
Courage, the Career Adaptability and Employee Engagement of Hotel Service Staff at HCM in the Context of the COVID-19 Epidemic

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ABSTRACT: The author combines descriptive statistics with document collection methods. By using these two methods, the authors can better understand the job satisfaction and courage of hospitality employees during the COVID-19 epidemic. Adaptation at work is a very important thing that managers are very concerned about. Many studies have found a major impact of job adaptation on the motivation and courage of workers. Motivation for adaptability and courage at work will impact labor productivity and, moreover, the performance of business organizations. However, this issue still does not receive enough attention from researchers as well as administrators in business organizations. The goal of the article is to synthesize theories about work adaptation and the meaning and importance of the courage of hotel and restaurant service staff during the COVID epidemic period, thereby helping managers in human resources management. The study has a more general view on this issue.

KEYWORDS: Employee Engagement, Career Adaptability, Public Service Motivation, Hospitality, COVID 19, courage.

Findings

This article synchronously and systematically presents the impact of COVID-19 on personnel in the service and tourism industries in Vietnam in general and Ho Chi Minh City in particular based on official data, especially the career adaptation and courage of hotel staff during the COVID-19 period. From results of Study suggested that employee resilience, perceived communication quality, and workplace health and safety training are positively related to employee engagement, which in turn improves employee performance.

Especially service and tourism businesses in Ho Chi Minh City in developing and properly evaluating human resources, thereby enhancing their competitive position and attracting labor resources in the international market, contributing to creating economic growth and a sustainable labor force in the service industry for the city.

This research enhances the theoretical understanding of the personal factor (Career Adaptability and Career Transition Readiness) and situational factors (courage, perceived communication quality, and workplace health and safety training) that help enhance employee engagement and ultimately improve performance. The practical implications of the study propose means of effective communication with employees, mechanisms to bolster employee resilience and proactive health and safety training and reinduction of employees ahead of their return to work with guests during times of extreme turbulence.

1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has led to a rapid global health crisis, resulting in economic shocks (Churski et al., 2021), including shocks affecting the tourism industry. Tourism demand decreased sharply because of the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic (Chen et al., 2007; Zeng et al., 2005). The impact of COVID-19 on the tourism economy is forecast to be huge, surpassing epidemics that the world has recently suffered, such as SARS in East Asia and Southeast Asia (2003), the MERS epidemic in the Middle East (2012), the Ebola epidemic in Africa (2014), or the Ebola insect epidemic (2016) (Global Rescue & WTTC, 2019).

Evidence from five countries with available data—Brunei Darussalam, Mongolia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam—suggests that job losses in tourism-related sectors in 2020 were four times higher than those in other sectors. Nearly a third of all jobs lost were related to tourism, with an estimated 1.6 million jobs lost in the five countries alone. Taking into account the many jobs indirectly linked to the sector, the estimated true tourism-related job losses due to COVID-19 in the region are likely to be much higher.

In Vietnam, the severe consequences of the crisis on the tourism sector are mainly reflected in the reduction of wages and the increase of informality. Average wages in the tourism sector fell by nearly 18%, with the wages of female workers falling even more, by nearly 23%. While the number of informal workers in the tourism sector increased by 3% in 2020, the number of formal

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workers decreased by 11%. During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the country only welcomed 3.7 million international visitors, serving 56 million domestic visitors, down 34% over the same period in 2019. Room capacity The national average is only 20%; 52% of tourism workers lost their jobs; Total revenue from tourists reached VND 312,200 billion, down 57.8% compared to 2019. In the second quarter of 2024, the supply of 3- to 5-star hotels in Ho Chi Minh City decreased by 1% quarterly but increased by 6% annually, reaching a total of 16,542 rooms from 116 projects. The quarterly decline was due to the lack of new projects and the closure of two 3-star hotels in suburban areas.

