Exploring and Understanding Employee Experience in Hawaii Restaurants

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The purpose of this thesis was to explore and understand employee experience in Hawaii Restaurants. Hawaii Restaurants is a restaurant family consisting of three individual restaurants; The Cock, Holiday and Yes Yes Yes, all located in Helsinki.

The thesis had three objectives. The first objective was to explore employee experiences in Hawaii Restaurants and to gain knowledge of employees’ perceptions. The second objective was to deepen understanding of employees’ experiences. The third and final objective was to provide suggestions for improvement.

The concept and significance of employee experience was thoroughly studied and defined, using the most prevalent models and frameworks. Concepts related to employee experience, such as organizational culture and leadership, were introduced and their influence on employee experience was examined.

Characteristics and the state of restaurant industry in Finland were also viewed. A new model, Employee Experience Wheel, was developed based on existing literature, to be suitable especially for restaurant industry.

A quantitative and a qualitative research were conducted in April 2019, in order to accomplish the objectives. First, a survey was used as a quantitative research method, to explore employee experience. Later, a group interview was carried out in order to deepen the understanding of employee experience.

The results of the research in this thesis provide valuable information about how the Hawaii Restaurants organization is experienced as a workplace. The research results were mainly positive, but certain issues emerged and could be improved. The information can be used by both the management as well as the employees, in order to recognize the strengths and improvement points in the organization, and to aim for a winning employee experiences that can benefit the whole organization.

Keywords
Employee experience, employee engagement, organizational culture, leadership
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1 Introduction

Business owners have studied the customer experiences and their significance on overall organizational success for decades. Leaders of different organizations are now aiming to build better workplaces, by focusing on the employee experience. (Arnold 2018.) Companies of any kind are encouraged to continue rethinking their relationship with the employees, in order to compete with each other (Plaskoff 2017).

According to Morgan (2017, 10), an experiential organization is designed to truly know its people and has accomplished the skill of creating a workplace where people want to show up, instead of feeling that they need to show up. Experiential organizations are masters of delivering great employee experiences. (Morgan 2017, 10.) Employee experience can be defined as “the sum of perceptions employees have about their interactions with the organization in which they work” (Maylett & Wride 2017, 12).

The purpose of this thesis is to explore and understand employee experience in Hawaii Restaurants. *Employee in Hawaii Restaurants* stands for anyone working in any of the Hawaii Restaurants. The word *experience* is used in the sense of the process of directly perceiving reality, not to be confused with *experience* in the sense of knowledge or skills developed in a particular job or activity over time (Merriam-Webster 2019).

There are three objectives in this thesis. The first objective is to explore employee experiences in Hawaii Restaurants and to gain knowledge of employees’ perceptions. The second objective is to deepen understanding on employees’ experiences. The third and final objective is to provide suggestions for improvement.

Employee experiences will be explored by conducting a quantitative research. A survey will be used as a research method and respondents will be all employees in Hawaii Restaurants. After collecting and analysing the data from the survey and identifying the main findings, a group interview will be implemented, in order to obtain a better understanding of employee experiences. The group interview will act as a qualitative research method in this thesis.

The third objective is to provide suggestions and ideas for improvement, in order to advance employee experiences in Hawaii Restaurants. This objective will be achieved by analysing the research results and by creating suggestions based on the main findings.
Hawaii Restaurants is a restaurant family that is composed of three restaurants; The Cock, Holiday and Yes Yes Yes, all located in downtown Helsinki. I have been working for Hawaii Restaurants since December 2017 and therefore wanted to conduct my thesis for the organization.

The reason why I chose especially this topic for my thesis was from the suggestion of my manager. The understanding of employee experience as a concept is still quite limited, due to the fact that the concept is fairly new. Therefore, I wanted to study the concept as well as to increase the awareness of employee experience.

In order to explore and understand employee experience in Hawaii Restaurants, the concept of employee experience itself needs to be thoroughly explained and studied. The significance of employee experience in terms of employee engagement and eventually overall business success is discussed.

A framework by Jacob Morgan is used as a main source of theory. Morgan (2017) identifies three employee experience environments which all affect the formation of employee experience. These environments are physical, technological and cultural environment. (Morgan 2017.) Other models are also introduced and compared together. In addition, conceptual analysis of employee experience is made. Based on the literature review, a new model for employee experience is introduced.

Although the results of this thesis are affiliated with a specific organization and can’t be generalized, this thesis may raise awareness of the conceptual understanding of employee experience as an emerging topic. The first half of this thesis will cover employee experience as a concept and can be advantageous for any type of organization. In the best-case scenario, people within different organizations will gain new perspectives on how to interact and treat their employees and peers.

