing, franchising or management contracts are able to position their brands in different

markets without the necessity of substantial disbursement of cash or investments in real estate (Alon et al., 2012).

According to the research from WTTC (2020) that was conducted in 185 countries and 25 different regions across the globe highlights the fact that the tourism sector accounts for 10.4% of global GDP and collectively represents a contribution of 330 millions jobs globally, equivalent to 10.4% of total employment in 2019. The evolution that the travel and tourism sector has had over the past years has positively affected the creation of new jobs contributing one in four of all net new jobs created across the world from 2015 to 2020 according to WTTC (2020).

Hence, the tourism industry is one of the driving sources for job creation across the globe and due to its structure requires a high demand for manpower compared to other industries (Bayar & Ozav, 2020). Moreover, it is an industry that promotes equal opportunities for diverse genders, younger generations joining the workforce and due to the global position, it is enriched by collaboration of different cultures within the same work environment (Loss, 2019).

The hotel industry comprises a combination of generations working closely together, and it is imperative that leaders understand each one of them and are able to connect with the employees in order to comply with expectations from different generations at the same time (Gursoy et al., 2008). In the research of Aynalem et al (2016) it is showcased the importance of the human resources aspects of the business as employees are considered the true asset of their companies and advocates for delivering their brand promise.

Khan (1990) was one of the pioneers on developing the concept of work engagement and since then different researches have taken place expanding and evolving this concept throughout the years.

According to the Penna research report (2007) after employees have been able to fulfill their basic needs of salary pay and benefits, they start looking at opportunities for internal promotion and the understanding of the company leadership style. In this way, when the prior points have

been satisfied the employee will start to align the value and meaning within the company that will be showcased through a true connection, a common purpose and a shared meaning at work.

With this development Ahmed et al. (2016) has suggested that work engagement will be achieved through meaningful work and this scenario will take place when employees find a real purpose in the job, leading subsequently to high levels of engagement with the company, its values and ultimately delivering the brand promise. Even if there is not a common definition about employee engagement, it is agreed that an engaged employee has a connection with the company, is concerned about the future of the corporation, shows passion about the job and will feel satisfied with the success of the company results (Gross & Holland, 2011).

Under these new circumstances employee engagement starts with the employee personal beliefs as well as the lifestyle that they feel connected with and not that much directly to the actual work itself that will be performed (Johnson, 2004). There are differences between the components of job satisfaction versus the ones that drive engagement. Organizations need to focus on meaning, autonomy, growth, impact and connection as those are engagement drivers and subsequently companies will benefit from innovation, productivity, talent retention and customer loyalty (Rogel, 2019)

As the world evolves and the working conditions rapidly change due to the incorporation of new technology, social changes and working environments readjust, corporations need to adapt much faster than ever before to these new conditions in order to remain competitive in the marketplace (Johnson, 2004).

Another important matter when understanding employee engagement is the importance of the work environment as it constitutes a decisive factor for workers (McGuire & McLaren, 2007). During the past years the work environment has been adjusting to the needs of the marketplace where new models of working have been established such as sharing desks, open space, teleworking, co-workings amongst others. All this has been possible due to the advancement of technology, internet connectivity, mobile networks and laptops beside other advancements (Becker, 1999).

The Teleworking concept originated during the 1970's (Van Meel, 2011) and was presented as a new way for improving the productivity levels of the companies while improving the work-life balance besides reducing the impact on the environment. One of the visionaries of this concept was Jack Nilles who performed a study to understand the impact that telework could have in a company's performance (Berthiaume, 2020). Moreover, since the concept of telework started there has been an evolution on the alternative spaces where the actual work can be carried out, which is not necessarily performed at home and is done at different locations from coffee shops to coworking spaces, airport lounges, hotel lobbies or rooms amongst others. This scenario has allowed the concept of telework to reshape and expand into what is known as remote work which suggests that the actual work is done geographically outside from where the company is based, or even the notion of e-work which can relate to the digital nomads who temporary transfer to different countries or cities where they are normally homebased (Parris, 2019).

This change from a traditional office workspace to the new alternatives spaces has introduced a new way of working breaking a traditional approach and opening wide options for companies and workers. This situation starts to differentiate the type of workers within an organization and it is possible to identify what can be considered the "*knowledge workers*". Furthermore, these workers are adapting to new working spaces and are not attached to one specific area which opens the opportunity to develop their work in locations such as coffee shops, hotels, homes, coworking offices or even while they are travelling on airports, planes or trains (Ruostela, 2013).

Due to the flexibility that employees will be having they will not be evaluated on their actual presence at work (Kingma, 2019) so international hotel chains will need on one hand be ready to set their company strategy and brand promise to ensure that their teams are connected and feel part of the corporation even when they are not physically present, as well as evaluate their performance through the use of balanced scorecards (Mutuku, 2018).