In the area of employment, the International Labour Organization (ILO)¹ believes that the recovery of the labor market in 2022 will be slow and uncertain as the pandemic will continue to have a significant impact on the global labor market. The ILO has downgraded its forecast for the recovery of the labor market in 2022, with the global working-hour deficit in 2022 compared to Q4 2019 being equivalent to 52 million full-time jobs. The global unemployment rate is expected to remain at pre-Covid-19 levels at least until 2023. The estimated global unemployment rate in 2022 is 207 million, compared to 186 million in 2019. The global labor force participation rate in 2022 is expected to remain 1.2 percentage points lower than in 2019.

The latest research shows that the impact of COVID-19 on the quality of tourism management and services has undergone many fluctuations. The already stressed hotel staff is now under more pressure due to the epidemic situation. This can affect their attitude and work performance. The study about the courage and career adaptability of hotel staff during the COVID-19 period can make an important argument to promote the search for additional resources and improve service capacity post-COVID travel. This paper presents a process model of courage consisting of decision-based pathways by which one comes to enact a courageous action. We argue that the process of courage begins with a trigger involving an actor(s) and a situation(s).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory has been valuable in understanding and explaining human interactions in various settings which emphasize actors in the exchange (individual or organizational), what is exchanged (material or symbolic resources), and relationships between actors (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005 ; Li et al., 2017; Molm, 2003).

According to social exchange theory, employees engage in social relationships and interactions based on expectations of reciprocity and mutual benefit. Hospitality organizations that invest in their employees by providing fair compensation, growth opportunities, and a positive work environment are more likely to receive reciprocal engagement from them (Guan et al., 2020). When employees feel valued and supported, they are more likely to reciprocate by putting in more effort and dedication to their work (Qi et al., 2020). Social exchange theory (SET) is one of the gold standards to understand workplace behavior (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). It is such a common phenomenon that is deeply inculcated in our daily lives. Exchanges are not limited to the organizations but extended to our family, friends, and relatives, and that too on a subtle basis. Cropanzano et al. (2017) defined the SET as (i) an initiation by an actor toward the target, (ii) an attitudinal or behavioral response from the target in reciprocity, and (iii) the resulting relationship

2.2. What is courage?

According to the most recent research on bravery, subjective sense of fear is acknowledged as the fundamental component of the concept of courage.

Courage is often a deliberate assessment of a trigger and an analyzed decision on how to proceed toward a noble purpose in the face of personal risks (Rate et al., 2007). Courage is one of the most significant psychological constructs for society, but not one of the most frequently studied. "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear" – Roosevelt (1932).

2.2. Employee Engagement

Job engagement refers to the extent to which employees are eager to wholeheartedly immerse themselves in work tasks on physical, cognitive, and emotional levels (He et al., 2021). Studies have been examining the role of employee engagement during crisis and the COVID pandemic in particular. For example, Liu et al. (2022) investigated the relationship between employee engagement and performance in the hospitality sector. They found that organizational empowerment, leadership, and collaboration fostered employee engagement. Moreover, employee engagement positively impacted individual and organizational performance, mediated by organizational innovation culture. The study underscores the importance of fostering employee engagement through supportive leadership, collaboration, and fair treatment, which leads to enhanced organizational performance and innovative culture. Vakira et al. (2023) examined the relationship between inclusive leadership and employee engagement in the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe. Results show that inclusive leadership directly influences employee engagement, with psychological safety partially mediating this relationship. They highlighted the importance of inclusive leadership for enhancing engagement and productivity in

¹ [ILO Homepage | International Labour Organization](https://www.ilo.org/)

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the hospitality sector. Despite the significant potential and ongoing evolution of employee engagement within the hospitality industry, there remains a necessity for a deeper comprehension of the mechanisms behind employee engagement in the hospitality sector, especially during crises (Liu et al., 2022).