In addition, this thesis will be extremely helpful for the leaders and managers working for the organization in question. They will most likely get information and data they have never had before, both from the importance and consequences of the concept of employee experience, as well as the feelings and experiences of their employees. Ideally, the leaders and managers will get some new aspects and ideas for their own work and for others, that can benefit the whole organization.

Most importantly, this thesis will be helpful for all the employees of Hawaii Restaurants. This study may help them have a better understanding of the feelings and behaviours of
themselves and their peers. Thus, this thesis may bring the employees closer to each other, as well as to make them feel more connected to their managers, leaders and the whole organization.

The structure of this thesis constitutes six main chapters. Employee experience as a concept is studied in chapter two. The chapter includes explaining the factors that lead to the rise of employee experience, identifying the benefits of positive employee experiences and several definitions and models of employee experience. A few related concepts and their connection to employee experience are explained.

Hawaii Restaurants is introduced in chapter three. All three restaurants within the organization; The Cock, Holiday and Yes Yes Yes are shortly presented. In chapter four, the research methods are explained. The use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods is reasoned. The implementation of both research methods is also clarified. The results from the quantitative and qualitative research are analysed in chapter five. First, the survey data is presented with figures and tables. Second, the findings from the group interview are discussed. The final chapter consists of discussion and conclusions. This chapter includes consideration of the research findings, as well as suggestions for improvement and future research. Reliability, validity and ethics of the thesis are also discussed. Lastly, personal learning through the thesis process is reflected.
2 Employee Experience

People who love going to work are more productive and more creative. They go home happier and have happier families. They treat their colleagues and customers and clients better. (Sinek 2009, 7.)

Employee experience as a phenomenon is not new. In fact, it has existed for as long as there have been employees and work to be done. Everyone who’s ever had a job of any kind, has had an employee experience. However, employee experience as a concept came into existence not until a few years ago. Hence, the significance of employee experience has become apparent in recent years.

Business leaders and authors around the world have been emphasising the relationship between business success and employee experience. Brigette Hyacinth (2018, 46–47), the founder of MBA Caribbean Organisation, writes in her article that business success starts with employee experience. According to her, employees will generate outstanding customer experiences only when they feel welcome, valued, respected and heard. William E. McClane (2018, 21), the president of McClane Consulting Group, says that the way employees perceive their work communicates value, motivation and expectations and is vital as it is the key for high performance.

Yohn (2018) claims that instead of focusing on customer experience organisations should make employee experience their number one priority and called for 2018 to be the year of employee experience. Morgan (2017, 25) states that when the employee experiences are the main focus, employees will not only automatically invest more in customer experiences but also help and support each other.

2.1 Brief history of Employee Experience

Today we live in a business world where four different generations work together for the first time; the traditionalists, baby boomers, Generation Xers and Millennials. All of these four generations have different assumptions towards their workplaces and employers based on their customs. Together the differing employee expectations, emerging use of technologies, changing nature of service industry, more complex consumer demand and globally widening marketplaces require companies to continue improving their relationships with employees, in order to attract and retain skilled employees. (Plaskoff 2017.)
One of the drivers that is shaping the relationships at our workplaces is the increase of millennial workers. Millennials are the generation of 80 million people born between 1980 and 2000 and by 2020, 40% of the workforce will be part of this generation. Millennials are the first generation who doesn’t perceive work and leisure as two distinct concepts that should be balanced. An ideal lifestyle is to have working and personal activities merged into one. The main reason why the line between work and life has started to fade is the emerging role and use of technology, which has given millennials the ability to work where and when they want. (Johnson, 2015.)

In fact, the transition to employee experience focused organisations began in the technology sector where companies have been fighting for competent workers for many years. The demand for EX (employee experience) mentality is now stronger than ever, due to the expectations of modern workers who are not hesitant to change jobs when seeking for the best. (Arnold 2018, 79.)

Maylett and Wride (2017) encourage everyone to think and act like a millennial, regardless if they are one or not, and to start questioning the current employee experience at workplaces. Transformation and innovation can be found only by challenging the old and ossified ways of thinking and by looking for better alternatives. (Maylett & Wride 2017, 71.)

A few years ago, employees may have endured a less than satisfactory experience at work for the sake of job safety, but today they don’t have to (Payne 2017). Organizations are also moving towards a more networked, team-based structure where employees have numerous roles and various managers. This means that employee experience is becoming more complex and important than ever. (Bersin & al. 2017.)