At the same time, hotel chains will need to assess the right balance of remote working to ensure that the engagement level of the team remains at its highest. For instance, according to Gallup studies it has been identified that the greatest level of engagement occurs when there is an hybrid model of remote working highlighting that in recent times the workers that more of their work time teleworking feel a high level of engagement than the ones that do not telework (Adkins & Man, 2017).

In these terms, international hotel chains will need to evaluate the best way to move forward on the human resources structure, aligning the internal strategies and assigning the best type of work model in relation to be a fully remote worker, a hybrid worker or fully on site employee to ensure that the workers will feel fully engaged with the company values and the brand promise.

4. Problem statement

The Tourism industry has positioned itself as a leading industry ahead of other sectors such as chemicals or fuels industries, representing about 30% of the total exports in services globally (FD Intelligence & Fingar C, 2018). This situation has allowed international hotel chains to grow their footprint globally and indirectly influence domestic industries, employment and benefit local communities. However, the lodging industry clearly depends on the development of adjacent industries such as the transportation, construction, infrastructures as well as incentives from governments and overall investors interests. In this way, the hospitality industry is set in the middle of the value chain.

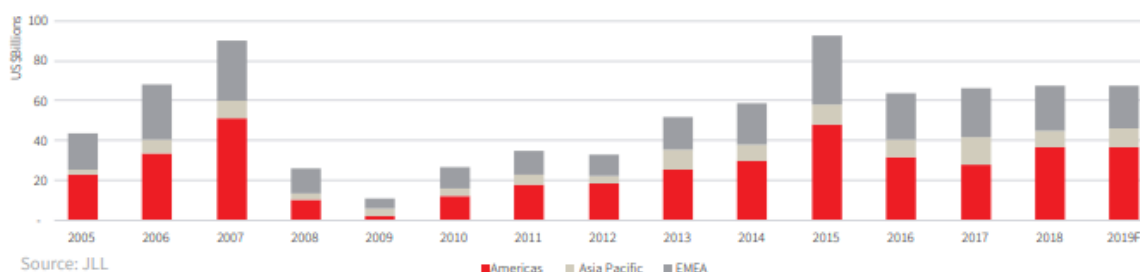
The development of the tourism industry needs a sustainable and steady environment to promote its growth as some factors such as political instability, climate change, terrorist attacks or pandemics like Covid-19 could negatively impact the industry and quickly disrupt the stability needed for the business evolution. The tourism sector will continue to grow overtime due to the improvement of the transportation alternatives, competitive pricing, digital connectivity, traveler's needs for discovering new places, attending corporate events and overall work travel related trips. However, it will need to be assessed how the growth affects some urban cities, its citizens and how it will impact the environment as some mass travel patterns are disrupting how the influence of tourism is perceived in the local communities.

In this instance, governments play a critical role on how they position their destinations, how they assist and incentivize sustainable growth, generating investment opportunities and setting the necessary legislation to ensure a promising future for the local economy. Moreover due to the global focus that the industry has, external country organizations such as OECD contribute and advise on priorities and policies that could generate future opportunities supporting a sustainable development over time (OECD, 2020). One of the specific agendas to promote this sustainable growth has been set by United Nations with a target for 2030 to transform the world and provide opportunities (United Nations, 2015)

The incremental importance of the tourism and hospitality sector has been recognized as well by investors of all sorts and not necessarily specialize in hotel investments. The interest of

investors comes due to the strong performance that the industry has experimented during the past years as well as the opportunity of higher returns on investments (ROI) compared to other alternatives on assets categories or other types of financial investments (JLL, 2019).

Global hotel investment volumes 2005 - 2019F



During the 1970's hotel chains like Marriott or Hilton controlled the internal operation, branding and acted as owners of their assets. However, during the 1990's the proprietorship structures changed and evolved appearing different ownership models such as franchising or REITS (Real Estate Investment Trusts) (Wijtenburg, 2019). By 2018 the investors structure for hotel investments experienced a new transition and dominant investors shifted to be institutional investors groups, private equity and consolidated REITS (JLL, 2019).

Due to the high competitive landscape that the hotel groups have encountered and with the switch on the ownership of the assets from the hotel operators into different kinds of investors, the hotel groups needed to differentiate themselves from their competitors in order to create value and be able to generate new leads on investments and partnerships fostering the necessary growth to remain competitive. Within this scenario, companies had to consolidate their global positioning and encourage a continuous expansion of their footprint. Within this highly competitive scene, corporations have identified during this past decade the importance to clearly define their values and subsequently established a concrete branding proposition (Olsen et al., 2005).

For this reason international hotel chains started to pay special attention to their brands definition and positioning with the goal to differentiate from their competitors. In this way, a brand has the final purpose to establish a connection with the final customer and at the same

time should reach an inspirational connection with the employees who consequently will feel motivated and have a positive behavior, showcasing their attitudes and ultimately connect with the brand (King & Grace, 2007).

