

HOTEL FRONT LINE EMPLOYEES' PERCEPTIONS ON LEADERSHIP AND WORKPLACE MOTIVATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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Abstract

Purpose - This study aims to identify the extent to which different motivational elements can support strong bonds and good cooperation between front-line employees and hotels' leadership in times of crisis and work suspension.

Design - The views of a sample of employees working in 4 and 5 star hotels in Heraklion Prefecture were studied in May 2020, when hotel operations were suspended.

Methodology - Two hundred and one completed questionnaires were collected, consisting of 31 six-point Likert scales, whose data were analysed using the Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Approach - The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) followed the principal component method of extraction based on a varimax rotation, while the CFA adopted the method of Structural Equation Modeling, that was based on the maximum likelihood method of estimation.

Results - In times of crisis, front-line employees of hotels consider that the creation of strong bonds and a good spirit of cooperation and communication between them and the leadership of the hotels is strongly based on the exploitation of their skills and the developmental opportunities offered.

Originality of the research - The research identified motivational factors that can support the creation of strong bonds and a good spirit of cooperation and communication between front-line employees and hotel management in times of crisis. On a practical level, the findings can help hotel managers gain strategic advantage and experience for the future, should they need to deal with similar situations.

Key words Leadership, motivation, job satisfaction, hotels, crisis, covid-19

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Greece has been tested by a series of successive crises such as that of economic adjustment (Cohen and Karatzimas 2018), immigration (Xypolytas 2018; Tsartas et al. 2019) and the spread of the Covid-19 disease (Gössling et al. 2020). Crises like these bring major changes in the wider economic and social environment (Markantonatou et al. 2018) in which businesses and organizations are acting, including tourism (Konovalova et al. 2018). One of the biggest challenges facing the modern leadership of hotels, due to the spread of Covid-19, is in conditions of social distancing and suspension of the operation of hotels, on the one hand to maintain good relations with front-line employees and on the other hand to effectively motivate their behavior (Alonso et al. 2020; Gössling et al. 2020).

The main objective of this study is to determine the extent to which different motivating factors (Yuliandi 2019; Stavrinoudis and Livadioti 2011; Stavrinoudis and Kakarouggkas 2017) can strengthen the links of cooperation and communication between leadership and front-line employees of hotels in crisis conditions (Bekirogullari and Thambusamy 2020; Coroiu et al. 2020). To accomplish the above, the effect of specific motivating elements was investigated in strengthening the good cooperation between the front-line employees and the leadership in conditions of suspension of the operation of the hotels. More specifically, the motivating elements examined are related to a) working conditions (Pawirosumarto et al. 2017; Underthun 2014), b) financial and intangible reward (Kakarouggkas and Stavrinoudis 2021; Koo et al. 2020) and c) the leadership of a hotel relationships with employees and between employees and supervisors (Afsar et al. 2018; Han and Hwang 2019).

The views of a convenience sample (Etikan et al. 2016) of one hundred and forty-two front-line employees working in 4 and 5 stars hotels in the prefecture of Heraklion (Research Institute for Tourism 2019) were investigated during May 2020, when the hotels' operations remained suspended. The statistical analysis followed the principal component method of extraction using a varimax rotation for the extraction of factors (Watkins 2018) and Structural Equation Modelling (Deng et al., 2018) that was based on the maximum likelihood method of estimation. Four latent constructs were created, of which three were validated without restrictions, while the fourth was validated but with restrictions. The first factor was named "Guided, by the leadership, employee development", the second one was named "Communication with the leadership and the colleagues", the third one "Working climate/environment" and the fourth one was named "Remuneration policies". The above findings are scientifically original as they help identify specific motivating factors that enhance the creation of strong bonds and a spirit of cooperation between front-line employees and the leadership of hotels in times of crisis and social distancing. At the same time, on a practical level, they assist hotel leaders to gain strategic advantage and experience for the future in case they need to deal with similar situations again.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Leadership and motivation of front-line employees in crisis situations

