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Singleton Employees in the Hotel Industry

Many organisations take pride in their ability to offer a rich variety of supportive programmes for employees with families. However, the growing number of single childless people in the workforce, especially members of Generations Y and Z, rarely benefit from equivalent perks or policies. Does the hospitality industry care about single childless employees? Curious as to whether organisational support can benefit hotels and their employees, the SHTM's Dr Xiaolin (Crystal) Shi and her co-author quizzed hotel employees in China about their experiences. The fruits of their comprehensive analysis will help organisations to create more supportive environments for employees, whilst also boosting hotel outcomes.

Organisational Support

Now more than ever, single employees without children dominate the labour-intensive hotel industry. Perhaps thanks to the false assumption that they have more free time and fewer responsibilities, "members of this group are often expected to shoulder heavier workloads, work longer hours, and travel more for work to support the family demands of their married colleagues", say the researchers. They have also been found to engage in more emotional labour, to have less decision-making latitude, and to face more negative work-

nonwork spillover than employees who are in a couple and/or have children. This highlights the emerging need to ascertain the workplace challenges faced by single childless employees in the hotel industry.

Common to all employees is the challenge of achieving a "work-life balance", which is the harmony between a individual's different roles, responsibilities and personal values. Whilst the concept of a work-family balance has been examined in great depth, it is not necessarily relevant to single childless people, whose "personal" roles are less likely to be family-related. "The commonly used terms 'work-family conflict' and 'family-supportive organisational culture' do not apply to all", explain the researchers.

They therefore inspected the experiences of "personal-to-work conflict", which occurs when personal activities infringe on professional ones, and "work-to-personal conflict", which occurs when job demands require a sacrifice of personal time and energy. A potential way to minimise these kinds of conflicts and strike a healthy work-life balance is through the provision of "organisational support".

Family-supportive work cultures can increase job satisfaction and performance—similar benefits might reasonably be expected by providing organisational support to single people without children. A

singles-friendly organisational culture is one that nurtures a work-life balance equally among employees, and not just in those who are married or with children. For this, it is crucial to acknowledge that family life and personal life are not one and the same. "Previous work has suggested that the work domain, family domain, and personal domain should be treated separately", explain the authors.

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is a key dimension of a singles-friendly work culture, and especially relevant to single childless employees, who are known to suffer more from social isolation and loneliness. "A high level of organisational support is typically linked with positive organisational outcomes", say the authors, "and social inclusion has been associated with both affective organisational commitment and perceived organisational support." The researchers therefore predicted that a strong socially inclusive organisational culture would reduce personal-to-work and work-to-personal conflicts.

Dissatisfaction and apathy can ensue when there is a discrepancy between desired and actual work-life balance. In addition, employees who feel that the available support is simply not enough to overcome work-life conflicts have heightened

stress levels. “For single childless employees, the incongruence between their perceptions of work–personal conflicts and relevant support from their organisations may result in negative consequences, such as lower job performance”, say the researchers. Accordingly, they predicted that an organisational-level social inclusion of a singles-friendly culture would yield better job performance.

Social inclusion of a singles-friendly culture might also have the power to boost the enjoyment got from leisure activities. Leisure activities contribute to psychological well-being and life satisfaction, and the loss of the freedom to engage in them can sour attitudes towards one’s own personal life. “Hospitality employees in particular may have less time and energy for leisure activities after work, preventing them from satisfying their need for relaxation or resulting in lower levels of leisure satisfaction”, say the researchers. An organisational culture geared towards improving employees’ work-life balance could therefore boost leisure satisfaction.

Multiple-Source Surveys

The researchers gathered rich data from total of 639 full-time employees, who were recruited from 29 full-service hotels in China. Participants completed a pre-developed questionnaires that measured personal-to-work and work-to-personal conflicts, leisure satisfaction, and their perception of the degree of social inclusion of a singles-friendly culture. Job performance was assessed using a survey completed by participants’ direct supervisors, who rated items such as “this employee performs tasks that are expected of him/her.” Hierarchical linear modelling was then applied to examine the relationships between variables, whilst controlling for potential confounding variables, such as whether participants were men or women.

All-Round Benefits

The results were unambiguous. Single childless employees who worked in hotels with a socially inclusive culture had notably less conflict between their work and personal domains, a more impressive job performance, and more satisfaction from leisure activities. “These findings highlight the significance of the social inclusion of a singles-friendly culture for both employees and organisations”, say the researchers. As a second intriguing finding, the effect of an inclusive organisational culture on employees’ job performance and leisure satisfaction were shaped by their degree of work-to-personal conflict. This, clarify the authors, could be explained by the important role of personal domain variables in influencing employees’ perceptions.

Such clear-cut findings should easily persuade managers to embrace a singles-friendly culture to enable a balance between the work and personal roles of single childless employees. Hotels could establish programs and policies to eliminate negative stereotyping, and should not solely focus on the needs of married and parent employees. “Although single childless employees do not require support for family responsibilities, they do require support for personal and social matters”, reiterate the authors. Hotels could also facilitate an enhanced mutual understanding between single and married employees through team-building activities, which would inspire more harmonious and productive relationships in the workplace.

The nature of social inclusion of a singles-friendly culture varied from hotel to hotel. “As such”, explain the researchers, “hotels should take their unique organisational cultures and characteristics into consideration when developing socially inclusive programs.” Hotel chains could, for instance infuse their mission and core values into inclusive policies and programs, and make sure that the same support is pro-

vided across all of their hotels. This would mean that employees who are transferred from one hotel to another of the same chain can more rapidly assimilate into their new working environment and immediately feel a sense of belonging.

Beyond Family-Friendly

With fewer people than ever in their 30s and 40s choosing to get married or have children, the hospitality workforce is increasingly home to single childless workers. This pioneering new work shows that the time has come to address their needs. “The study can assist hotel industry managers in recognising single childless employees as an important, distinct, and growing segment of the labour force”, conclude the authors. As well as several managerial implications, this investigation also paves the way for more exciting research. For example, future work could additionally consider how a supportive culture affects other workers who also have a “non-traditional” family structure, such as those in a same-sex relationship.

POINTS TO NOTE

- Hotel employees who are single and childless often get fewer perks and less policy support.
- Single childless workers have a unique set of personal needs and are vulnerable to work–life imbalance.
- This growing segment of hospitality staff can benefit from singles-friendly workplaces.
- Establishing a uniform singles-friendly culture is good for employee retention in hotel chains.

Shi, Xiaolin (Crystal), and Shi, Jieyu (Jade) (2022). Who Cares about Single Childless Employees in the Hotel Industry? Creating a Workplace Culture Beyond Family-Friendly. *Tourism Management*, Vol. 90, 104477.