In consequence, it is possible to highlight the importance that relationship marketing has within corporations and how these companies will need to focus their efforts on establishing a strategy that will not only reach their customers but will reach with the same power their internal customers (Gehrels & de Looij, 2011). The visionary approach of employer branding has been conceived by Ambler and Barrow in 1996 where they highlighted the importance of relationship marketing for staff engagement within corporations which since then other related concepts have been built around this concept.

Within the hospitality industry hotel chains are a good source of employment and consequently serves as a platform for social inclusion, personal growth, generates disposable income and provides work opportunities worldwide (International Labor Organization & UNWTO, 2014). The industry provides a large amount of job alternatives from basic entry level positions to high level leadership roles. Nonetheless, the industry has a poor conception of the job quality reflected on an unsteady employment due to some jobs being low paid and having challenging working hours compared to other industries (Aynalem et al., 2016) Moreover, there has been a high demand for jobs in developed cities which has incentivized job rotation, low engagement with brands, more investment on training, higher recruitment costs added to the fact that new generations of workforce like millennials or Generation Y look for short periods of employment in order to rapidly advance on their careers and get new job experiences (Lub et al., 2012).

Due to the geographic disparity where hotels are located around the world, international hotel chains need to adapt their recruitment strategies taking in consideration local legislations, understand the market trends and evaluate the availability of qualified workforce in order to ensure that the company hires the most qualified talent for that particular market and job function (Aynalem et al., 2016).

The extensive and diverse aspects that need to be considered for the employability of the workforce added to the interrelation of intangible business aspects like brand promise, company values and guest experience sets a unique scenery where hotel chains will need to clearly distinguish themselves. In this way, recruitment, benefits and adaptability to new market trends play a critical role in the distinction between hotel chains portraying a competitive advantage towards the company performance, its financial results, overall guests satisfaction, employee engagement and ultimately delivering the brand promise.

As an important initial step when making the recruitment strategy, international hotel chains are considering a wide range of aspects when selecting the future workforce as they will need to reach a wide audience from young professionals entering the labor market, workers from different nationalities and cultures, diverse age generations from baby boomers to millennials, diverse background experience and technical knowledge, availability of the workforce in the marketplace and most importantly how the candidate will relate to the company culture, its brand and values.

Diverse generations have different concerns and expectations, for instance according to a study carried out by Lub et al. (2012) the Generation Y has shown a higher interest for autonomy on their work and value considerably the work-life balance compared to prior generations. According to Agrawal (2016) Generation Y is set as a generation which reflects low engagement compared to other generations such as Baby Boomers or Generation X, so companies will need to be very much focusing their attention and effort on this group as it is becoming a large part of the workforce. Besides, in the research from Martin (2005) it is disclosed that this generation of talents appreciates managers who will provide them with guidance about the work they are performing, establish an open communication, generate a positive work ambience, while fostering an environment for freedom in the execution and where they feel empowered.

For this reason, companies nowadays in order to remain competitive need to relate to the performance, productivity and engagement of their teams. Out of the three mentioned concepts the one that drives the ultimate long-term results and can influence the customer experience and their loyalty is the engagement level of the employees (Jha & Kumar, 2016). Even though there

is not a globally agreed definition of employee engagement there are several recognized concepts that are set around of employee engagement.

One of the distinctive writers about engagement was Khan in 1990 where he wanted to understand the impact of motivation at work and defined personal engagement as “the harnessing of organizational members selves to their work roles as in engagement people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during the role performance” (Khan, 1990).

Further to this concept other definitions have been raised as results of different studies such as the one from Robinson et al. (2004) who defined employee engagement as “a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its value. An engaged employee is aware of business context, and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. The organization must work to develop and nurture engagement, which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee.”

It is possible to understand that brands on one side will be built around some functional or physical aspects but at the same time will have a good connotation of emotional particularities. Looking within the hospitality industry as a service sector the product offered will have a physical element which can be identified as the hotel room, restaurant decorations, public areas of the building amongst others. However it will be challenging to represent the brand through a service experience as this has an intangible aspect that each employee will represent in a personal custom way (Erkmen, 2018). For this reason, companies that have an important focus on delivering the brand promise are able to recruit, promote and recognize those employees that will serve as brand ambassadors. This core group of people within the organization will be the ones that live and promote the brand into the next level and will serve as a connector between the company brand promise and its internal customers which will result in a positive impact on the brand perception and influence the level of engagement within the team members (The McQuaig Institute, 2019).

In this way, corporations will need to assess how they can influence employees to be fully engaged. For this reason leaders will need to have a concrete understanding of the specific

drivers that will set the best scenario to achieve the highest level of engagement and be able to maintain it over time (Kompaso & Sridevi, 2010).