Aliperti et al. (2019) point out that in recent years multiple successive crises have had a strongly negative effect on the tourism industry. Liu-Lastres et al. (2020) underline the fact that the strong impact of major crises often jeopardizes the daily operation and the very core of entire sectors of the economy, necessitating immediate preventive actions. However, a crisis beyond the negative consequences it brings, can also create an opportunity for a change of policy – strategy (Cerna 2016; Venette 2008). Often organizations, to meet the challenges posed by a crisis, focus on changes in their material components as they are easy to identify and implement (Galpin 1996). However, focusing on the human resources of a business-organization is more effective (Rashid et al. 2004; Denning 2015).

In agreement with the above, Vo-Thanh et al. (2021) suggest that the spread of Covid-19 disease, in addition to the strong negative consequences it had on the hotel companies themselves (falling profits, reduced demand, etc.), had a particularly large negative effect on front-line employees at two main levels: working conditions and labour relationships. Focusing on the first level, Voorhees et al. (2020) and Berry et al. (2020) argued that the work of front-line employees became more demanding and difficult on the one hand due to the measures that had to be implemented to reduce the spread of the pandemic, and on the other hand due to the unfavourable conditions in which they offer their work, since front-line employees come in strong contact with other people therefore they feel that the risk of catching the Covid-19 disease is high. Continuing with the level of labour relations, Abuelnasr (2020) and Jung et al. (2021) argued that hotel managers, in their effort to offset the negative economic effects of the pandemic, implemented policies (downsizing, flexible employment forms, etc.) which created job insecurity and instability, especially among the front-line employees. The above had a negative impact on the morale and motivation of the front-line employees of hotels (Stergiou and Farmaki 2021).

Lin et al. (2019) argue that the front line employees are particularly important for achieving organizational goals in hotels, adding that in order to perform, they need good leadership, especially in times of crisis (Ramlachan and Beharry-Ramraj 2021). More specifically, Chen and Peng (2021) consider leadership to be one of the most important elements in strengthening the connection/engagement of employees with the enterprise's activities. Liden et al. (2008) support the above view but suggest that this will only happen if a leader tries to connect with the members of the team, he/she is leading so that he/she understands their talents and helps them in a positive way to accomplish the task they have undertaken. Menguc et al. (2017) argue that a leader to create a work environment that will enhance the connection/engagement of employees with the activities of the organization he/she leads must show interest, support, and protection towards his team members. Mufti et al. (2020) in agreement with all the above, propose that modern leaders can strengthen the positive connection/engagement of individual employees and entire groups in achieving organizational goals, if their behavior includes the appropriate motivating factors.

According to Chen and Peng (2021), to enhance the positive connection/engagement of front-line employees with the realization of organizational goals, the leadership of an enterprise should focus on motivating elements that will enhance its communication and collaboration with them. Yuliandi (2019) and Putra et al. (2017) agree that the leadership of an organization to achieve high motivation of human resources in hotel organizations can focus on two main categories of incentives. The first category focuses on intrinsic motivation, i.e., incentives that stem from the work itself such as: individual recognition, appreciation, and team coordination (Chon and Zoltan 2019; Minh-Duc and Huu-Lam 2019). According to Ramlachan and Beharry-Ramraj (2021) the leaders of hotels in times of crisis should offer employees a mix of mostly intangible reward and intrinsic incentives. The second category focuses on extrinsic motivation, i.e., incentives that are not related to the work itself but to external factors such as the provision of financial remuneration and benefits (Younies and Na 2021; Zopiatis et al. 2018). In this area, Cañada (2018) and Yrigoy and Cañada (2019) argue that in times of crisis, the leadership

of hotels to handle the impact of a crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, rely less on the adoption of material and financial rewards, incentives, and benefits.

