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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Factors Influencing Employee Engagement in the Tourism Sector with the Managing Agency

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
  *Corresponding Author: khangcl@hcmue.edu.vn	The study presents the engagement of employees with tourism organizations, focusing on building and maintaining the workforce in the tourism sector, which is always in a state of labor shortage, especially high-quality labor. The study utilizes the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method to determine the weights of the criteria affecting employee engagement in the tourism sector. This study proposes seven factor components influencing engagement as follows: (1) Work environment and conditions; (2) Salary policies; (3) Reward and welfare policies; (4) Nature of the job; (5) Training and promotion opportunities; (6) Support from superiors; (7) Relationship with colleagues across three main areas including travel service business, accommodation and food service business, and tourism management.

INTRODUCTION

In the tourism sector, human talent is one of the critical resources (Murray & Holmes, 2021). Increasing competition and growing labor demand have heightened organizational concern regarding employee engagement in the workplace. Engagement with the organization is among the foremost objectives of any institution to ensure sustainable development (Hanaysha, 2016). Over the years, research on talent management has flourished, often at the strategic human resources level, aiming to maximize the output of high-performing individuals in key positions within the organization (Lewis et al., 2006).

Vietnam's tourism industry is regarded as a pivotal economic sector to propel national development. However, the sector faces a labor shortage. Following two years of the Covid-19 pandemic, most of the workforce has transitioned to other professions, and the rate of workers returning to the industry remains low. According to statistics from the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (2020), the tourism industry requires an additional 40,000 workers annually, but the number of students majoring in tourism is only about 15,000 per year, with college and university levels constituting merely 12%. The tourism industry not only suffers from a manpower shortage but also from weak professional qualifications. The productivity of Vietnam's tourism workforce is ranked the lowest in

the region, at \$3,477 per person per year, less than half compared to Thailand and 1/15 compared to Singapore. Attracting labor and retaining skilled workers are urgent requirements for human resource management in the tourism sector that need attention from agencies and organizations.

In tourism, what factors affect employee engagement with the organization? Does job satisfaction lead to higher organizational commitment? Is the reputation of a brand sufficient to attract and retain talent in a highly competitive business environment? Through a multidimensional approach, this research identifies criteria and the relative importance of factors affecting employee engagement within specific fields of the tourism industry. Consequently, solutions are proposed to maintain employee engagement, enhance labor efficiency, and promote comprehensive and sustainable development of the tourism industry.

1.   THEORETICAL BASIS AND RESEARCH MODEL
2.1 Concept of engagement

Human resource management is considered a key activity in fostering the reciprocal relationship between employees, managers, and the organization (Farnham & Pimlott, 1990; Legge, 1995). In recent years, this perspective on the role of human resource management has become increasingly popular, recognizing that human resource management no longer focuses on control and compliance but rather on enhancing work performance and employee engagement with the organization (Farnham & Pimlott, 1990).

Engagement has garnered considerable attention from scholars. In 1979, Mowday and colleagues posited that "Organizational commitment is the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979). According to them, engagement includes identification, effort, and loyalty. This concept refers to a positive relationship with the organization, motivating employees to invest effort towards the success and development of the organization. Therefore, engagement stems not only from employees' beliefs and words but also from practical actions at work. Kahn (1990) defined employee engagement as "the harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances." Engagement occurs when individuals connect emotionally with others and recognize the work. Employees are emotionally and cognitively engaged when they understand what is expected, what they expect, and what they need to do to achieve it, perceiving themselves as part of the organization, meaningful to colleagues, trusted, and given opportunities to improve and develop. Robinson, Perryman & Hayday (2004) suggested that "Employee engagement is a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values. An engaged employee is aware of the 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." Saks (2006) defined engagement as "a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organization and its values. The engaged employee is aware of the business context and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organization. Engagement requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee."