Certainly, this task will not be easy as leaders will need to be able to reach a true connection with the employee to recognize their personal influences of engagement and how these will be developed overtime as people will grow within their personalities and personal interests while be exposed to external factors that will reshape each individual motivation and eventually affect their engagement. Under this situation leaders will need to set the conditions to identify and define which tasks employees will need to carry out and provide the necessary trust and flexibility on the work to achieve the maximum potential of the worker and overall results for the company.

Furthermore, with the new scenarios of team members teleworking from remote locations, leaders will need to strategically focus on achieving a connection and further develop the relationship with the employees in a virtual way as they will not be able to relate on a physical space as often as has occurred in the past years.

One of the primary aspects to be considered from the managers side is the actual work location from where the employees will be able to carry out their work. Different environments will best suits for a task, for instance a quiet space at home can set the stage for work which needs concentration while on the other hand been in a physical office or an coworking environment can presume a more collaborative scenario where creative ideas can be developed in teamwork (Ruostela, 2013). Certainly not all employees will perform on the same way while working from home as besides of the personal performance and adaptability to the environment it needs to be consider external work factors such as if the employee has childrens or family at home while they are working, noise environment, adequate lighting or having the necessary equipment to productively and securely carry out the job.

Besides this highlighted points should be considered other aspects that might affect the employee. For instance, when employees are working from home they will be able to save commute time which might lead to use that particular time to do more hours of work than when

the employees were at the office locations resulting in a differentiation to the employees working at the office.

Besides, other difficulties might arise and affect the worker performance such as household distractions or family care duties resulting in a stress situation for the employee (Ellison, 1999). Moreover, with the flexibility of the location where the job can be performed people will be able to work from anywhere in the world as long as the connectivity and technological support is available. Even if this scenario will be appealing for many workers some others might have problems of adaptability to a new constant environment, being frequently surrounded by new people or different time-zones of work where they will not be able to find a constant work ambience ultimately affecting their performance and productivity.

The mentioned situations might ultimately affect the organizational culture serving as a disruptor to the level of engagement with the company brand promise and lead to a disengagement scenario between the worker and the corporation values (Ellison, 1999). Furthermore, employees might land on a situation where they will find themselves isolated due to the lack of human face-to-face connections or even reducing their self-esteem by missing some prompt day-to-day work recognition, not dressing up for the occasion or losing daily contact with colleagues network.

With the mentioned circumstances leaders will have a complicated role when they will need to evaluate the workers performance as the physical distance might provoke a disconnection with other co-workers, managers, leaders, company values and brand engagement.

Looking specifically within the hospitality industry and within the hotel operations there will be numerous jobs that are operational which will need to be based at property level. However, several job roles can be performed by employees in remote locations. As example of hotel departments that can execute their work in a diverse range of locations could be considered accounting, sales and marketing, human resources, reservations, revenue, e-commerce and IT (information technology). Additionally, international hotel chains have a corporate and regional structure that complement and provide support to the hotel operations such as innovation, asset

management, legal, development, purchasing amongst others, which ultimately can work remotely.

In this way, at property level some of the positions that can be executed outside of the hotel might need to remain as hybrid positions. Even if the majority of the tasks within these roles could be done remotely at some point in time there might be a need to have a physical presence in order to support specific tasks for the operations teams at property level. This situation will imply that hotels will need to specifically allocate a workspace for those working in a hybrid way.

With the unprecedented pandemic scenario of Covid-19 hotel chains had to quickly adapt to this new situation and reorganize some of the job roles while understanding new government regulations which are arising in different countries in relation to telework norms and standards that corporations will need to follow and comply. At the same time, this situation will provoke a number of opportunities that companies should leverage upon such as new technologies and how they are applied to the framework of the organization added to the chance to use this technology to set future parameters of communication, adjust obsolete processes and set a more dynamic workforce (Volini et al., 2020).

At the same time, hotel chains will need to evaluate and prudently consider some related costs associated with remote working or homeworking. For instance, corporations might incur in some extra costs that the employees will have in order to perform their work to the best of their capabilities such as internet accessibility, electricity consumption, work equipment, laptop, mobile telephone and ancillary expenses paper, printing and potential transportation costs for face to face meetings held in the offices.

On another hand, companies will be financially compensated and generate some savings for the workers working remotely. In this way, corporations will need less physical space in the office to accommodate the teams which might reduce the cost associated on real estate and can set hot desks for workers when they need to be present at the offices. In this way, companies will be

able to reduce some operational costs such as electricity expense, printing, hardware equipment, benefit allowances (car, fuel, transportation, employee meals, etc.) (Aderaldo et al., 2017)

Due to the exponential growth of remote working governments have stepped up and are currently reviewing and setting policies that will impact the overall way of working. For international hotel chains this will imply to set different policies and procedures to adapt to each particular market and government policy. Further to this, corporations will need to review and consider several aspects from risk management point of view depends on the location where the work will be done, internal IT policies, concile work-life balance, detect inequality, data protection rules, cybersecurity impact, taxes administration, policy on salary and benefits according to remote working location, scope of working hours, insurance policies, related expenses or remote work and other requirements (NoHQ, 2020). This will imply a restructure of the internal administrative work which the human resources department will need to perform.