The leadership of an organization can be focused on a series of motivating factors that are defined by several interrelated and interdependent elements, which can be expressed at individual, group, and organizational level (Arubayi et al. 2020; Cléry-Melin et al. 2019; Downes and Choi 2014; Silaban and Syah 2018; Stavrinoudis and Kakarouggkas 2017; Zhu et al. 2018). More specifically, at the organizational level, elements such as: the transparent and simple to understand design of the remuneration system as well as the timely provision of job recognition were found to be crucial (Datta 2012). In addition, motives stemming from the work environment and the reputation of front-line employees are important elements in motivating their behavior at the organizational level (Li and Roloff 2007; Chen 2010; Panagiotakopoulos 2013; Pang and Lu 2018). The previous findings led to the formulation of the hypothesis number one:

H₁: In times of health crisis, the motivation of front-line employees in hotels at the organizational level, is positively correlated with the non-financial incentives provided by the leadership of the organization.

At the group level, in addition to remuneration, elements such as: the recognition of teamwork, employee participation in decision-making processes and the free expression of their needs are crucial (Armstrong et al. 2011). In addition, elements such as a pleasant and supportive work environment, employee guidance from their superiors, rewarding team effort and good relationships between team members play a key role in motivating front-line employee behavior at the group level (Cumbie 2020; Rose 2014). The above findings led to the formulation of the second hypothesis:

H₂: In times of health crisis, at the group level, the motivation of front-line employees in hotels is positively correlated with the interpersonal relationships that develop between them and the leadership of the organization.

At the individual level, crucial were found to be elements such as: the individual motivations and goals that each employee has as well as his/her level of participation in the organization (Coccia 2018), the individual work of employees (Marks and Mirvis 2011) which should allow the utilization of individual knowledge and skills (Yao and Chang 2017), the satisfaction of individual aspirations and expectations (Noor et al. 2018; Qiu et al. 2020), the reward of individual work (Costantini et al. 2018; Arubayi et al. 2020), as well as the satisfaction of individual needs such as the need for safety, recognition and self-realization in the workplace (Ho and Kuo 2013; Ramlachan and Beharry-Ramraj 2021). The above findings led to the wording of the third hypothesis:

H₃: In times of health crisis, at the individual level, the motivation of front-line employees in hotels is positively correlated with the adoption of non-financial incentives by the leadership of the organization.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Survey design

The present research, for the collection of primary data, was based on a weighted questionnaire Kakaroukas et al. (2020) which was tailored to its needs and consisted of 31 six-point Likert type scales (Kyriazos and Stalikas 2018). The scales were formulated in the simplest possible way to minimize the risk of a) refusal to complete the questionnaire and b) collecting data of poor-quality due to misunderstanding of the queries (Jordan and Troth 2020). The survey was conducted in May 2020, where hotels in Greece remained closed due to their suspension (Betcherman et al. 2020). This strict time frame forced the researchers to base the research on a convenience sample (Etikan et al. 2016), consisting of front-line employees working in the one hundred and forty-two (142) 4-star hotels and in the forty-six (46) 5-star hotels (Research Institute for Tourism 2019) located in the prefecture of Heraklion. Through electronic means (Regmi et al. 2016), two hundred and one (201) completed questionnaires were collected, whose data were analysed using the statistical packages: SPSS 19 and AMOS 23.