From these definitions, employee engagement with an enterprise can be understood as the level of emotional, committed, and connected relationship that employees have with the enterprise they work for. It reflects the emotions and motivation of employees towards their work, colleagues, values, and organizational goals. Employee engagement may include the following elements: *Loyalty:* Loyal employees are those who remain faithful to the enterprise, trust the leadership and their colleagues. *Pride in work:* Highly engaged employees often take pride in their work, enjoy, and are satisfied with what they are doing. They see work as an important part of themselves and set high goals in completing tasks. *Motivation and commitment:* Highly engaged employees are often motivated at work, enjoy their job, and put in the effort to achieve good results. They are committed

to the goals and values of the enterprise, leading to dedication and positive contributions. *Interaction and support:* Engaged employees often show positive interactions with colleagues and contribute to creating a better work environment. They usually support and share knowledge and experience with others in the organization. *Development and advancement:* Highly engaged employees often seek opportunities for personal development and career advancement. They are conscious of building skills, learning, and significantly contributing to the enterprise's success.

2.2 Research model

Research on employee engagement with organizations is not a new direction. Studies approach it from various aspects. In the study by Saks (2006), employee engagement is divided into two dimensions: job engagement and organizational engagement. Lockwood (2007) divided engagement into two types: emotional engagement, related to how employees feel about the company, its leaders, and their colleagues; and behavioral engagement, referring to the efforts employees devote to their work, such as intellectual, time, and physical effort. In Vietnam, Tu & Liem (2012) suggested that engagement is influenced by five factors: job satisfaction, material and spiritual rewards, goal alignment, empowerment, and specific skills accumulated by employees. Nguyen and colleagues (2020) identified eight factors affecting engagement: direct managers, training and development, salary and benefits, job characteristics, career development opportunities, organizational support, empowerment, and personality traits.

To build the research model, the author inherits theories from Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Adam's equity theory, and previous empirical studies on engagement in enterprises and the practical labor situation in Vietnam's tourism industry. This study proposes seven components influencing labor engagement in the tourism sector with organizations, including: work environment and conditions; salary policies; reward and welfare policies; job nature; training and promotion opportunities; support from superiors; relationship with colleagues.

Tourism is an integrated economic sector involving various business activities forming a supply chain, including travel business; accommodation and food service business; tourism transportation service business; and tourism information business (Thong, 2003). To maintain stability and ensure the sustainable development of the tourism industry, the role of state management agencies in tourism is crucial. Labor in the tourism sector is defined as employees working directly or indirectly at tourism business establishments and tourism management organizations (Thanh, 2015).

Based on these considerations, within the scope of this topic, the author proposes the following research model:
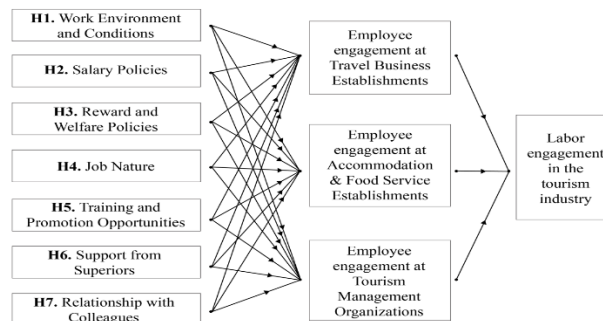
Model 1: Factors affecting employee engagement with Tourism Organizations

Source: Proposed by the author group

H1: Work environment and conditions*:* Work environment and conditions are two crucial concepts in human resources and management. The work environment includes physical and psychological factors surrounding an individual when performing work. This can encompass office space, facilities, colleagues, work processes, organizational culture, and other elements. Work conditions relate to specific factors and regulations that employees must adhere to while performing their duties. Work conditions may include regulations on working hours, salary levels, insurance policies, safety rules, welfare policies, and legal labor requirements. Both the work environment and conditions are vital in creating a positive work culture and ensuring employee satisfaction and efficiency.

H2: Salary policies: Salary policies are a set of rules and principles established and applied by an organization to determine employee compensation. It specifies the calculation and determination of salaries, as well as other related aspects such as allowances, benefits, and other income components. Salary policies may include: basic salary levels, salary scales, salary increment policies, allowances, and benefits. Salary policies are designed to ensure fairness and transparency in employee compensation, motivate work, and retain talent while meeting legal requirements and the organization's business principles.