In this direction, corporations will need to adapt and restructure the internal communication, processes and procedures to review how remote working will impact the business and internal organization. International hotel chains might need to consider the implementation of new administrative roles within the organizations that will be specialized in coordination, implementation and assessment of the remote work model. Furthermore, they will need to reevaluate their recruitment strategy, internal position statement, company culture otherwise the engagement level of their workers might be impacted and in the long run affect the company performance.

5. Research Methodology

The research methodology has been based on a descriptive approach combined with explanatory research in order to explore and provide additional information on how remote working can influence the engagement that employees have toward the company values and its brand.

The focus of the research has been directed towards how working remotely for an international hotel chain can influence the workers perception and engagement to the corporation values and the brand promise. With the impact of the pandemic Covid-19 has emerged an opportunity for hotel corporations to enhance the remote work experience for some job roles and even consider

some hybrid scenarios for work positions which due to the hotel operations might need to be physically present at the hotel property.

The hospitality industry overall is one that has particularly not promoted the remote working in the past as most of the job roles in a way has a direct contact with guests, suppliers and other stakeholders which required a physical presence at the hotel level. Some corporate office roles and cluster positions were flexible in the approach of remote working models but was not something that corporations have intentionally promoted in the past. There have been several pilot programs such as the one that Marriott corporation launched with an initial format of telework in 1990 and expanded its utilization in 2009 (Marriott International, 2009). In 2019, just before the Covid-19 Hilton opened new telework possibilities for reservation and customer care specialists with the vision of expanding this jobs role (Hilton, 2019).

The beginning of the remote work concept can be attributed to Jack Nilles, who in 1973 considered the term of Telecommuting and considered the opportunity for companies to be decentralized with the introduction of technology and avoid the unnecessary travel of workers from their home to the offices (Nilles, 2017).

There have been several studies and authors that have been debating on the way to define a teleworker, however a general consensus has been brought to live understanding that teleworking is conceived on the fact that the work is carried out in a remote location of the person premises using technology to communicate and complete its work (Wilks & Billsberry, 2007). Furthermore, it has extended the concept introducing the idea of e-working which relates to the way of working besides the consideration of a variety of locations of the actual work (Hardill & Green, 2003).

Beside of considering the location where the work will be performed companies will need to focus on the suitability of employee criteria as not all workers will be able to adapt to the remote working format in order to achieve the personal self-realization and contribute to the corporation long term vision while maintain a strong engagement with its values and the brand (Shin et al., 2000).

There have been many theories developed about and research associated with telework from a corporation perspective focusing on the relationship with innovation approach, workforce

organization, internal teams relationship, legal and contractual challenges, impact on job satisfaction, impact on environment, workers productivity or employee engagement (Shin et al., 2000). However, minimum research has been found on the impact of telework or remote work which particularly impacts employee engagement towards the company's brand promise and its values.

Moreover, many of the research publications were focused on industrial corporations, consultancy companies or information technology enterprises (Cascio, 2000). However, there is not specific studies with a special focus on international hotel chains and how they can incorporate telework or remote work into their organizational structure as a model of work while ensuring that the workforce will be engaged and represent their brand promise and company values.

In this way, the main objective of the research is to identify how employees that telework or remote work could have an impact on the company brand through their level of engagement when they are not fully present.

In order to review the phenomena of employees from international hotel chains working remotely or teleworking and its influence on the company brand promise we have considered a qualitative research approach. The main idea of the research is to review the implications that remote working has on employee engagement while delivering the company brand promise.

I will approach a select amount of individuals (10 people per brand) from the top international hotel chains like Marriott, Hilton, Intercontinental, Accor and Hyatt that are currently teleworking and evaluate their level of engagement from a brand perspective, at the same time comparing the results to workers (10 people per brand) that do not perform the job remotely and are based on a hotel property or in a corporate office in a full time basis.

The employees that will be considered for the study within the group of teleworkers can range from full time workers, part time employees or that occasionally telework due to their job role. For the group of workers at a property level or corporate office can be considered that they perform an operational or an administrative role within the corporation.

The research nature will be carried out through structured interviews to the sample of workers. The interviews could be done in presence or online to provide flexibility to the workers and at

the same time be able to reach a wider audience across the globe. In order to provide an international vision to the study, the sample of employees selected will be based in different continents across the world in order to provide an holistic approach to such international based companies.

