

Talent management practices in the extreme context of hospitality sector: An exploratory study

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This is author accepted manuscript version of the paper accepted to be published in “International Journal of Organizational Analysis” (Emerald). Kindly cite this paper as:

Mousa, M., Arslan, A., & Szczepańska-Woszczyna, K. (2022). “Talent management practices in the extreme context of hospitality sector: An exploratory study”, *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*. Available online at <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-07-2022-3356>

Talent management practices in the extreme context of hospitality sector: An exploratory study

Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to specifically analyse the extent to which talent management practices in the post-Covid-19 era differ from those before the pandemic in the extreme work context of Egyptian hospitality sector.

Methodology: The study uses an exploratory qualitative research approach where semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 full-time employees working at hotels in Sharm El-Sheikh (Egypt). Moreover, thematic analysis was undertaken on the interview transcripts.

Findings: The findings revealed that in the post-Covid-19 era, the case hotels exclusively use the inclusive talent management approach, in which all staff are recognised by the management as talents with the same workplace privileges. This approach helped to mitigate the negative influences caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, our findings highlighted the criticality of competencies such as multitasking along with in hospitality sector employees in relation to extreme context necessitated by Covid-19. Our findings further established that when facing extreme events, such as Covid-19, a shift in training activities towards activating positive mental health and effective shock management among employees is also needed. We found that organisational support and continuous learning play a vital role in individual employees' resilience development, which also helped in retaining them.

Originality/Value: This paper is one of the pioneering empirical studies on the relationship between talent management practices in extreme contexts and the influences of global disruptions resulting from Covid-19. Moreover, it is one of the few studies to specifically undertake a comparative assessment of the differences in talent management practices pre- and post-Covid-19 time period in the hospitality sector. The study findings contribute to multiple literature streams including extreme context, hospitality, human resource management, and transaction stress model.

Keywords: Covid-19, Egypt, Extreme Context, Hospitality Sector, Talent Management, and Transactional Stress Model.

Type of paper: Empirical research paper

1. Introduction

Hospitality and tourism have been referred to as being one of the most vulnerable sectors subject to political, economic, and natural disasters, revolutions, and pandemics (Israeli *et al.*, 2018; Zopiatis *et al.*, 2019). Covid-19 pandemic, which started in November 2019 in China and later spread globally (Baum & Hai, 2020) resulted in mandatory lockdowns for airports, hotels, and restaurants (Gossling *et al.*, 2020; Arslan *et al.*, 2022) along with the suspension of a variety of other socioeconomic activities (Giousmpasoglou *et al.*, 2021). It has been argued that Covid-19 caused an approximately 50 percent drop in global tourism revenue for 2020 (Baum *et al.*, 2020)

and threatened the jobs of approximately 120 million employees in this sector (Sigala, 2020). Such global disruptions resulting from the spread of Covid-19 have been referred to as extreme since, as an extreme event, the pandemic has created extreme work contexts and sometimes also extreme jobs (Grima *et al.*, 2020; Alonso *et al.*, 2022).

It should be noted that extreme context refers to working atmospheres in which one or more massive event occurs, and subsequently causes significant physical, and psycho-social demands on organisational members (e.g., Duarte Alonso *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, a job can be described as extreme if it includes "at least five of the following ten characteristics: unpredictable flows of work, fast-paced work under tight deadlines, the inordinate scope of responsibility that amounts to more than one job, work-related events outside regular work hours, availability to clients 24/7, responsibility for profit and loss, responsibility for mentoring and recruitment, a large amount of travel, large amount of direct reports, and lastly physical presence at the workplace for at least 10 hours a day" (Hewlett & Luce, 2006, p. 51). Extreme jobs themselves tend to be a result of global macro events (e.g., the spread of viruses, political uprisings, terrorist attacks), organisational/meso-related events (e.g., daily advancement of information technology, downsizing decisions), and micro/individual antecedents (e.g., workaholic personalities) (e.g., Lievre, 2016; Gascoigne *et al.*, 2015; Turnball & Wass, 2015; Hallgren *et al.*, 2018). However, despite the spread of Covid-19, it is rather difficult to classify hospitality-related jobs as extreme. However, the context of work in the hospitality sector has become extreme due to the manifold influences of Covid-19 (Alonso *et al.*, 2022).