H3: Reward and welfare policies: Reward and welfare policies are principles and regulations established and applied by an organization to ensure that employees are recognized, praised, and enjoy specific benefits. Reward policies encompass rules on how an organization evaluates, acknowledges, and praises employees for significant achievements and contributions at work. Welfare policies include provisions and regimes provided by the organization to enhance employees' quality of life and satisfaction. They play an essential role in attracting, retaining, and motivating employees while increasing satisfaction and a positive work spirit within the organization.

H4: Job nature: Job nature encompasses the core elements and important characteristics of a job or specific task. It relates to the content, objectives, responsibilities, and specific activities associated with that job. Job nature may include: job content, job objectives, responsibilities and tasks, skills and competencies.

H5: Training and promotion opportunities: **Both** training and promotion opportunities are important in human resource development and management. They play a crucial role in ensuring that employees can develop and progress in their careers while providing a foundation for them to contribute their best to the organization. Training opportunities: provide employees with new knowledge, skills, and competencies. Promotion opportunities: relate to the ability and chance for employees to advance in their careers and move up to higher positions within the organization.

H6: Support from superiors*:* Support from superiors describes the level of assistance, guidance, and concern provided by managers to their subordinates. This is a significant factor in building a positive work environment, motivation, and employee development. Support from superiors can include aspects such as guidance support, development support, feedback and evaluation support. Support from superiors is crucial in creating a positive work environment, encouraging development, and fostering solidarity within the organization.

H7: Relationship with colleagues: The relationship with colleagues is understood as the interactions among individuals working together in an organization, company, or workplace. This is a significant aspect of the work environment and can influence satisfaction, work performance, and overall success of individuals and the organization. Relationships with colleagues may include various aspects such as daily interactions, teamwork spirit, cooperation, and conflict resolution. A good relationship with colleagues can bring numerous benefits, including support, personal development, creating a positive work environment, and contributing to organizational success*.*

2.3 METHOD

Most previous studies on engagement often use descriptive statistical methods based on surveys of employees, demographic characteristics, and job satisfaction. Criteria are usually quantified and evaluated through Likert scales. Criteria are determined to have equal levels. However, in multi-criteria analysis and evaluation, the role of resources contributes differently, thus requiring the determination of the weight of each factor before conducting a comprehensive evaluation. Multi-criteria analysis in evaluating criteria affecting engagement helps identify the importance of each criterion in specific tourism economic sectors. There are many methods to determine weights, among which the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) is most advantageous.

2.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the opinions of 16 experts, who are human resource managers and recruiters in three main fields: state management of tourism (3 experts), accommodation and food service business (5 experts), travel business (8 experts). The analysis results determine the weights based on the AHP model, as follows:

Table 1: Results of weight evaluation of criteria affecting engagement

	H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6	H7	WS	CW	CV
H1	0,340	0,304	0,466	0,290	0,373	0,282	0,498	2,554	0,340	7,509
H2	0,170	0,152	0,078	0,145	0,149	0,226	0,214	1,133	0,152	7,450
H3	0,170	0,456	0,233	0,218	0,299	0,169	0,214	1,758	0,233	7,549
H4	0,085	0,076	0,078	0,073	0,037	0,056	0,142	0,547	0,073	7,548
H5	0,068	0,076	0,058	0,145	0,075	0,056	0,071	0,550	0,075	7,364
H6	0,068	0,038	0,078	0,073	0,075	0,056	0,024	0,411	0,056	7,282
H7	0,049	0,051	0,078	0,036	0,075	0,169	0,071	0,528	0,071	7,424

Table 2: Consistency test parameters of research results

Lamda_max	**7,4465**
CI (Consistency Index)	0,0744
CR (Consistency Ratio)	0,0513

The results indicate that the surveyed values are acceptable (CR<0.1). Based on the analysis of criteria evaluated by experts, the study proceeds to evaluate the pairwise comparison matrix - determining the priority level of the options according to each criterion. From the results, the weights of the criteria impacting the decision of employee engagement with various tourism organizations in specific fields can be seen (Table 3).

