

# A Study on Employee Motivation and Retention Strategies in Five-Star Hotels Holiday Inn

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## ABSTRACT

Employee motivation and retention are vital for sustaining service quality and competitiveness in the hospitality industry, particularly in five-star hotels where service delivery is highly employee driven. This study examines the factors influencing employee motivation and retention at Holiday Inn Kochi, Kerala, using a descriptive research design based on primary data collected from 60 employees across major operational and guest-facing departments. The results indicate a predominantly young and educated workforce, with 66.7% of respondents below 35 years of age, suggesting a higher vulnerability to attrition. Overall employee motivation was found to be moderate, with a mean score of 3.57 out of 5. Supportive leadership and job security emerged as the most influential motivational factors, while recognition practices, career guidance, and work–life balance were identified as key areas requiring improvement. Work–life balance concerns were particularly evident in guest-contact roles such as front office and sales and marketing, where job demands and stress levels are comparatively high. Nearly 40% of employees reported having considered leaving the organization, a trend closely associated with inconsistent recognition, limited feedback mechanisms, and inadequate communication regarding performance-based incentives. The study highlights the importance of adopting holistic human resource strategies that integrate competitive compensation, structured recognition systems, supportive leadership, effective communication, and flexible work arrangements to enhance employee engagement and retention in the hospitality sector.

**Keywords:** Employee Motivation, Employee Retention, Hospitality Industry, Five-Star Hotels, Work–Life Balance, Human Resource Practices

## INTRODUCTION

Employee motivation and retention have emerged as critical challenges in the hospitality industry, particularly in luxury hotels where service quality is directly influenced by employee commitment and satisfaction. High employee turnover not only escalates operational costs but also affects service consistency and guest experiences. In this context, understanding the factors that influence employee motivation and retention has become essential for hotel management seeking sustainable organizational performance.

This study examines employee motivation and retention practices in a five-star hotel in Kochi, Kerala, with a specific focus on Holiday Inn. Adopting an undergraduate dissertation framework, the research systematically investigates employees' perceptions of motivational factors, workplace environment, recognition systems, and work–life balance. The study employs a structured research design supported by primary data collected from hotel employees, enabling a realistic assessment of organizational practices and employee attitudes.

Through descriptive statistical analysis and interpretation of employee responses, the research identifies a moderate level of overall employee satisfaction. While employees express reasonable contentment with certain motivational aspects, the findings also indicate scope for improvement, particularly in areas such as recognition mechanisms, career advancement opportunities, and work–life balance. The study highlights the importance of continuous motivational strategies and effective retention policies to enhance employee morale and reduce turnover in the competitive hospitality sector.

The insights derived from this research contribute to a deeper understanding of human resource management practices in luxury hotels and offer practical implications for hotel administrators aiming to foster a motivated and stable workforce.

### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of the present study is confined to examining employee motivation and retention practices within the five-star hotel segment of the hospitality industry, with specific reference to Holiday Inn, Kochi. The research focuses on understanding the key motivational factors that influence employee satisfaction, performance, and retention in a luxury hotel environment where service quality and employee engagement are crucial for organizational success.

The study primarily explores both financial and non-financial motivational factors, including salary, incentives, recognition, career advancement opportunities, work–life balance, training and development, and the overall working environment. It also assesses employees' attitudes toward management practices, organizational culture, and interpersonal relationships at the workplace. Particular emphasis is placed on understanding employees' preferences related to career growth and work–life balance, given the demanding nature of work in five-star hotels.

The research is based on primary data collected from a sample of employees working at Holiday Inn, Kochi, through a structured questionnaire. The analysis is limited to responses obtained from the selected respondents and reflects their perceptions and experiences at the time of the study. The findings, therefore, are specific to the chosen hotel and may not be generalized to other hotels, hospitality segments, or geographical regions.

Furthermore, the scope of the study does not extend to comparative analysis with other hotels or sectors such as budget hotels, resorts, or restaurants. Certain practical constraints, including limited access to detailed human resource records, time limitations, and reliance on self-reported data, also define the boundaries of the research. Despite these limitations, the study provides meaningful insights into employee motivation and retention practices within a five-star hotel setting and offers valuable inputs for improving human resource strategies in similar hospitality organizations.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify the key financial and non-financial factors influencing employee motivation in a five-star hotel environment.
2. To assess employees' perceptions of work–life balance and career growth opportunities, particularly in high-pressure guest-contact roles.
3. To analyze departmental variations in motivation and stress levels,
4. To examine the relationship between recognition, leadership support, and employee turnover intention.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The existing body of literature on employee motivation and retention in the hospitality industry highlights the sector's strong dependence on human capital for service excellence, particularly in star-rated hotels. Studies conducted across India and neighboring regions consistently emphasize that employee retention is influenced by a combination of financial rewards, non-financial motivators, organizational culture, and career development opportunities (Sharma & Nayak, 2019; Ramesh & Krishnan, 2020).