The structure interviews will be comprised with the following information:

For employees that ***are*** currently teleworking and remote working:

1. General information about the interviewee (Age, Gender, homebase country, job role within the company)
2. How long have you been working for your current company?
 - a. 15 or more years
 - b. 10 or more years
 - c. 5 or more years
 - d. 2 or more years
 - e. Less than 2 years
3. How satisfied are you with your leader's guidance on delivering the brand promise?
 - a. Not satisfied
 - b. Somehow satisfied
 - c. Satisfied
 - d. Very satisfied
 - e. Extremely satisfied
4. How would you rate your level of trust in your leader?
 - a. I fully trust my leader
 - b. I somehow trust my leader
 - c. I neither trust or not trust my leader
 - d. I trust my leader
 - e. I fully trust my leader
5. How would you rate your level of engagement with your brand?
 - a. Not engaged
 - b. Somehow engaged
 - c. Neutrally engaged

- d. Engaged
 - e. Fully engaged
6. How often does your company speak about the importance of delivering the brand promise?
- a. Never
 - b. Sometimes (once every six months)
 - c. Often (once every three months)
 - d. Very Often (once every month)
 - e. Always (every day)
7. Which channels does your company use to promote the brand culture? (*Select 2 options*)
- a. On site training
 - b. Online training
 - c. Group works
 - d. Printed collaterals
 - e. Video
8. How can corporations achieve a high level of engagement between employees and their brand? (*Select 2 options*)
- a. Structured recruitment process
 - b. Allow employees to experience the brand first hand
 - c. Trainings
 - d. Career growth
 - e. Social activities
9. How would you rate the overall engagement level of your colleagues at work
- a. Not engaged
 - b. Somehow engaged
 - c. Neutrally engaged
 - d. Engaged
 - e. Fully engaged

10. Do you see a difference in engagement between employees that telework or remote work and then ones working at the company office?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
11. What would influence your engagement with your company? (*Select 2 options*)
- a. Better salary and benefits
 - b. Opportunities for career development
 - c. Work-life balance
 - d. I am fully engaged because my life style matches the brand promise
 - e. Work environment
12. Has your company given you the option to telework or remote work
- a. Yes, At any time
 - b. Yes, but only a few days a week
 - c. Yes, but only a few days a month
 - d. Yes, but only during the period of the pandemic
 - e. Yes, but I don't want
13. From the below statements which ones you feel most identified with? (*Select 2 options*)
- a. I understand my role in the organization
 - b. I have freedom to execute my job
 - c. I know what is expected from me within the company
 - d. I fit with the brand and the company values
 - e. The leaders value my work contribution
14. How would you see the future of remote work in hotels
- a. It is only temporary due to the pandemic situation
 - b. Leaders will give the option to work remotely
 - c. It will be difficult to execute my job well if I telework
 - d. I would change company's if my leader don't give me the option of telework
 - e. I don't want to telework as I prefer to work in the company office
15. What are the most valuable benefits of telework or remote working? (*Select 2 options*)

- a. Flexibility to work from different locations
- b. Work-life balance
- c. Reduce my commute time to work
- d. I can contribute to reduce the pollution and help the environment
- e. There are no benefits

16. What corporations need to do in order to properly implement telework? (*Select 2 options*)

- a. Trust employees
- b. Empower employees
- c. Focus on communication
- d. Rethink the company structure
- e. Provide the tools to employees

17. What is your company providing for teleworkers and remote workers?

(*Select all that apply*)

- a. The company provides all the necessary tools and equipment
- b. The company pays related working costs that employees have at home such as electricity, wifi and other
- c. The company has an internal set of procedures for teleworking
- d. The company organizes a set of social events to encourage teamwork
- e. The company provides training for employees to be better prepare to telework

18. What are the future challenges of teleworking and remote working? (*Select 2 options*)

- a. Isolation and lack of teamwork
- b. Engagement with the brand
- c. Communication amongst the team
- d. Increase of distractions
- e. Different time zones of work

19. From the below list, select what will positively affect you as an employee:

(Select 2 options)

- a. Telework will increase my productivity
- b. Telework will affect the quality of my work
- c. Remote working will allow me to work while I travel the world
- d. I will be able to better reconcile my work and life priorities
- e. I will have more flexibility on how I manage my time and work priorities

20. What is your overall opinion about the telework and remote work?

- a. I don't like it
- b. I somehow like it
- c. I neither like it or dislike it
- d. I like it
- e. I very much like it

For employees that currently ***are not*** teleworking and remote working:

1. General information about the interviewee (Age, Gender, homebase country, job role within the company)
2. How long have you been working for your current company?
 - a. 15 or more years
 - b. 10 or more years
 - c. 5 or more years
 - d. 2 or more years
 - e. Less than 2 years
3. How satisfied are you with your leader's guidance on delivering the brand promise?
 - a. Not satisfied
 - b. Somehow satisfied
 - c. Satisfied