2.3 Career Adaptability and Career Transition Readiness

Career adaptability is composed of four factors: (a) concern, related to the time perspective and personal commitment to the future, viewing it with an optimistic and hopeful vision; (b) control, referring to the individual's perception of being able to implement an adequate decision-making process with respect to one's own career; (c) curiosity, related to the propensity for curiosity and exploration, which is considered relevant because knowledge derived from curiosity and exploration of possibilities is useful for making choices; and (d) confidence, theorized as the anticipation of success in facing challenges and overcoming obstacles to pursue career-related goals².

In Heppner's³ conception, readiness is defined by how much individuals are willing to exert themselves to reach their career goals; it indicates how individuals are motivated to make a transition that affects their professional future.

Lastly, preparedness has a negative correlation with psychological discomfort and a good correlation with optimism and contentment.

According to Heppner's definition, readiness is determined by the amount of effort people are ready to put out in order to achieve their professional objectives; it shows how driven people are to make a change that would have an impact on their professional future. Individuals vary in their desire or readiness to influence change as well as in their amount of preparation for it.

3. METHODOLOGY

This is a cross-sectional study of the descriptive-analytical type, and it is aimed to investigate the relationship between moral courage and career adaptability and career transition readiness's staff tourism in Ho Chi Minh City.

The author combines descriptive statistics with the document collection method. With the use of these two approaches, the author is better able to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected industry structure changes, particularly in the tourism sector. Additionally, the author has a stronger scientific and practical foundation upon which to base any recommendations for human resource recovery strategies for the tourism sector in Ho Chi Minh City following the pandemic.

- Document collecting method: From the website of The UNWTO, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, the General Department of Tourism, the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, and the Ho Chi Minh City Department of Tourism are the sources from which the author gathered secondary data for this article. based on studies measuring hotel company owners' flexibility in adjusting their business models and statistics on the frequency of staff changes.

- Descriptive statistical method: Investigate and compile data on the number of tourists, workers in the tourism sector, and growth rates in revenue, as well as workers in the tourism sector. The discrepancies between the epidemic and non-epidemic eras are analyzed, and the correlation between stakeholders is discovered, using non-parametric statistical approaches to clearly show how employees adapted to the COVID period and made career decisions during this time. Next, provide a corresponding business plan for the company and an excellent plan for the city's human resource development.

The author used non-parametric statistical methods to address the following specific issues: Descriptive statistical methods allow comparison of data groups from primary to secondary to answer the question of whether there are any significant differences in the number of tourists, revenue, and employment rate in the tourism industry in Vietnam, including Ho Chi Minh City, between the epidemic and non-epidemic periods. Considering that the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have severely impacted the socio-economic, environmental, and especially the tourism industry, qualitative research, which is a small part through interviews and focus group discussions, is considered relatively appropriate to explore essential concepts that can go beyond mere statistics. Qualitative data was collected by interviewing 20 participants. They are experts, highly qualified hotel staff, capable of giving opinions to ensure.

4. Some strategies on work adaptability and business innovation that hotels in Ho Chi Minh City implemented during the Covid

4.1 Some strategies that hotels are implementing during the Covid pandemic

Since March 2020, Ho Chi Minh City has mobilized more than 22 hotels in the city to register as paid quarantine facilities, which is aimed at reducing the burden on quarantine areas, and participating hotels can also cover costs during the epidemic period. Hotels must register with the city's Department of Tourism and ensure the standards set by the Department of Tourism and the Ministry of

² 43. Savickas M.L. Career adaptability: An integrative construct for lifespan, lifespan theory. *Career Dev. Q.* 1997;**45**:247–259. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-0045.1997.tb00469.x. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)]

³ Heppner M.J. The career transitions inventory: Measuring internal resources in adulthood. *J. Career Assess.* 1998;**6**:135–145. doi: 10.1177/106907279800600202. [[CrossRef](#)] [[Google Scholar](#)] [[Ref list](#)]

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Health on quarantine. This proposal can be considered beneficial for all parties. Pressure could be lessened for the healthcare system; demand for more comfortable accommodation with better service quality could be satisfied for the quarantined people who were willing to pay for the services, and service operation could be maintained for the hotels to help them survive over the pandemic (Tang et al. 2015; Cheng et al. 2018).