Prior scholars have established that talents and their management currently shape the hospitality industry realities and priorities (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2019; Bolander *et al.*, 2017; Michaels *et al.*, 2001; Konnerth, 2008). It is worth noting that academic scholars (e.g., Silzer & Dowell, 2010; Mellahi & Collings, 2010) constantly use the concept of talent to reflect one of the following three aspects: (a) a person who effectively contributes to the productivity of his/her organisation, (b) a group of members who successfully add value to the performance of their organisation or (c) a set of knowledge, skills, and abilities in individuals that entail a contribution to the organisation's performance. Noticeably, and despite its dependence on human interactions and the ongoing close relations between hosts and guests, empirical studies on talent management in the hospitality industry are relatively few in comparison to multidisciplinary studies produced in the disciplines of organisational psychology, human resources management, public administration, and politics (see e.g., Dries, 2013; Thunnissen *et al.*, 2013; Sanjeev, 2016; Mousa, 2022). Consequently, we have decided to address talent management practices in the hospitality sector by focusing on Egypt, where hotels have witnessed rather dramatic events and/or disruptions over the past decade, including the spread of Covid-19 pandemic (Ramadan *et al.*, 2021). It is worth highlighting that the problems in the Egyptian hospitality sector started with the Egyptian revolution in 2011, followed by the crash of a Russian plane above northern Sinai, resulting in the death of 212 Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian tourists.

It is critical to highlight the vitality of the hospitality sector in Egypt, along with the paucity of studies on talent management in the tourism sector (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019; Sanjeev, 2016), and the dearth of studies conducted on extreme contexts (Hannah *et al.*, 2009; Hallgren *et al.*, 2018), especially concerning Covid-19; there is a clear gap in the literature, which our study aims

to fill in. Therefore, we focus on employees working at several hotels in Sharm El-Sheikh (Egypt) to answer the following research question: *To what extent are talent management practices in the post-Covid-19 era different from those that existed before Covid?* By doing so, we contribute to multiple literature streams, including extreme context, hospitality, human resource management (particularly talent management) and transaction stress model. The current paper is one of the pioneering studies to specifically highlight the differences between talent management practices in the pre- and post-Covid-19 time period, in a relatively unstable context of Egypt. Moreover, our findings highlighted the development of multitasking capabilities in employees played a critical role in talent management practices; thereby empowering those employees and potentially enhancing their future demand in the employment market of this sector. Finally, using transaction stress mode (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Grima *et al.*, 2020), our paper is one of the first to specifically show that in extreme contexts (post Covid-19 period), talent management practices should care about not only the employees' personal traits (e.g., educational achievements, values, work experiences, etc.) but also their individual resilience.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. After the literature review, we present the study methodology and analysis details. After that the study findings are presented followed by a discussion on theoretical and practical implications. The paper concludes with limitations and future research potential.

2. Literature review

2.1 Talent management practices

Since its emergence in the report entitled "The War for Talent" in the Mckinsey Quarterly in 1998 (Chambers *et al.*, 1998), the use of talent management has always been accompanied by questions such as who is talented and who is not in each sector, industry, organisation, and function. Another interesting question in this concern is whether a talented person remains talented across time and/or organisations or not? (Mousa & Ayoubi, 2019a, b; Mousa *et al.*, 2021; Maheshwari *et al.*, 2017; Maurya & Agarwal, 2018). The answers to such questions are mostly prioritised in service sectors, such as tourism, where effective talent management fuels individuals' competence, boosts employee skills, and recognises the value of knowledge (Zhang & Bright, 2012; Mousa *et al.*, 2021). Huang and Tansley (2012) differentiated between macro talent management, which addresses the availability of qualified staff in a specific country, and micro talent management, which focuses on how talents are recognised, developed, and retained in their organisations.

Earlier scholars (e.g., Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Valverde *et al.*, 2013; Tarique & Schuler, 2010; Alferaih, 2017; Sivathanu & Pillai, 2020) have differentiated between three schools of thought in relation to talent management. The first considers talent management as a subset of the traditional human resources management functions, which usually includes planning, recruiting, placing and developing personnel, among others. The second school perceives talent management as a rebranding of the concept of HRM, particularly because of the tendency of HR personnel to change titles from personnel manager to HR manager to Learning and Development Managers (Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Mousa & Mahmood, 2022; Singh & Sharma, 2015; Mujtaba & Mubarik, 2022; Mousa, 2021a,b). Noticeably, these first two seek to include all employees of the organisation under the umbrella of the concept "talent"; accordingly, all staff should be included in the training,

coaching, mentoring, and, therefore, should also feel equal in remuneration (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). The third school of thought limits the scope of work-related privileges (e.g., training, financial rewards, flexible work time, etc.) to only 10–20 per cent of the organisation's staff, which the organisation recognises as talents (Mellahi & Collings, 2010).