2.2. Data analysis

The analysis of the data was based on EFA and CFA, as the combination of these two methods is ideal for investigating complex problems regarding the behavior of various stakeholders involved in the tourism/ hotel sector (Ariffin 2013; Chen and Chen 2010; Knutson et al. 2009). The SPSS 19 statistical program was used for the completion of the EFA, which adopted the extraction method of principal component and was based on the varimax rotation for the extraction of factors. This method was chosen as it is considered the most appropriate for exploring similar issues in the hotel industry (Lee and Cheng 2018; Vasilagos et al. 2017). The extraction method of principal component implemented in two stages (Laerd Statistics 2015; Watkins 2018). In the first stage, with the help of the correlation matrix and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index per variable, it was confirmed that all the variables are linearly correlated with each other and with the help of the general Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin index and the Barlett test of sphericity the degree of sampling adequacy was also confirmed. In the second stage, a small number of factors were extracted based on the criteria: Percentage of variance explained, scree plot test and interpretability criterion. In this way, four new data models/structures were created (Laerd Statistics 2015; Watkins 2018), which were then confirmed through CFA. The statistical program AMOS 23 was used for the CFA. The CFA which was based on the results of the EFA (Jeon 2015; Van Prooijen and Van Der Kloot 2001; Worthington and Whittaker 2006), followed the methodology of Structural Equation Modelling (Deng et al., 2018), and adopted the Maximum Likelihood method of estimation. Four “latent constructs” were created (Jeon 2015) whose validation was based on the following conditions which were met: achieving a common dimension (Unidimensionality) of variables/elements, existence of validity (Validity) and reliability (Reliability) as well as existence of a high level of probability (probability level/ p- value).

3. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

3.1. Sample characteristics

The present survey was based on data collected from a total of 201 fully completed questionnaires. These questionnaires were answered by 103 women (51.78%) and 98 men (48.22%), of different ages: 18-24 (5.47%), 25-34 (28.36%), 35-44 (37.31%), 45-54 (23.38%) and 55-64 (5.47%). In relation to the educational level of the participants, it was found that a large percentage of them (64%) had a high educational level after completing studies at postgraduate level (15%) and at a bachelor level (49%). The remaining 32% had a high school diploma, while 5.5% were at elementary level. The participants were front-line employees in hotels, who worked in different departments, such as: 17% restaurant, 11% bar, 18.50% reception, 9.50% housekeeping and 44% other departments (spa, shops, security, etc.). The characteristics of the above sample justified the authors' choices regarding survey instrument design. First, because a significant amount of data was collected in a short period of time. Second, because the high educational level of the participants in combination with the simple wording of the 31 six-point Likert type scales (Kyriazos and Stalikas 2018), reduced the likelihood of increasing the bias resulting from not understanding the questions (Jordan and Troth 2020).

3.2. Results of EFA

The results of the EFA, which followed the extraction method of principal component and was based on a varimax rotation for the extraction of factors, are presented in the table below. Criteria for the inclusion of the different variables in the four factors that emerged were the factor loadings scores which at least had to be equal to or greater than 0.6 (Laerd Statistics 2015; Watkins 2018).

Table 1: Results of EFA

Factor 1	F.L.	Com
Adequate guidance from supervisors- I3_19.	0.636	0.719
The management inspires employees - I3_30	0.697	0.749
Utilization of employees' skills - I2_20.	0.810	0.782
Utilization of employees' knowledge - I2_21.	0.804	0.720
Opportunities to acquire new skills - I2_22	0.839	0.746

Provision of educational programs - I2_23	0.713	0.743
Job development opportunities - I2_24	0.797	0.739
Freedom in the expression of ideas - I2_25	0.677	0.753
Recognition of employees' efforts -I2_26	0.704	0.696
Personal development opportunities - I2_28	0.755	0.749
The management takes care of the employees - I2_29.	0.698	0.860
Factor 2	F.L.	Com
Good communication and cooperation between colleagues - I3_13	0.787	0.720
Trust between colleagues - I3_14	0.794	0.746
Support at work between colleagues - I3_15	0.710	0.743
Good working climate - conditions - I3_16	0.724	0.739
Good communication with supervisors - I3_17	0.648	0.753
Supervisors are people they trust - I3_18	0.609	0.696
Factor 3	F.L.	Com
Pleasure that comes from work - I1_1	0.926	0.860
Safety at work - I1_2	0.887	0.792
Establishment of social contacts in the workplace - I1_3	0.826	0.694
Pleasant working environment - I1_4.	0.918	0.850
Satisfactory workload - I1_5	0.623	0.403