Some hotels in Saigon also send food and meals to doctors and nurses on the front lines of the fight against the epidemic. Similar activities are taking place around the world: hotels turn into quarantine facilities or offer quarantine services to suspected cases at a small cost. Making a profit is far-fetched, but at least these activities contribute to maintaining operating costs and paying salaries to employees, whose income is severely reduced due to the epidemic.

“In a time of great uncertainty, we are reassuring our customers that they can count on us to be flexible, clean, safe, and put health first,” said Mr. Verove- GM of InterContinental Hanoi Landmark72. “Faced with temporary closures and low demand, we have identified ways to change our operations to improve profitability, protect cash flow, implement cutting-edge digital solutions, and train our employees to have a growth mindset.”

“The safety of our guests and staff is our top priority.” Mr. Wayne Woods, General Manager of Eastin Grand Hotel Saigon Vietnam, says Vietnam is one of the top 10 destinations for Chinese tourists, so the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent travel bans has been significant. We have issued strict regulations for our staff and guests to follow. An example is that all public area surfaces for guests, such as lift tables, coffee tables, and reception desks, are cleaned and sprayed with disinfectant every 30 minutes. All our staff wear masks as a precaution, and we have disinfecting alcohol gel and disinfectant available throughout the hotel. In addition, we conduct temperature checks of all guests entering the hotel, and the temperature of all staff is recorded twice a day. The safety of our guests and staff is our top priority.

Some regulations and safety standards at a quarantine hotel in Ho Chi Minh City:

- Ensure to meet the requirements for arranging and organizing quarantine service areas at the hotel.
- Divide into floors for different groups of guests, guests staying on different days must be arranged on different floors
- Ensure facilities, room cleaning services, food, laundry, disinfection, etc. to serve the needs of quarantined people
- Ensure training for all hotel staff to serve quarantine
- Disseminate medical quarantine regulations in the reception area and each quarantine room Distribute medical masks to quarantined people throughout their stay at the hotel
- Direct room service staff will also be quarantined for 14 days with guests. Only when guests complete quarantine with a negative test result can hotel service staff return.
- Provide specialized protective equipment and clothing for service staff in the isolation area Provide medical masks and disinfectants for all service staff in other departments.
- All hotel staff are guaranteed to be vaccinated with 2 doses of COVID-19 vaccine and undergo regular testing and sampling according to the instructions of the health authorities

Many hotels and resorts in Vietnam have opened yoga classes via their Instagram Live, which are filmed live at the resort. Lawrence Ng, Vice President of Sales & Marketing of Marriott Group, After observing the trends that can attract customers' attention during the pandemic, he came up with a strategy to bring unique experiences at home: from livestreaming master chefs cooking and sharing recipes. When bedrooms became empty, many hotels around the world and even in Vietnam simultaneously turned on the lights in their rooms in the shape of hearts or smileys with messages spreading hope to the community, as well as sharing and supporting the medical team who are fighting the epidemic. As you can see, instead of simply closing the hotel and becoming a "dead place," many hotels chose to take advantage of empty hotel rooms in a way that spreads emotions. In addition to sending a message of love to the community, this form of lighting also helps increase customers' affection for the hotel.

| Categories | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | July | Aug | Sept | Oct |
|--|-----|------|------|------|-----|-----|------|-----|------|-----|
| Hotel room occupancy (%) | 88% | 39% | 13% | 32% | 47% | 49% | 53% | 57% | 60% | 625 |
| Change im room revenues compared to previous month (%) | | -55% | -58% | 142% | 66% | 10% | 8 | 7% | 6% | 5% |
| Number of full - time staff | 102 | 72 | 56 | 66 | 70 | 70 | 75 | 77 | 80 | 80 |

Source: springer.com

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Since the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Vietnam on 23rd January 2020, leaders of Viehost prepared a response plan as well as contacting the local government for support. In early March, the plan for preparing a paid quarantine service was promoted by the Vietnamese government and Viehost began to prepare a proposal and submit it to become one of first hotels to pilot this service. In the third week of March, Viehost was one of eight hotels in Vietnam that was allowed to introduce paid quarantine service beside the current response strategies that were already being practiced in Viehost. As soon as their proposal was accepted, Viehost immediately contacted suppliers, business partners, and the local government to ensure that the required resources were ready for them to develop the paid quarantine service.