Furthermore, Naim and Lenka (2017) have highlighted two approaches to managing talent: the first is inclusive, in which all organisational members are identified as talents, and accordingly, they should be granted the same support opportunities; whereas the second is exclusive, in which only a few employees are recognised as talents and accordingly perceive greater privileges than their colleagues. This goes in line with Lacey and Tompkins (2007), who stressed that the organisation has the right to treat its members differently.

2.2 Talent management in the hospitality industry

Talented and stable employees are essential factors for the success of a hotel (e.g., Jauhari & Sanjeev, 2012). Consequently, talent management which starts by recognising, developing, and retaining trained staff in the hospitality sector has become very critical (e.g., Burbach & Royle, 2010). However, not all hotels care about this specific aspect (Sen, 2009). Hospitality organisations, including hotels, witness a higher-than-average level of employee turnover and/or withdrawal (Karatepe, 2013; Han & Hyun, 2015). Several scholars (e.g., Baum, 2002, 2006; Nickson *et al.*, 2002; Mousa *et al.*, 2021a, b, c; Mousa, 2021a) have shown that depending on low-skilled individuals who can perform micro-tasks that do not require systematic training is no longer acceptable in the tourism and hospitality industry. However, efforts to cultivate talent-related practices have been mostly undertaken in western countries while they remain unknown in non-western countries (Westwood, 2002; Mousa & Chaouali, 2022; Mousa & Samara, 2022).

In this concern, many famous hotels have initiated a positive change in their HR policies to show more care toward their talents (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019). Shangri-La hotels international, for instance, have developed a performance assessment for their employees every six months to guarantee timely feedback. The Hilton group has also developed a career development program to suit employees of different age groups (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019). Noticeably, employees can fulfil different hotel roles and/or functions. This includes and is not limited to reservations, front desk, security, storekeeping, housekeeping, culinary, financial management, events management, sales, marketing, and information technology (Sen & Kaushik, 2016). Accordingly, all except those who work in finance and storekeeping are in daily contact with hotel guests and tourists (Mohlala *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, the hotel's employees should maintain a set of skills, knowledge, experience, motivation, and competencies to meet guests' demands (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019). It is worth highlighting that, given the information technology revolution, any dissatisfied guest can harm a hotel's reputation with a single online remark that can be disseminated globally to millions of people (Chauhan *et al.*, 2014; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019). Hence, guest comfort and satisfaction are even more critical these days due to the potential of negative influences on business performance in case of negative reviews and comments by them.

2.3 Transactional stress model

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) developed the transactional stress model to highlight the need for individuals to have a dynamic reaction to stressful events. This model necessitates an assessment of the stressful event and secondly, an assessment of all the physical, social, and material resources an individual has (Schuler, 1982; Wilkins-Yel *et al.*, 2019). An event is perceived as stressful only when it exceeds the set of different resources a person can use (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Noticeably, the traits an individual has (e.g., values, beliefs, work experience, educational achievements) primarily shape his/her ability to encounter stressful events in addition to some contextual factors (e.g., managerial orientation, organisational support, and characteristics of the event) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Therefore, people react differently to the same stressful events (Retna, 2015).

Adapting to stressful events (Covid-19 in this case) fosters the development of coping strategies that individuals might depend on when seeking organisational support, which is constantly reflected in institutional strategies, training sessions, and continuous mentoring, among others. In this regard, coping strategies can be referred to as "the cognitive and behavioural efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce external and internal demands that tax or exceed the resources of the person" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 114).