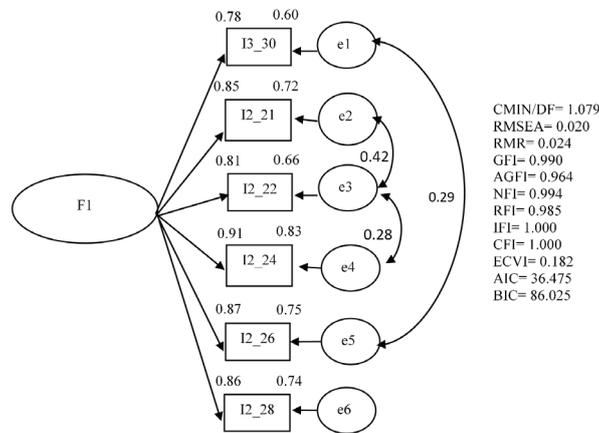
Freedom in the execution of work- I1_6	0.816	0.678
Factor 4	F.L.	Com
Adequacy days of leave - I1_8.	0.657	0.514
Satisfactory salary according to the workload - I2_9	0.750	0.711
Satisfactory additional rewards i.e., private insurance - I2_10	0.695	0.584
Fair financial benefits - I2_11	0.670	0.619
Overtime pay - I2_12.	0.773	0.715
F.L.= Factor loadings Com. = Communalities. Bold = The variables that remain in the validated latent constructs		

The variables: I1_7, Convenient working hours, I2_27, Fair performance evaluation and I2_31, Provision of additional benefits, were not included in any of the four factors due to their low factor loading score. The results are likely to be due to the hotels suspension of operations which made these incentives less important to participating front-line employees. Nevertheless, the EFA achieved its central aim, i.e., it managed to extract a small number of factors which, keeping a low degree of complexity, explain most of the total variance of the initial variables (Cumulative Variance: 69.84%).

3.3. Results of CFA

The CFA was based on the results of the EFA. Based on the results of the EFA (see Table 1) and specifically in the Factor 1 (Table 1), the authors attempted to update the first Latent Construct, which, however, did not meet the validation requirements presented in the methodology. Due to this, the variables I3_19 and I2_23, were removed from the first Latent Construct since, in relation to the other variables, they had the lowest factor loadings and R² scores. In addition, the variables I2_29, I2_25 and I2_20, were removed, due to the high score in the modification indices (Covariances) that they had according to the output file of AMOS 23, respectively with the variables I3_30, I2_26 and I2_21. This result, according to Collier (2020) is an indication that these elements essentially measure the same observed variable in the “Latent construct” under consideration, a fact that is supported by the content (wording) of these data. Based on this, the authors decided to remove the variables with the lowest factor loadings and R², i.e. I2_29, I2_25 and I2_20. The above options led to the creation of Latent Construct 1, which satisfies all the validation requirements set and are presented in detail in Table 2.

Figure 1: Latent Construct 1 - Guided, by the leadership, employee development

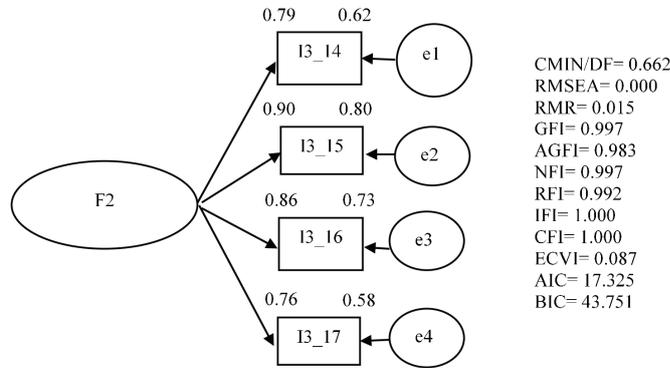


Chi-square = 6.475 Degrees of freedom = 6 P-value= 0.372

Latent Construct 1 was interpreted as “Guided, by the leadership, employee development” due to the six observed variables it includes which are related to the development and training opportunities that the management of a hotel provides to its employees.