Morgan (2017) identifies four different eras that have determined the relationship between employees and employers, and which ultimately led to the emerging trend of employee experience. Decades ago the main focus in working life was utility. Back then, all employees needed was thought to be the tools and other equipment that would help them to get the work done. After utility came productivity. Managers did everything they could to make employees work as fast and convenient as possible. After the eras of utility and productivity, employers started to realise that in order to make employees perform better, they should also feel more engagement towards their jobs. To make employees more engaged, employers began to pay more attention to taking care of their employees; how they felt and what they valued. (Morgan 2017, 3–6.) The era of engagement was very vital in terms of the rise of the era of employee experience.
In a Harvard Business Review interview, the chief human resources officer at IBM Diane Gherson stated that because of social media, companies have turned into glass houses. According to her, things that are said and done inside an organisation do not stay within a small group of people anymore but spread outside instead. (Burrell 2018, 58.) Morgan (2017, 45–46) also states that employees now have a voice they haven’t had before and that organizations no longer can’t afford not to invest in employee experience.

As a result of the rise of the era of employee experience, companies in all industries have positions focused on employee experience in their HR structures, including companies such as Adidas, Facebook and Harrods (Ellis 2018). In 2015, Airbnb was one of the first companies to appoint a global head of employee experience (Maylett & Wride 2017, xi). McClane (2018) says that the need for HR to strategically define employee experience has never been more vital, as employee experience is the key to enable high performance.

### 2.2 The power of Employee Experience

The consequences of employee experience, both positive and negative, are prominently wide. Hence, it is extremely important for business leaders and managers to understand the concept and extent of employee experience, not only for the sake of the employees, but also for the full-scale organizational success. In this chapter the magnitude of employee experience will be reflected.

Business magnate and philanthropist Sir Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group, has inspired many business leaders with his leadership ideologies. He emphasises that a company of any kind is eventually a group of people and that all companies are eventually selling their people (Feifer 2017). Therefore, it would only make sense to be extremely mindful about how those people are treated every day.
Morgan (2017) claims that by focusing on employee experience, companies are able to provide better customer service, be more innovative, attract and retain top talent, be admired and respected as well as build more brand value. Companies that invest in employee experience are more likely to deliver higher returns on performance benchmarks and they provide a higher return on investment. (Morgan 2017, 149–165.)

One of the reasons why it is extremely important to pay attention to employee experience is that the war for talent is now stronger than ever. The war for talent isn’t only about attracting the most potential employees but also keeping the existing ones (Morgan 2017, 26). A record low unemployment rate and employers’ dread that employees will leave for better positions and workplaces is driving companies to change the way they view their workforce (Selko 2018). It’s getting harder and harder for employers to attract and retain the best talent. A novel employee experience, however, can provide a new kind of competitive advantage for employers as highly skilled workforce is more attracted to work for their organizations and eager to stay with them. (Jackson 2017.)

IBM (2017) also states that a more positive employee experience is positively linked to employee retention. IBM’s analysis shows that employees with low Employee Experience Index scores are more than twice as likely to leave their organization compared to those with more positive experiences. (IBM 2017.)

Other researchers have studied the link between employee experience and organizational commitment and work engagement. Allen and Meyer (1991) define organizational commitment as a psychological link between an employee and their organization. They identify three types of organizational commitment through three main reasons why a person wants to stay within an organization. Those reasons are that (1) he or she wants the salary or benefits, (2) feels obligation to stay with an organization because it’s the right thing to do, or (3) feels happy with the organization and feels attached to it on an emotional level. (Allen & Meyer 1991.) The last cause is defined as the affective component, which is found to have the largest impact on job satisfaction, employee turnover, absenteeism and engagement (Kinnie, Rossenberg, Swart & Yalabik 2015).

Schenoi and Uchil (2018) studied that employee experience has a strong influence in forming employee engagement. Higher employee engagement in turn results in better employee experience. (Schenoi & Uchil 2018.) Maylett and Wride (2017) summarise that an engaged workforce results in high customer satisfaction and loyalty, stronger growth and
higher profits. It also leads to lower turnover and lower recruitment costs. Engaged employees are more likely to have healthier lifestyles and have fewer chronic diseases. (Maylett & Wride 2017, 15.)