Several studies from hospitality-intensive regions such as Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Kerala, and Nepal underline the importance of growth opportunities, structured human resource policies, and favorable working conditions in retaining hotel employees (Joshi & Bhatia, 2018; Thapa, 2021). While compensation remains a significant determinant of job satisfaction, researchers argue that non-monetary motivators—such as recognition, autonomy, mentorship, and supportive supervision—play an equally critical role in sustaining employee commitment (Kumar & Priyadarshini, 2020).

The concept of job embeddedness has gained prominence in recent literature, suggesting that employees are more likely to stay when they feel socially connected, professionally valued, and aligned with organizational goals (Mitchell et al., 2001; Das & Sengupta, 2019). In the hospitality context, job satisfaction derived from recognition, fair treatment, and meaningful work significantly reduces turnover intentions, even in high-pressure service roles.

The Ability–Motivation–Opportunity (AMO) framework is widely applied to explain how investment in employee skills, motivational incentives, and participative work environments enhances engagement and performance (Appelbaum et al., 2000). Complementing this, transformational leadership has been found to positively influence motivation by fostering trust, encouraging professional development, and creating a shared vision among hotel employees (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Menon, 2022).

Despite these insights, several challenges persist within the hospitality sector. Empirical studies identify low entry-level salaries, irregular working hours, limited career progression, and inadequate managerial support as major contributors to employee dissatisfaction and attrition (George & Santhosh, 2018; Pillai & Suresh, 2021). Researchers advocate for comprehensive human resource strategies that integrate training, transparent promotion policies, recognition systems, and a positive organizational culture to address these challenges effectively.

Studies focusing on Kerala’s star-rated hotels further reveal that successful talent retention is closely linked to realistic recruitment practices and alignment between employee expectations and organizational offerings (Nair & Joseph, 2020). These findings underscore the need for holistic retention strategies that balance operational demands with employee well-being, particularly in guest-facing departments where stress levels are comparatively higher.

Overall, the literature confirms that sustainable employee retention in the hospitality industry requires a strategic blend of monetary incentives, supportive leadership, career development, and work–life balance initiatives. These insights provide a strong theoretical foundation for the present study and justify its focus on motivation and retention practices within a five-star hotel setting.

## Theoretical Context

The hospitality industry operates within a dynamic macro-environment shaped by economic, technological, social, and institutional forces. Economic growth directly influences tourism demand and hotel occupancy rates, while economic slowdowns and recessions disproportionately affect luxury and five-star hotels due to their high operational costs and premium pricing structures (Sharma & Nayak, 2019). Consequently, five-star hotels remain particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in disposable income and travel spending.

Technological advancements have significantly transformed hotel operations and service delivery. The adoption of digital platforms, artificial intelligence–enabled check-ins, customer relationship management systems, and data-driven personalization has enhanced operational efficiency and guest satisfaction (Buhalis & Leung, 2018). At the same time, social expectations have evolved, with increased emphasis on sustainability, ethical practices, and personalized guest experiences. These trends require hotels to continuously upskill employees and maintain high levels of motivation to deliver consistent service quality.

In the Indian context, the hospitality sector is strongly supported by the country’s rich cultural heritage, diverse tourism offerings, and proactive government initiatives such as *Swadesh Darshan* and *Incredible India*, which aim to promote domestic and international tourism (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2022). The increasing penetration of online travel agencies and digital booking platforms has further intensified competition, compelling hotels to differentiate themselves through superior service quality driven by motivated employees.

Employee motivation occupies a central position in hospitality management theory, as service quality in hotels is largely inseparable from employee performance. Motivated employees contribute to enhanced guest satisfaction, organizational commitment, and brand loyalty, while also reducing recruitment and training costs associated with high turnover (Robbins & Judge, 2020). Retention strategies—such as competitive compensation, continuous training, career development opportunities, and a supportive organizational

culture— help in building stable and cohesive work teams essential for service excellence in luxury hotels (Kumar & Priyadarshini, 2020).

From an organizational perspective, international hotel chains such as IHG Hotels & Resorts emphasize standardized service quality combined with localized guest experiences. Holiday Inn Kochi, operational since 2011, represents a full-service five-star hotel offering extensive accommodation, dining, wellness, and event facilities designed to cater to both business and leisure travelers. The hotel's operations are supported by core functional departments including front office, housekeeping, food and beverage services, human resources, and sales and marketing.

Theoretical and empirical studies consistently indicate that guest-contact roles—particularly in front office and food and beverage services—experience higher levels of stress due to long working hours, emotional labor, and continuous interaction with guests (Pillai & Suresh, 2021). These roles demand higher motivational support and effective retention practices to prevent burnout and turnover. Understanding employee motivation and retention within this theoretical and industry context provides a strong foundation for analyzing workforce challenges in five-star hotels and for developing effective human resource strategies.