Along the same lines, the authors tried to validate the second Latent Construct based on the data of Factor 2 (Table 1), but this was not possible based on the validation conditions that had been set. Subsequently, the variables I3_17, I3_18, I3_13 and I3_14, based on the output file of AMOS 23, were found to have a high score in the modification indices (Covariances). This result, as in the case of the first Latent Construct, led the authors to remove the variables I3_18 and I3_13 due to the lower factor loadings and R^2 , respectively. The above led to the creation of Latent Construct 2 which satisfies all the validation requirements (Table 2) and was interpreted as “Communication with the leadership and the colleagues” due to the observed variables associated with it, which are linked with the relationships between colleagues regardless of their position in the hierarchy of a hotel (leaders included).

Figure 2: Latent Construct 2 - Communication with the leadership and the colleagues

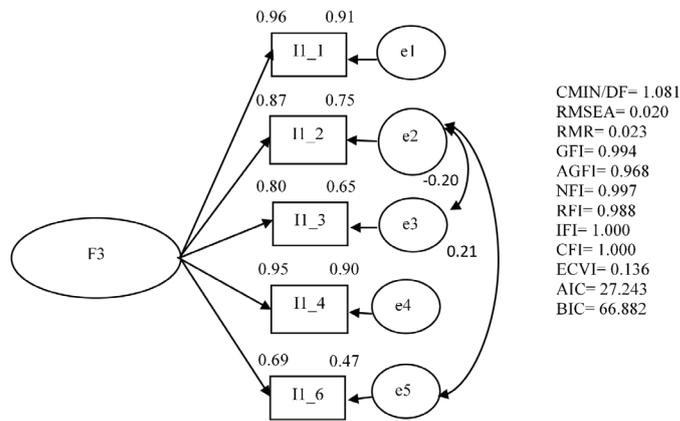


CMIN/DF= 0.662
 RMSEA= 0.000
 RMR= 0.015
 GFI= 0.997
 AGFI= 0.983
 NFI= 0.997
 RFI= 0.992
 IFI= 1.000
 CFI= 1.000
 ECVI= 0.087
 AIC= 17.325
 BIC= 43.751

Chi-square = 1.325 Degrees of freedom = 2 P-value= 0.516

Latent Construct 3 was based on the results of the Factor 3 column of Table 1. To validate it, the variable I1_5 had to be removed due to the low factor loading score and the low R² score. This resulted in the successful validation of Latent Construct 3 whose latent variable was interpreted as “Working climate/environment” due to the observed variables associated with it, which are linked with job satisfaction, safety, and freedom but also the pleasant working environment.

Figure 3: Latent Construct 3 - Working climate/environment

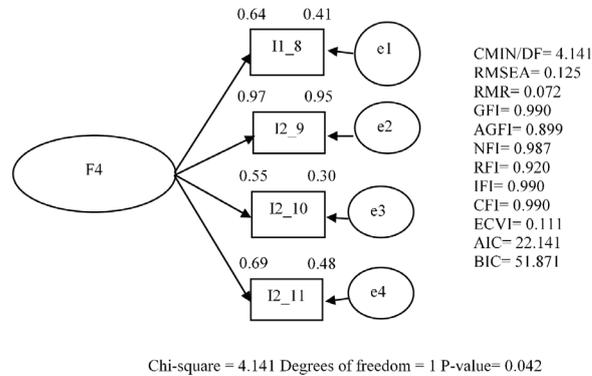


CMIN/DF= 1.081
 RMSEA= 0.020
 RMR= 0.023
 GFI= 0.994
 AGFI= 0.968
 NFI= 0.997
 RFI= 0.988
 IFI= 1.000
 CFI= 1.000
 ECVI= 0.136
 AIC= 27.243
 BIC= 66.882

Chi-square = 3.243 Degrees of freedom = 3 P-value= 0.356

Latent Construct 4 was based on the results of the Factor 4 column of Table 1 and the latent variable it contains was interpreted as “Remuneration policies” due to the observed variables associated with it, which are linked with financial wages except the salary.