2.4 The extreme conditions in the Egyptian tourism context

An extreme context can be referred to as an "environment where one or more extreme events are occurring or are more likely to occur that may exceed the organisation's capacity to prevent, and result in an extensive and intolerable magnitude of physical, psychological or material consequences to – or in close physical or psycho-social proximity to – organisational members" (Hannah *et al.*, 2009, p. 898). Given this definition, an extreme context is the result of a sudden and/or (un) expected event, for which organisations (hotels in this case) mostly do not have sufficient time to secure resources and training for their personnel to effectively deal with the new event or at least overcome its expected adverse consequences. The fact that since the spread of Covid-19, there has been a drop in income of an estimated 1 billion USD monthly from the Egyptian Tourism and Hospitality (T&H) sector, which contributes to 15% of GDP (OECD, 2020, Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, 2020) indicates the extent to which the Egyptian tourism context is considered to be extreme. Furthermore, and notably, the Egyptian T&H sector relies heavily on Russian and Ukrainian tourists, which account for more than one-third of the total visitors. The Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has dealt yet another heavy blow to the T&H sector, as occupancy in Red Sea resorts and hotels, which yield 90% of T&H revenue, plunged to 5% of normal levels (Financial Times, 2022). The loss of visitors from its two largest tourism markets has been a severe shock to the sector that is considered the third largest source of revenue after remittances and non-oil exports (OECD, 2020).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research design and sample

The current paper is a qualitative study. We undertook 30 semi-structured interviews between February and April 2022 with a sample of 30 hotel employees who work mainly in the reservations,

front desk, and events management departments. The interviewed employees work at four four-star hotels in Sharm El-Sheikh (Egypt). The focus was on employees in those three departments because of the direct interaction and/or close relations they develop with hundreds of guests, given the nature of their duties. The lead author who also collected data mainly depended on their personal relationships in gaining access to the respondents. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the study sample.

Insert table 1 here

Sharm El-Sheikh is an appropriate setting in which to explore this topic for the following reasons. First, the city is a major destination that is internationally well-known for tourists who care about beach tourism. Second, the city has been negatively affected by a series of local and global events, starting from the Egyptian revolution in 2011, the crash of the Russian plane in 2015 near Sharm El-Sheikh, the Covid-19 pandemic in 2019 and the war in Ukraine in 2022, which is expected to decrease the number of tourists of the city by at least 30% (CNN, 2022; Financial Times, 2022). This stimulated hotels in Sharm El-Sheikh and other beach tourism cities in Egypt to consider talent management as a valuable mechanism to overcome the negative consequences of such political events, global pandemics and international conflicts (Ramadan *et al.*, 2021).

3.2 Procedures

As mentioned earlier, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Zoom and Telegram were used to conduct their interviews in Arabic, the native language of the respondents and the lead author. The main interview questions are presented in Table 2

Insert table 2 here

The duration of each interview ranged from 60 to 90 minutes. The obtained data was transcribed and translated from Arabic into English, and to guarantee the accuracy of the translated data, the separately translated English transcripts were translated into Arabic and compared with the original text. Notably, because of the sensitivity of the research issue, only 16 respondents agreed to have their interviews audio-recorded, while detailed notes were taken in case of all other interviews. It is worth highlighting that all respondents were reassured that interview data would only be used for research purposes and would be anonymous and confidential. Furthermore, they were told that they could ignore any question or leave the interview at any point if they felt uncomfortable. The objectives of the study of talent management practices were communicated upfront. Furthermore, during the analysis phase, personal identifiers were removed from the transcripts, and codes were assigned to each interviewee.

3.3 Data analysis

The respondents were encouraged to co-construct their experience of the talent management practices they experienced before and after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Interview data were coded manually and evaluated based on three steps (Strauss & Cobin, 1990). First, data gathered from each hotel was separated to form a contextual understanding of the experiences of employees working at each hotel. Second, we analysed and separated the data into independent themes. The objective was to examine how talent management practices are experienced pre- and

post-Covid-19 to find out whether there is a difference in implementing such practices in those two stages. More specifically, this meant paying attention to the respondents' interpretation of talent management, training, recognition, retention, organisational support, learning opportunities, equality, and communication, together with other emerging themes from the data. This approach is in line with Alvesson and Kärreman (2011), who support participant sensemaking and researcher participant discourse as a social tie that links them to the construct(s) under study. However, Alvesson (2011) recommends careful data analysis to obtain a rational interpretation because not all data can be codified. Conspicuously, the perceptions and reflections of some respondents revealed new layers of understanding of the dynamics of talent management practices that helped them navigate the ensuing extreme context resulting from the spread of Covid-19.