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### **Data Analysis**

The demographic analysis reveals that the workforce is predominantly young and educated, with 66.7% of respondents below the age of 35, 56.7% male, and 58.3% holding undergraduate qualifications. This profile reflects a dynamic employee base that is highly mobile and therefore more vulnerable to attrition. Departmental distribution shows that a significant proportion of respondents were employed in guest-facing roles, particularly front office (20%) and sales and marketing (16.7%), departments traditionally associated with high work pressure and customer interaction.

Overall employee motivation recorded a moderate mean score of 3.57 out of 5 across key motivational dimensions. Supportive leadership emerged as the strongest motivating factor, with a dominant four-star rating pattern, followed by job security, where 38.3% of respondents expressed agreement. Salary and benefits generated largely neutral responses, with 45% neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and 40% expressing agreement, indicating moderate financial satisfaction rather than strong motivation.

Work-life balance emerged as a weaker dimension, with 41.7% of respondents indicating that balance was achieved only “sometimes.” Recognition practices were reported as inconsistent, with 36.7% stating that recognition was occasional and 21.7% indicating that they did not receive recognition at all. These gaps appear to influence retention intentions, as 40% of employees reported having considered leaving the organization in the previous year.

### **Descriptive Analysis of Key Survey Metrics**

Analysis of specific workplace metrics highlights moderate organizational effectiveness. Nearly half of the respondents (46.7%) agreed that the work environment was satisfactory, while role satisfaction was relatively high, with 73.4% indicating satisfaction either fully or to some extent. Team-building initiatives were perceived as limited, with 33.3% stating that such activities occurred only occasionally. Supervisor approachability was rated as “somewhat approachable” by 50% of respondents, suggesting scope for strengthening managerial relationships.

### **Analysis of Motivation Factors**

The mean scores for motivation-related variables further illustrate areas of strength and concern. Supportive leadership recorded the highest mean score (3.8), with 60% of respondents providing positive ratings (4–5). Job security followed with a mean of 3.7, reflecting its importance in employee retention within the hospitality sector. The work environment received a mean score of 3.62, indicating generally favorable perceptions.

In contrast, recognition and work–life balance scored lower, with mean values of 3.4 and 3.2 respectively. Work–life balance also recorded the highest proportion of neutral responses (45%), suggesting ambiguity and dissatisfaction among employees regarding workload management and scheduling practices.

### **Departmental Variations and Correlation Patterns**

Department-wise analysis reveals notable variations in stress and motivation. Guest-facing departments, particularly front office and sales and marketing, collectively representing 36.7% of the sample, reported lower work–life balance scores despite perceiving relatively higher job security. This pattern reinforces existing hospitality literature that identifies high-contact service roles as inherently stressful due to emotional labor, long working hours, and continuous guest interaction.

Correlation patterns indicate a strong association between inconsistent recognition and turnover intention. Recognition reported as “sometimes” by 36.7% of respondents aligns closely with the 40% of employees who expressed an intention to leave, suggesting that extrinsic motivational gaps intensify neutral intrinsic motivation. Younger employees below 25 years of age (30% of the sample) placed greater emphasis on career guidance and development opportunities, with 58.3% reporting such support as only occasional. Additionally, 26.7% expressed dissatisfaction with their roles, indicating mismatched expectations contributing to demotivation.

Positive outliers were also observed. Employees who expressed approval of the work environment (46.7%) demonstrated higher motivation levels, particularly when combined with approachable supervisors (50%), resulting in 33.3% reporting higher motivation.

### **Implications of the Study**

The findings validate existing hospitality literature that holistic human resource strategies—integrating rewards, leadership, communication, and organizational culture—are more effective than isolated training interventions. A notable gap in awareness of performance-based incentives (41.7%) indicates communication deficiencies that may exacerbate attrition risks, particularly given the 40% turnover intention observed.

The limited frequency of consistent feedback, reported by only 20% of respondents, further highlights the need for structured performance management systems. Addressing recognition gaps, improving incentive communication, and introducing flexible work arrangements can potentially shift the substantial neutral group (48.3%) toward higher engagement and commitment.

## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study reveals a moderate level of employee motivation, supported by a generally positive work environment and job security, but constrained by inconsistencies in recognition, career guidance, and work–life balance. Younger employees, who constitute a majority of the workforce, prioritize flexibility (60%) and training opportunities (51.7%) over wellness-related benefits, indicating evolving motivational preferences.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the implementation of competitive compensation structures, performance-linked bonuses, and regular recognition programs. Continuous training, structured career development plans, flexible scheduling, empathetic leadership practices, and employee participation in decision making are essential for improving motivation. The adoption of stay interviews, digital feedback mechanisms, job rotation, and technology-enabled HR tools is also suggested to enhance engagement and reduce turnover intention.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that employee motivation at Holiday Inn Kochi is moderate, with strengths in work environment and job security offset by deficiencies in recognition practices and work–life balance, contributing to a significant turnover risk. Strategic implementation of consistent incentives, training initiatives, flexible work schedules, and effective feedback systems aligned with organizational objectives can substantially improve employee retention, service quality, and competitive positioning in India’s hospitality sector. Future research may expand the sample size and include comparative studies across hotels to enhance generalizability of findings.

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