Figure 4: Latent Construct 4 - Remuneration policies



The validation of Latent Construct 4 has a limitation, in relation to the P-value score, which did not exceed the Cut off criteria set and presented in Table 2 below. It should be noted that the Latent Construct 4 could not be further improved/modified due to the small number of observed variables correlated with the latent variable. Specifically, the authors tried to remove the variable I2_10 due to its low factor loading and low R², but in that case Latent Construct 4, was led to a not admissible solution, according to the output file of AMOS 23.

Table 2 below presents in detail the extent to which the Latent Constructs presented, met the criteria that had been set as conditions for their validation.

Table 2: Latent Constructs validation criteria

Validation conditions	Latent Construct 1	Latent Construct 2	Latent Construct 3	Latent Construct 4	Cut off Criteria
Unidimensionality of the variables	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Factor loading on each variable >0.5 (Brown 2014; Collier 2020)
Convergent validity	Satisfied (0.719)	Satisfied (0.688)	Satisfied (0.739)	Satisfied (0.532)	Average variance extracted >0.5 (Fornell and Larcker 1981)
Construct validity	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Based on the Fitness Indexes according to AMOS 23 (Brown 2014; Zainudin 2012)

Validation conditions	Latent Construct 1	Latent Construct 2	Latent Construct 3	Latent Construct 4	Cut off Criteria
Discriminant validity	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied	No redundant items found on the modification indices (Brown 2014; Zainudin 2012)
Internal reliability	Satisfied Cronbach's Alpha (0.943)	Satisfied Cronbach's Alpha (0.893)	Satisfied Cronbach's Alpha (0.927)	Satisfied Cronbach's Alpha (0.817)	Cronbach's Alpha Score > 0.5 (DeVellis 2016)
Composite reliability	Satisfied (0.939)	Satisfied (0.898)	Satisfied (0.933)	Satisfied (0.813)	Composite reliability score >0.6 (Collier 2020; Fornell and Larcker 1981)
Average variance extracted	Satisfied (0.719)	Satisfied (0.688)	Satisfied (0.739)	Satisfied (0.532)	Average variance extracted >0.5 (Fornell and Larcker 1981)
P-value	Satisfied (0.372)	Satisfied (0.516)	Satisfied (0.356)	Not Satisfied (0.042)	P-value > 0.05 (Brown 2014)

The study of the above table makes it clear that Latent Constructs 1, 2 and 3 meet all the conditions set for their validation, i.e., they have a common dimension (Unidimensionality) of variables/elements, existence of validity and reliability as well as a high probability level score (p-value).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. The motivation, at the organizational level, of front-line hotel employees by the leadership, in times of health crisis

The findings of previous research by Li and Roloff (2007), Chen (2010), Panagiotakopoulos (2013) and Pang and Lu (2018) showed that, at the organizational level, the motivations stemming from the work environment and the prestige of front-line employees are key elements of motivational behavior. These conclusions are in line with the results of Latent Construct 1, which highlights that in times of crisis, and to maintain strong bonds and a spirit of good cooperation and communication between front-line employees and the leadership of a hotel, the professional development of the employees must be supported

by the management. This development must be linked to intrinsic motivational elements, i.e., elements that will inspire employees giving them the opportunity to utilize and further develop their knowledge but also to enable further personal development through the recognition of their efforts. These findings contradict the results of previous research by Datta (2012) who argue that motivating front-line employees at the organizational level is primarily linked to financial incentives. The first hypothesis is fully confirmed after it was found that in times of health crisis, the motivation, at the organizational level, of front-line hotel employees is positively correlated with the non-financial incentives provided by the leadership of the organization.