After introducing the paid quarantine service as well as adopting other response strategies, the hotel's room revenues increased significantly by 142% in April and 66% in May 2020, and increased slightly further over the next 5 months. Furthermore, the number of full-time staff rose to 70 in May 2020 and 80 in October 2020⁴.

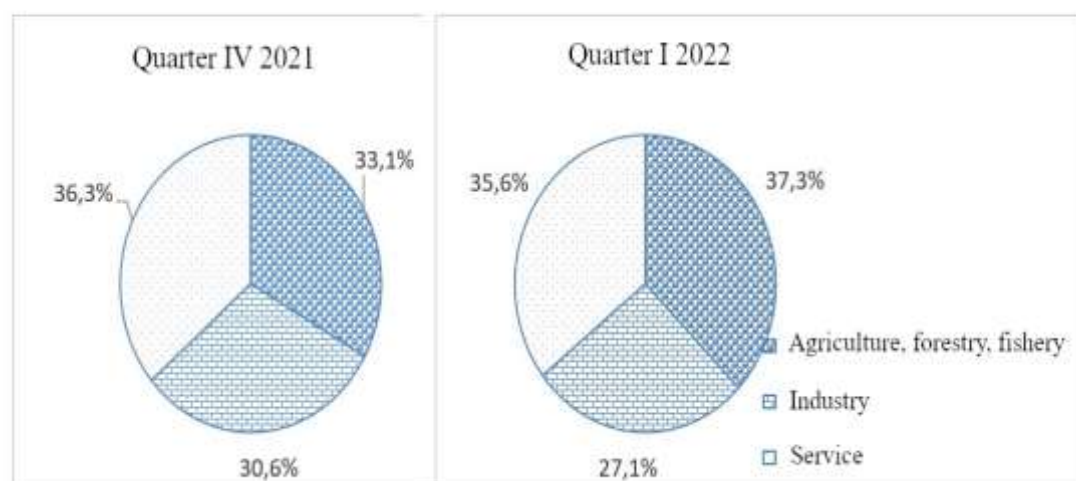
A new method of communication is adopted, replacing face-to-face meetings and regular work. The development and uptake of new communication channels is one significant way that the pandemic has altered hotel communication practices. Following the implementation of furlough, many employees were not actively involved in the company. As a result, the hotels' communication style with furloughed employees shifted from business to personal and from work engagement to social engagement. Social media's more personal aspect made it unsuitable for professional business use in the past, but in certain situations, it proved to be a rapid and efficient way for staff members to communicate when more formal, traditional routes failed.

It can be seen from the data that the changes to more personal communication with the adaptation to social media led to unprecedented new ways of communication and level of engagement. As suggested by the social exchange theory, higher particularistic and socio-emotional resources including love, attention and caring are more likely to develop long-term and positive exchange relationship than merely economic resources such as money, information, goods and services (Ohtsubo et al., 2014; Ziakas & Costa, 2010). The new and more personal and social communication adopted during the Covid pandemic allowed more opportunities for the exchange of higher particularistic and socio-emotional resources, and consequently stronger person to person engagement and attachment.

4.2. The state of human resources in the travel and service sector currently

Of the total of more than 16.9 million people negatively affected by the pandemic, 0.9 million people lost their jobs, accounting for 1.2%; 5.1 million people had to temporarily stop or suspend production and business, accounting for 6.7%; 5.7 million people had their working hours cut or were forced to take leave or take turns, accounting for 7.6%; and 13.7 million workers had their income reduced, accounting for 18.3%.