- d. Very satisfied
 - e. Extremely satisfied
4. How would you rate your level of trust in your leader?
- a. I fully trust my leader
 - b. I somehow trust my leader
 - c. I neither trust or not trust my leader
 - d. I trust my leader
 - e. I fully trust my leader
5. How would you rate your level of engagement with your brand?
- a. Not engaged
 - b. Somehow engaged
 - c. Neutrally engaged
 - d. Engaged
 - e. Fully engaged
6. How often does your company speak about the importance of delivering the brand promise?
- a. Never
 - b. Sometimes (once every six months)
 - c. Often (once every three months)
 - d. Very Often (once every month)
 - e. Always (every day)
7. Which channels does your company use to promote the brand culture? (*Select 2 options*)
- a. On site training
 - b. Online training
 - c. Group works
 - d. Printed collaterals
 - e. Video

8. How can corporations achieve a high level of engagement between employees and their brand? (*Select 2 options*)
- a. Structured recruitment process
 - b. Allow employees to experience the brand first hand
 - c. Trainings
 - d. Career growth
 - e. Social activities
9. How would you rate the overall engagement level of your colleagues at work
- a. Not engaged
 - b. Somehow engaged
 - c. Neutrally engaged
 - d. Engaged
 - e. Fully engaged
10. Do you see a difference in engagement between employees that telework or remote work and then ones working at the company office or hotel?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
11. What would influence your engagement with your company? (*Select 2 options*)
- a. Better salary and benefits
 - b. Opportunities for career development
 - c. Work-life balance
 - d. I am fully engaged because my life style matches the brand promise
 - e. Work environment
12. Has your company given you the option to telework or remote work
- a. Yes
 - b. No
13. From the below statements which ones you feel most identified with? (*Select 2 options*)
- a. I understand my role in the organization

- b. I have freedom to execute my job
- c. I know what is expected from me within the company
- d. I fit with the brand and the company values
- e. The leaders value my work contribution

14. How would you see the future of remote work in hotels

- a. It is only temporary due to the pandemic situation
- b. Leaders will give the option to work remotely
- c. It will be difficult to execute my job well if I telework
- d. I feel is not fair that some jobs roles will have the option to telework and others not
- e. There will be a disconnect between the employees that telework and the ones that are in the office or at the hotel

15. What are the most valuable benefits of working on site vs to telework or remote work:

(Select 2 options)

- a. Better connection with the brand promise
- b. Better communication between the employees
- c. Telework will reduced the work focus and productivity
- d. Better relationship with the leaders
- e. More opportunity for career growth

16. How can corporations benefit by implementing a telework or remote working model?

(Select 2 options)

- a. Reduce overall costs
- b. Improve customer service
- c. Increase productivity
- d. Improve employee retention
- e. Ability to hire more qualified employees around the globe

17. What is your company providing to onsite workers vs teleworkers and remote workers?

(Select all that apply)

- a. Have a personal relationship with other colleagues

- b. The company absorbs working costs such as employee meals, uniforms or transportation
 - c. Safe environment
 - d. Better and constant recognition
 - e. More fluent and constant connection with company leaders
18. What are the future challenges of teleworking and remote working? (*Select 2 options*)
- a. Isolation and lack of teamwork
 - b. Engagement with the brand
 - c. Communication amongst the team
 - d. Increase of distractions
 - e. Different time zones of work
19. From the below list, what will affect the implementation of telework? (*Select 2 options*)
- a. Telework will affect the worker productivity
 - b. Telework will affect the quality of the work done
 - c. Remote working will increase the company costs
 - d. Home working will affect the family relationship
 - e. Employees will work more hours
20. What is your overall opinion about the telework and remote work?
- a. I don't like it
 - b. I somehow like it
 - c. I neither like it or dislike it
 - d. I like it
 - e. I very much like it

The outcomes of the interviews from the different corporations will be analyzed and described in order to provide an in-depth view of the organizational environment as well as the relationship between remote working and engagement of the teams for the feature international hotel chains.

6. Conclusion

The tourism and hotel industry has had a vital and dynamic growth for the last century and will continue to grow in the upcoming future even if external factors might affect its progress such as pandemics effects like Covid-19, terrorist attacks, natural disasters, government policies, changes on legislations might take place globally.

There are certain factors that will positively help the hospitality industry to continue to develop overtime. The main key drivers for its sustainable growth will be that investors will continue to foresee this industry as a profitable one compared to other sort of investments; government interest as it is one of the main industries which contributes to economic growth; substantial need of workforce; impact that has on local economies as well as collateral industries such as transportation or food and beverage amongst others.

With the situation of Covid-19 there will be REIT's, institutional funds and large equity funds that under this circumstances will see a potential interest to introduce or even expand their investment presence in the hospitality industry due to the competitive opportunities that will be arising in the near future as some privately owned hotel properties, small hotel chains or hotels which had a slim financial situation might be on need to sell the properties on a price point where investors will be interested to acquire them.