4.2. The motivation, at the group level, of front-line hotel employees by the leadership, in times of health crisis

The results of Latent Construct 2 showed that, in times of health crisis, the motivation of front-line employees, at the team level, is positively correlated with the development of good communication between colleagues, which is associated with the enhancement of good interpersonal relationships between employees and leaders. This finding is partially in agreement with the findings of previous research. Armstrong et al. (2011), Cumbie (2020) and Rose (2014) in their research argue that to develop a positive work climate that will motivate the behaviour of front-line employees at the group level requires a mix of incentives which will be based on the development of interpersonal relationships between the members of a team and the offering of financial incentives that will reward teamwork. The above conclusions are further supported by the results of Latent Construct 4, which grouped incentives that are related exclusively with the financial remuneration of employees. In conclusion, the second hypothesis is confirmed, since it has been found that in times of health crisis, at the group level, the motivation of front-line employees in hotels is positively correlated with the interpersonal relationships that develop between them and the leadership of the organization.

4.3. The motivation, at the individual level, of front-line hotel employees by the leadership, in times of health crisis

The results of Latent Construct 3 showed that, in times of health crisis, the motivation of front-line employees, at the individual level, is positively correlated with non-financial incentives associated with the development of positive working climate/environment. This finding is also supported by previous research (Ho and Kuo 2013; Noor et al. 2018; Qiu et al. 2020; Ramlachan and Beharry-Ramraj 2021) which suggested that the establishment of good relationships and positive communication at the individual level between front-line employees and the leadership of a hotel organization are associated with the satisfaction of individual needs, aspirations and expectations, as well as with the utilization of individual knowledge and skills of each employee (Yao and Chang 2017). The view of Arubayi et al. (2020) is not supported by the results of Latent Construct 3, as no element of individual financial reward was found to be associated with motivating front-line employees in times of health crisis. Thus, the third hypothesis is confirmed,

since it has been found that in times of health crisis at the individual level, the motivation of front-line employees in hotels is positively correlated with the adoption of non-financial incentives by the leadership of the organization.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that the above results, combined with the partial validation of Latent Construct 4, are in line with the results of previous research that showed that in times of crisis the leadership of hotel organizations, in order to achieve high motivation of human resources, rely more on intrinsic motivation, i.e. incentives that stem from the work itself, such as: individual recognition, appreciation, and team coordination (Chon and Zoltan 2019; Minh-Duc and Huu-Lam 2019), while at the same time the value of material and financial rewards, incentives and benefits are of secondary importance. (Cañada 2018; Yrigoy and Cañada 2019).

5. SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The present research, using EFA and CFA, identified specific motivating factors that, in times of crisis, can create or strengthen strong bonds of cooperation and communication between the leadership and the front-line employees of hotels. This knowledge constitutes a scientific contribution and involves elements of originality as it was based on data collected in conditions unprecedented for the hospitality industry. But apart from being original, it is also scientifically important for two reasons. Firstly, because it tested and expanded existing knowledge under the conditions created by the spread of Covid-19. Secondly, because it presents findings on which other researchers will be able to rely to conduct similar research in the future. In addition, to the scientific contribution, the research findings contribute significantly on a practical level as well, after identifying specific motivational factors which, if used properly by the leadership of hotels, will be able to enhance good communication and cooperation with front-line employees in health crisis situations where social distancing and suspension of the operation of hotel businesses has been imposed. This will help hotel leaders gain a strategic advantage and leverage existing experience for the future when similar situations arise.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study was based on the collection of data from a convenience sample, so future research should be based on random sampling to obtain data that better represents the general population. In addition, a future study could investigate in combination the views of hotel leadership and front-line employees in hotels in Greece and other countries. This would allow a better understanding of the subject under investigation and the comparison of results between countries. Possible future research could collect and process qualitative data, as the combined processing of qualitative and quantitative data will allow a comprehensive examination of the issue. Another consideration could be to employ stakeholder theory to explore the knowledge about motivational factors that a hotel leadership can use to enhance good collaboration and communication with other stakeholders in addition to front-line employees in crisis conditions.

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