Table 3: Results of the weight evaluation of criteria affecting employee engagement in Tourism Organizations.

	H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6	H7
Travel Business Establishments	0,623	0,128	0,739	0,665	0,074	0,072	0,633

Accommodation & Food Service Establishments	0,239	0,512	0,179	0,231	0,283	0,555	0,260
Tourism Management Organizations	0,137	0,360	0,082	0,104	0,643	0,373	0,106

From the results in Table 3, it can be seen:

For the travel business establishments: The factors affecting employee engagement with the business are identified with important weights as follows: Reward and welfare policies (H3) is the factor with the highest weight determining engagement, followed by job nature (H4), relationship with colleagues (H7) is the third most important factor, and work environment and conditions (H1) is the next significant factor. Meanwhile, the other three factors have very low weights, especially H5 and H6. The weights among the factors show a significant disparity, divided into two groups: group 1 leans towards job-related factors, and group 2 leans towards work environment factors. This can be explained by the nature of job positions in the travel industry such as tour guides, tour designers, and tour operators. These are positions suitable for workers who enjoy freedom, flexible working hours, income from various sources, not preferring to work fixed hours, and not concerned much about higher positions in their jobs.

For the accommodation and food service establishments: The factors affecting employee engagement with accommodation and food service businesses are identified with important weights as follows: Support from superiors (H6) is the factor with the highest weight, followed by salary policies (H2), with the remaining factors having relatively equal weights, about half compared to H2 and H6. In accommodation and food service businesses, the workforce is primarily female (Tran Van Thong, 2003), hence the factors that create job stability are highly valued.

For the tourism management Organizations: The factors affecting employee engagement with organizations are identified with important weights as follows: Training and promotion opportunities (H5) is the factor with the highest weight, followed by support from superiors (H6) and salary policies (H2). The work environment in tourism management organizations is often governmental agencies, without much participation from private organizations. Employees working in the public sector, in general, and tourism management organizations, in particular, often have high theoretical qualifications, work in a stable environment, and have clear career planning. The factors (H1) Work environment and conditions; (H3) Reward and welfare policies; (H4) Job nature; (H7) Relationship with colleagues do not hold significant weights. This can be explained by the fact that in the public sector (Vietnam), these factors are unified and implemented through official documents and resolutions.

Although working in the tourism environment, the factors affecting employee engagement with organizations and businesses vary according to specific sectors. This aligns with the diversity of job structure and job characteristics of each department, business field, and management area within the tourism industry.

3.   CONCLUSION

Research on employee engagement in tourism units holds significant importance as it relates to the relationship between employees and organizations, affecting work performance, satisfaction, and company success. The results of the study clarify the factors impacting employee engagement and the work environment, and indicate the varying importance of each factor for different specific units.

Based on the research results and theoretical basis, the author group proposes several recommendations as follows:

For the travel business establishments*: Work environment and conditions; job nature: It is necessary to create a free working environment, not imposing working hours and positions. Instead

of monitoring the work process, managers of travel units should evaluate work outcomes. Salary policies, reward and welfare: The primary income of employees in the travel sector comes from reward policies, commissions, etc. Hence, instead of focusing on increasing basic salary, managers should pay attention to reward and commission policies.

For the accommodation and food service establishments: The working locations of employees in the accommodation and food service sector are fixed, and the work is highly specialized. Therefore, managers need to have clear salary and reward policies, and show employees the development path if they stay with the unit.

For the tourism management Organizations: Working in state tourism management agencies usually means lower income compared to other sectors. Employees in this sector often prioritize career advancement. Therefore, the concern of leaders in recognizing efforts and guiding human resource development is crucial. Additionally, salary, reward policies, and the work environment need improvement.

Limitations of the study and future research directions*:* Within the scope of this article, the author group only approached job sectors; however, there are many different job positions within each sector. The research results only show the weights of the factors evaluated by experts. For practical application, it is necessary to analyze the impact of these factors according to each job position. It is essential to score evaluations from the current workforce in various fields. The final result is calculated by multiplying the scores (surveyed from employees) and the weights (evaluated by experts).

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