4. Findings

4.1 Scope of talent management: Inclusive or exclusive?

Several scholars (e.g., Naim & Lenka, 2017; Mellahi & Collings, 2010) have differentiated between the inclusive and exclusive talent management approaches. In the former, all organisational members are recognised as talented and consequently perceive the same workplace privileges in terms of training opportunities, financial rewards, and promotions. In the latter, only 10–20 per cent of organisational members tend to be identified as talents, and hence they perceive more workplace privileges than their colleagues. The latter exclusive approach was the one adopted by the hotels in this study before the emergence of Covid-19. However, upon the spread of Covid-19, these hotels shifted their orientation to rely exclusively on inclusive talent management, as shown in the interviews conducted. The reason behind this shift is that the management of the addressed hotels was fully aware that they were going through an extreme situation and/or event, which required their employees to be available 24/7 (Hewlett & Luce, 2006). Specifically, if an employee on the front desk contracts Covid-19, he or she may be replaced by one of his/her colleagues, regardless of whether the replacement possesses normal or elite skills. Consequently, hotels have to guarantee all of their employees the same training opportunities, financial rewards, and coaching sessions to overcome any shortages due to the loss, withdrawal, or absence of one or a group of employees because of Covid-19.

Since the spread of Covid-19, the hotel I work in has no option except to offer all of us the same training, workshops, and rewards. The hotel did not want to face any shortage because of any unexpected Covid-19 infections among us. Respondent 2

With the spread of Covid-19 and once starting to reinstate our work after the lock down, many of us had become infected by Covid-19. Therefore, one of us found that he was a multitask employee who could perform multiple roles. At the end of 2020, we started to recover our losses through increasing numbers of Russian and Ukrainian tourists, but many of us had had Covid-19 with severe symptoms. Therefore, I had to work in reservations, at the front desk, and sometimes in event management as well. It was and still is an extreme time. Respondent 27

Before the emergence of Covid-19, my manager preferred certain people among my colleagues. Accordingly, they dominated all the financial rewards, training

opportunities, promotions and other privileges. The situation changed after Covid-19, as the manager started to depend on all of us and to make me and my colleagues ready for any crisis, disruption and shock. Respondent 12

The only advantage I got from Covid-19 is the fact that this virus has created a need for a new type of treatment and a new set of skills. That is why, my hotel had to respond and afford all of the staff the same workplace privileges for the first time. Respondent 16

4.2 The shift towards psychological development

Talent management describes a sequence of activities organisations (hotels in this case) implement in identifying, recruiting, developing, and retaining top employees (Blass, 2007; Baum, 2008). Therefore, the development represents the main subset of talent management practices (Ulrich, 2008). Therefore, Shangri-La Hotels International have initiated a periodic assessment for their employees that is carried out every six months (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019). The Hilton Hotels Group has also decreed a career development program that matches the various age groups of its staff (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2019). The addressed hotels, as per informed in the conducted interviews, have also initiated psychological training which aims to aid the mental health of their members. This is the first-time mental health training has been undertaken in Egypt, and it has assisted in supporting employee commitment to their hospitality careers by focusing on the temporary issue of Covid-19. Trainers elaborate that Covid-19 is a temporary phenomenon and will not last forever.

It was a part of my hotel activities to organise various workshops and meetings with psychiatrists for my colleague and me. This happened for the first time. However, the main aim of such activities was to ensure our balanced behaviour, treatment, and response to our guests despite the intense atmosphere we have in work and life because of the strict Covid-19 requirements adopted by the government. Respondent 28

Our continuous smile and empathy toward guests represent a motive for the administration of my hotel to prepare all the staff through psychology-related training sessions in addition to regular psychological assessments every week. Respondent 6

Sen (2009) referred to increased visibility of training programs in the hospitality industry to reduce employee turnover. Moreover, the developmental training packages offered for tourism-related personnel has aimed to recognise the multitask competencies of hotel staff (Burbach & Royle, 2010). The hotels studied in our paper continue to pursue multitask skills for their employees in order to mitigate any negative influences of Covid-19 pandemic.

Before Covid-19, all the forms of training and/or development we had was about how to stimulate customer loyalty, satisfaction, and commitment. This necessitated intensive sessions on how I as an employee become capable of multiple tasks.