Major international hotel chains have become during the past ten years global conglomerates that are enlarging its internal economic power and encouraging a continuous seek for new momentum to partner with investors while maintain a strong focus on business growth, project developments, expansion on franchise opportunities and promote new business lines in order to remain leaders within the hospitality sector.

The increasing competition and proliferation of new hotel chains, local boutique hotels and new disruptors such as Airbnb or Homeaway are forcing established international hotel chains to be more agile, innovative and laser focused on their strategy to differentiate themselves from their competitors. For this reason corporations are reflecting on their value proposition to owners, customers and employees by building strong brand concepts that will support their company values and long term vision.

In this way, traditional hotel chains will need to clearly define their brands and ensure that the service delivery will be executed in a genuine and distinctive manner so they can differentiate from its close competitors and new players in the market. The main challenge that large international hotel chains currently have is the substantial amount of brands within their portfolio which sometimes might create some disorientation to the final customers and even to the investors. On another hand, by having a distinctive selection of brands in the company's portfolio could benefit the reach of new customers as well as provoke a connection with the most loyal customers and be able to engage with a larger and diverse workforce.

This brand connection will be critical for hotel companies to attract and retain the most qualified talent. In this way, more and more international hotel chains are establishing new ways of recruitment and they are focusing on the employee's personal interests, how they will achieve their self-realization, how they will fit within the company culture and how they will represent their values. This employee selection and future engagement will be critical under the new circumstances of a remote work environment. For this reason employees and its leaders will need to build a strong sense of trust.

Leaders within the hospitality industry will have a large challenge which they will need to be prepared to overcome, and this is that they will manage teams that are not physically present in the office, have different time work zones, few that might require to have an hybrid job presence and some operational roles which will need to remain on site. Added to these situations leaders will need to manage a diverse workforce in terms of generations, culture backgrounds, education and level of expertise in the field. This will represent that leaders need to master their communication skills and be capable of building a trustful relationship in order to reach and engage with their audience at all levels independently where they will be located while supporting a culture of collaboration between teams in order to ultimately deliver the brand promise under the company set values

For this reason corporations will need to start looking for new ways to adapt their workspaces, their internal organization, overall structure, communication tools and be able to generate an environment of collaboration even if this is set in a combination of physical and virtual space in order for employees and teams to remain synchronized, connected and fully engaged with the brand.

In this way, is taking place a shift in the industry and some of the traditional job roles will be adjusted in order to fit a new way of remote working. We will view an important transformation on the way that leaders will communicate with their teams utilizing new technology tools, cloud base platforms, virtual meetings and even expanding to a more dynamic and flexible way of working. Under this scenario the worker will have more independence and flexibility on the job execution, more control on its organization and will demand from each individual a strict discipline to perform their job in a productive and efficient way.

Nevertheless, this autonomy and freedom might represent a challenge for some employees to remain connected with the rest of the team, the company or even land into a situation where the workers motivation will be self-developed, taking a proactive approach on their own with less supervision on their tasks which will need a leadership vision and self-direct path. However, for some workers this new approach might bring a chance to better balance their personal and professional life, give the necessary flexibility to travel and discover new places while they

work, could generate some savings in commute time or reduce the personal expenses related to job transportation.

In this way, there will be some critical factors that leaders within organizations will need to focus and concentrate a substantial effort to maintain a high level of engagement with their teams. Leaders will need to maneuver its leadership styles and coaching approach in a way that is flexible, tailor to each individual, timely conscious, approachable, trustful while being able to transmit with passion the values of the company and brand promise to reach a genuine connection with the corporate culture.

Furthermore, there are external aspects that enterprises will need to evaluate and consider in terms of local legislations related to home working or telework, overtime handling, taxes implications, labor risk management, employees illness/accident handling, workers compensation for long term disabilities, staff related insurances, government laws, distribution of equipments, work safety regulations, cyber security impact, technology maintenance, home based utility costs

Corporations will need to assess which one is the best mix of talents working from a remote location and the ones working at corporate offices or at the property level. Besides of the fact that will need to be reviewed the opportunity of cost savings associated to the remote working model as companies might benefit from a direct decrease on costs such as transportation allowances, uniforms costs, real estate space or other costs such as recruitment costs that can be deemed from a reduction on the turnover of staff in the company, reduce absenteeism and lower level of stress of the team benefiting the employee health.

Consequently, there are many aspects which need to be considered and analyzed in order to successfully implement a remote work program. In this instance, leaders will play a critical role in the execution and promotion of the remote work model and will be the bridge between the company brand, its value and the employees. In this way, companies will need to develop and support their internal leaders while providing them with the necessary resources, financial

support, flexibility and trust in order to maintain the essence of the company culture and encourage an ambience prosperity within the teams.

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