Figure 2: Structure of underemployed labor within working age by three economics sectors, Quarter IV 2021 and Quarter I 2022

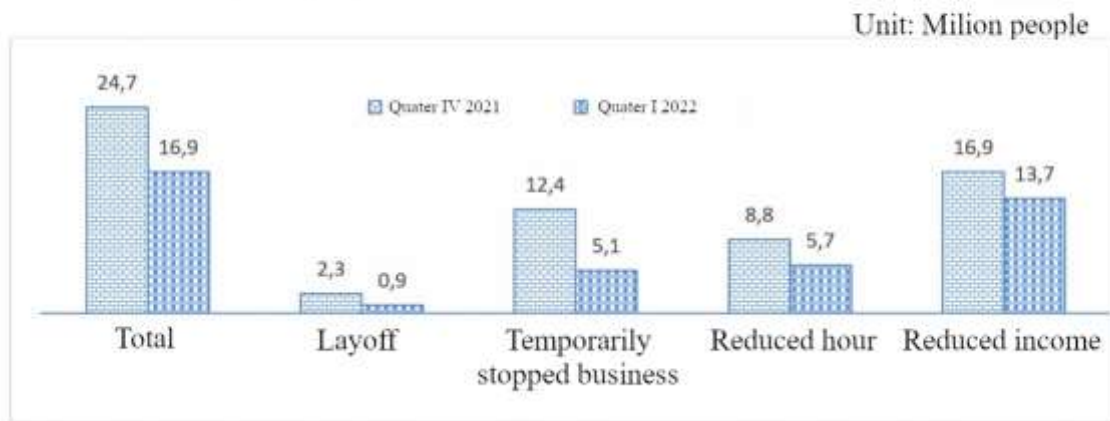


The Red River Delta and the Southeast are still the two regions with a higher proportion of affected workers than other regions.

⁴ Souce: [Table 1 | The survival of hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic: a critical case study in Vietnam | Service Business \(springer.com\)](#)

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Figure 3: Number of people from 15 years old and above negatively impacted, Quarter IV 2021 and Quarter I 2022



The number of workers in these two regions who said that their jobs were affected by the pandemic accounted for 25.7% and 23.9%, respectively, significantly higher than the figures in the Northern Midlands and Mountains and the Central Highlands, respectively, at 18.8% and 14.4%. Urban areas are still the areas with more affected workers than rural areas. 25.8% of urban workers were negatively affected, while the rate in rural areas was 20.5%.

Most of those whose jobs were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the past were quite young, between 25 and 54 years old, accounting for 73.8%.

Table 1: Number of employees interviewed at 65 hotels (3-5star) in HCMC

| | | Number of employees | % |
|------------|------------------|---------------------|-------|
| Year | Over 20 | 43 | 55.1% |
| | Over 30 | 25 | 44.9% |
| Gender | Male | 34 | 50% |
| | Female | 34 | 50% |
| Department | FO | 29 | 42.6% |
| | HK | 6 | 8.8% |
| | FB | 15 | 22.1% |
| | Other | 18 | 26.5% |
| Experience | Under 1 year | 10 | 14.9% |
| | From 1 to 5 year | 31 | 46.3% |
| | Over 5 year | 26 | 38.8% |

There were 68 respondents, of whom 86 were between the ages of 20 and 30 (55,1%) and 25 were over 30 (44.9%). The number of men and women in the survey 50% was equal at 34 people (50.0%). There were 10 respondents with work experience less than 1 year (14,9%), 56 with experience from 1 to 5 years (46.3%) and over 5 year 38,8%.