Suddenly, our hotels changed the content of the training to focus on the positive mental health of employees and guests at the same time. It was and still is a new trustworthy experience. Respondent 18

The idea that my hotel started to pay for some visits for me and some of my colleagues to psychological counsellors who were required to mitigate our work-related stress was totally appreciated. Moreover, the hotel started to organise some gatherings for the staff. This creates a healthy atmosphere that helps us to forget the out-of-work suffering resulting from the Covid-19 restrictions. Respondent 24

4.3 Retaining talents through support and resilience

According to the transactional stress model, any event is perceived as stressful when exceeding the individual's physical, material, and social resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Consequently, Covid-19 is considered a stressful event. Since adapting to any stressful event is primarily based on personal traits (e.g., values, beliefs, work experience, educational achievements, etc.) and organisational support (Retna, 2015; Silkins-Yel *et al.*, 2018; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the addressed hotels have decided to enhance the capacities of their employees in preparing them to deal with the consequences of Covid-19 and accordingly, guarantee the retention of staff through stimulating their resilience.

One of the main advantages of Covid-19 was the care I perceived from the hotel I work in, something I did not feel over 12 years of experience I have had in this hotel. My commitment to this hotel has been doubled because of the responsible treatment the administration afforded me and my colleagues since Covid. Respondent 9

Employee resilience can be referred to as "the capacity of employees to utilise resources to continually adapt and flourish at work, even when faced with challenging circumstances" (Kuntz *et al.*, 2016, p. 460). This is constantly associated with continuous learning and leadership support. Therefore, one of the addressed hotels has developed a unit for managing its employees' resilience, while others have prepared monthly workshops on "resilience in extreme times or crisis". Noticeably, maintaining high levels of resilience assists employees in developing critical thinking traits and, accordingly, crisis management skills (Block & Block, 1980). Consequently, resilience is always employed as a mechanism to overcome challenging aspects especially in extreme work contexts (e.g., Lai & Cai, 2022).

I only started to feel that there was a team standing behind me after Covid-19. Continuous rewards to keep my life going, ongoing training, regular visits to psychological counsellors, and weekly meetings with managers to discuss any career-related shock I feel. Respondent 23

In Sharm El-Sheikh we got used to finding massive events that might negatively affect many of our seasons. Events like the Egyptian revolution and the Russian plane crash over Sinai in 2015. However, I only felt care and support in the era of Covid-19. The training, coaching, meeting, and mentoring I have had post-Covid-

19 prepare me for any crisis and makes me feel that I am appreciated by the hotel I work in. Respondent 10

5. Discussion

The current paper aimed to find out the main differences in the talent management practices pre- and post-Covid-19 in a relatively unstable context of Egypt. Our findings show the use of inclusive talent management practices by the case hotels. We believe that implementing the inclusive talent management approach goes in line with the extreme context of Covid-19 that hotels have had to respond and adapt to. Hannah *et al.* (2009) elaborate that work in extreme contexts might lead to intolerable exhaustion of employees in terms of their physical and psychological resources. Case hotels tried to develop multitasking skills in employees (even if they were traditional performers) to mitigate the negative psychological influences of extreme context emanating from Covid-19. As employee stress due to insecurity or health influences the guests' experiences, case hotels' management made an effort to offer organisational support in multiple ways and encourage resilience development.

Insert figure 1 here

5.1 Theoretical implications

A major theoretical implication of this study relates to the usefulness of inclusive talent management practices in response to disruptive events such as Covid-19 as a mechanism to mitigate the negative influences caused by them. Hence, hospitality and human resource management theorists need to work further to establish this interlinkage in relation to other extreme events, including major political changes, wars, or socioeconomic shocks. Moreover, our findings highlighted the criticality of competencies such as multitasking along with in hospitality sector employees in relation to extreme contexts necessitated by Covid-19. Our findings further established that when facing extreme events, such as Covid-19, a shift in training activities towards activating positive mental health and effective shock management among employees is also needed. Hence, the researchers focusing on talent management and extreme work contexts need to incorporate elements of new competencies development as well as readjustment of training activities, while theorising. Finally, for the transaction stress model research stream, our findings established the importance of organisational support and continuous learning in relation to individual employees' resilience development.

5.2 Practical implications

Our study offers several practical implications as well. First, even though adopting an inclusive talent management approach in the post-Covid-19 period alleviates the negative consequences of identifying who is talented and who is not, we suggest the addressed hotels establish the identity of a "good colleague" which should be awarded to the one who shows care towards his/her colleagues' health, feeling and performance in extreme contexts. This contributes to the healthy workplace atmosphere the addressed hotels initiated after the spread of Covid-19.

Second, in the post-Covid-19 period, in which many employees lost friends or witnessed the pain of their friends, colleagues, and relatives who became infected by the virus, we suggest the addressed employees organise regular visits to psychological counsellors who might help in decreasing the stress, pain, and depression they might feel. The hotels need more entertaining activities to foster employees' positive mental health and subsequently help them to forget any bad experiences they feel exposed to throughout the Covid-19 period.

Third, we suggest the addressed employees prepare a monthly report about "what skills they really miss in the post-Covid-19 period?" and raise these with the administration. This might help in deciding the context and orientation of any talent management-related training on the one hand and provide signs of respect that the hotels have for their employees on the other. Hence, the forms of organisational support the hotel provides its employees should come in line with their needs and/or desires.

6. Limitations and future research directions

Our paper does have several limitations. Firstly, this study is limited to employees from four hotels in Sharm El-Sheikh, and as a result, caution is needed in generalising the study findings. However, keeping in view that this is a pioneering work in this specific context, it sets reasonable bases for future scholars to further explore these phenomena in other resort cities of Egypt and other developing (relatively unstable) countries. Also, future studies can try to focus on talent management dynamics pre- and post-Covid-19 in other hospitality sector players like restaurants, traditional bazaars, and travel agencies. Future studies can enhance our understanding of talent management in the hospitality sector and the influences of extreme events (Covid-19, political turmoil, and wars) by undertaking comparative studies between hotels owned by global multinational chains and hotels owned by locals in Egypt as well as other similar touristic destinations in developing countries. Finally, a specific focus on the role of culture (particularly at country level) in talent management practices in extreme contexts in hospitality sector is an avenue which the future scholars should explore.

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Table 1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

N	Gender	Religion	Work experience	Marital status
1	Female	Muslim	5-10	Single
2	Male	Christian	10-15	Married
3	Female	Christian	5-10	Single
4	Male	Muslim	10-15	Divorced
5	Male	Muslim	10-15	Married
6	Male	Muslim	10-15	Single
7	Male	Muslim	10-15	Married
8	Male	Muslim	10-15	Married
9	Male	Muslim	10-15	Married
10	Male	Muslim	10-15	Married
11	Female	Muslim	5-10	Married
12	Female	Muslim	5-10	Married
13	Female	Muslim	5-10	Single
14	Male	Muslim	5-10	Single
15	Male	Muslim	5-10	Single
16	Male	Muslim	5-10	Single
17	Male	Muslim	10-15	Divorced
18	Male	Muslim	10-15	Married
19	Male	Muslim	10-15	Married
20	Male	Christian	10-15	Married
21	Male	Muslim	10-15	Married
22	Male	Muslim	5-10	Divorced
23	Male	Muslim	5-10	Single
24	Male	Muslim	5-10	Single
25	Male	Muslim	5-10	Single
26	Female	Muslim	5-10	Divorced
27	Male	Muslim	10-15	Married
28	Male	Muslim	10-15	Married
29	Male	Muslim	10-15	Married
30	Male	Muslim	10-15	Divorced

Table 2: Interview's guide

- 1- To what extent do you feel satisfied with your current job?
- 2- Is there a difference in your job responsibilities before and after the spread of COVID-19? If so, how?
- 3- How does your hotel support you before and after the emergence of Covid-19? Do you feel more care after the COVID-19? If so, how?
- 4- Are you happy with the paradigm through which you and your colleagues are treated before and after the COVID-19? Specifically, is there a justice in distributing work-related privileges between you and your colleagues? Please justify
- 5- Does your hotel recognise you as a talent? Why?
- 6- Do you consider yourself a valuable member in your hotel? Why?
- 7- Which is adopted in your hotel: inclusive or exclusive talent management? And in your opinion, which is much more beneficial to your hotel and why?
- 8- What are the main directions/areas/orientations your hotel supports you in before and after COVID-19?
- 9- What changes in your competences/skills/abilities you have to fulfill after the spread of COVID-19 and how does your hotel support you in that regard?
- 10- Any additional comment/suggestion concerning talent management practices post the spread of COVID-19?

Figure 1. Talent management practices by Egyptian hotels in post Covid-19 era (compiled by the authors)