Factor analysis was conducted to test whether the data could be used for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) through Cronbach's Alpha.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's | N of Items |
|------------|------------|
| .918 | 7 |

Table 3. Testing reliability with Cronbach's coefficient alpha

| | Number of items | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted |
|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Work Itself (W) | 3 | .912 |
| Career adaptability (CA) | 2 | .907 |
| Company Policy (P) | 3 | .904 |

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| | | |
|--------------------------------|---|------|
| Security at Work (S) | 3 | .912 |
| Courage (C) | 2 | .906 |
| Relations with Supervisor (RS) | 2 | .916 |
| Working Conditions (WC)) | 3 | .911 |

Table 4: Model Summary

| Model | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Durbin-Watson |
|-------|-------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | .686 | .455 | 1.525 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), W, CA, P, S, C, RS, WC

b. Dependent Variable: Career adaptability

There are 68.6% of the data sets with significant coefficients at $\alpha = 5\%$.

Table 5. The career adaptability

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | Collinearity Statistics | |
|-------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|-------------------------|-------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | Tolerance | VIF |
| W | .116 | .055 | .143 | 2.091 | .039 | .497 | 2.010 |
| CA | .179 | .063 | .221 | 2.827 | .005 | .381 | 2.628 |
| P | .075 | .070 | .092 | 1.069 | .287 | .314 | 3.189 |
| S | .081 | .060 | .099 | 1.331 | .186 | .418 | 2.391 |
| C | .075 | .063 | .092 | .1180 | .240 | .381 | 2.625 |
| RS | .190 | .061 | .235 | .3141 | .002 | .417 | 2.400 |
| WC | .159 | .055 | .196 | 2.878 | .005 | .501 | 1.994 |

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between factors affecting the career adaptability of hotel employees at HCMC. Regression analysis with nonlinear relationships: VIF values (variance inflation factor) in the analysis table are less than 5. This shows that there is no collinearity phenomenon; the regression coefficients of individual variables are all significant with a confidence level of over 95%.

Through a survey on the level of adaptation and job satisfaction of hotel staff in Ho Chi Minh City, using qualitative and quantitative methods, there are some comments as follows:

According to the latest report on human resources from the General Department of Tourism, Vietnam is among the countries that have lost the most tourism workers due to the pandemic. In 2020, about 52% of tourism workers quit or changed jobs. The number of full-time employees only accounted for 24%. The workforce with 5-10 years of seniority who changed jobs was 44%, and 90% of post-graduate workers changed jobs.

Hotel human resources have chosen to change careers (52%), and the rest because of the nature of the job (24%), adaptability, and a real desire to stick with the job during the COVID-19 period, achieving good commitment in the job. It can be found that the income of workers is directly affected by the job, and there is no additional source of income such as service, customer tips, bonuses, or revenue bonuses during the epidemic. This is one of the reasons why workers may have to switch to another profession.

Following COVID-19, a lot of big businesses in the hotel and restaurant sector are always hiring, but the amount of workers does not match the quantity and caliber of urgency for the company.

5. CONCLUSION

First, many low- to mid-level hotel staff have left the industry during the pandemic. This is also quite obvious and understandable when the market has been frozen for 2.5 years. Many hotels, restaurants, airlines, and other businesses have had to downsize or stop operating. Until the market recovers, the current number of staff is not enough to meet the needs of the business situation. On the other hand, the number of staff attached to the industry has changed positions from staff to management level because, during the pandemic, they have undergone multi-position training to meet the actual needs of the Covid epidemic situation.

Second, Adaptability at work is the driving force for employee commitment to the organization. The hotel industry has been able to survive the COVID-19 pandemic thanks to policies that ensure the safety of hotel guests and employees, specifically from the courage of employees, adaptability at work, and Employee Engagement of staff and leader at hotel HCM in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic.

Finally, Ho Chi Minh City needs: Training; attracting and recruiting employees; appropriate employment policies; creating a healthy, competitive working environment, encouraging tourism staff to develop their skills and creativity at work. To get top talent back into the workforce, businesses must implement compensation and welfare plans that meet global standards. These include benefits packages and personal insurance policies for executives and their families. Annual leave, perks from travel to study and

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share additional experiences across hotels and tourist sites, and training expenses to stay up to speed on industry knowledge are also provided.

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