Another main motive for investing in employee experience is the direct link to customer experience. According to Maylett and Wride (2017), managers have tried for decades to shape customer experiences directly through procedures, pricing and different kinds of perks without understanding that customer satisfaction and good customer experience is an outcome that generates from a good employee experience. After all, a successful customer experience is a direct result of the beliefs and behaviours of the employees who interact with the customers. Every crucial business result comes into being from the engagement and experience of the people who make the business go. Therefore, employees should come first, and the great customer experiences will follow as a result, not the other way around. Maylett and Wride also state that employees will deliver a customer experience that matches with their own experience in the organization. (Maylett & Wride 2017, 10–11.)

Other researches have also emphasised the link between employee and customer experiences. Fischer (2012) studied the link between employee and customer perceptions. However, instead of the term employee experience, she uses the term employee perception. Fischer’s research showed that service employees’ perceptions of their workplace climate and meaning of their work has a direct link to both customers’ perceptions of the quality of the service as well as the overall profitability of the business. The main finding of the research was that a major competitive advantage of any service business is created by the quality of interactions between an employee, an employer, a colleague and a customer. Positive interactions generate positive emotions and import in work community, which in turn nurture positive customer experiences. Positive interactions are essentially acts such as helping, respecting and empowering each other, as well as being thankful for each other. (Fischer 2012.)

Lee Yohn (2018) states that great employee experiences bring a company’s distinctive brand values and characteristics into life the best. In other words, companies’ values should be aligned with their internal functions in a way that those values would be reflected in employee experiences. This allows the employees to experience the benefits of the brand first and to be more prepared, qualified and motivated to interpret them with customers. (Lee Yohn 2018.)
IBM (2017) claims that a positive employee experience results in better work performance and drives employees to put more effort into their work. Niall Ryan-Jones (in Sequel Group 2018), the Head of Employee Experience at Harrods, says that if employers and those in charge expect employees to go the extra mile for customers, they need to go the extra mile for the employees in turn. If people feel respected and treated as individuals, get their needs fulfilled and the company is easy to deal with, just like customers, employees will tell others about it and stay loyal to the company. If, however, they don’t feel treated as individuals, don’t get their needs fulfilled and dealing with the company is difficult, they naturally will not want to stay with the company. Ryan-Jones concludes that by concentrating on delivering great employee experiences at Harrods, they are able to attract the best people by enhancing the employment lifecycle and developing their employer brand, which in turn will help them to build stronger customer relationships as well as support profitable growth. (Sequel Group 2018.)

2.3 Defining Employee Experience

The concept of employee experience is fairly new. The use of the term started to spread in business scenery around 2015 when Airbnb was one of the first companies to appoint a global head of employee experience. (Maylett & Wride 2017, xi.) By November 2016, there were already 1 850 people using the term employee experience in their job titles on LinkedIn (Ellis 2018, 23).

Simply put, employee experience can be defined as employee’s holistic perceptions of the relationship with the organization s/he is employed to, derived from all the encounters at touchpoints along the employee’s journey (Plaskoff 2017). Employees look at everything that happens at work as an integrated experience that has an impact on their daily lives in and outside workplaces, involving overall physical, emotional, professional and financial well-being (Deloitte Insights 2017).

The most famous and commonly used frameworks of employee experience are developed by an author and futurist Jacob Morgan as well as employee engagement pioneers Tracy Maylett and Matthew Wride. Both of these theories are based on broad research and they are widely used in literature. Morgan’s framework is used as a main source of theory in this thesis and therefore, the next subchapter will be focused on that theory.
2.3.1 Framework by Morgan

Morgan's framework and approach are based on organizational analysis and research of 252 global organizations. As a part of his research, Morgan created the world's first Employee Experience Index, which scores and ranks those organizations across 17 variables. Those variables are grouped into *three employee experience environments*, which together with *reason for being* creates employee experience.

Morgan (2017) claims that in order to provide an excellent employee experience, organizations need to have a proper *reason for being*. He states that by surpassing the basic concept of a mission statement, which could be for example delivering great customer experiences, being the market leader or providing shareholder value, organizations can create a stronger connection with the people who are actually affected. In other words, an idealistic mission statement provides the impact that an organization is aiming to have on the world and the community around it. A great reason for being is also something that's unobtainable, which drives the organization to keep dreaming big over time. Lastly, Morgan (2017) states that it should be something that unites and ignites the employees. Employees who work for an organization that has a great reason for being don't question why they should care nor why they should stand by it. The answer to both should already be rooted within the organisation. (Morgan 2017, 51.)

According to Morgan (2017), employee experience consists of *three employee experience environments*. These environments are *physical environment*, *technological environment* and *cultural environment*. Everything an organisation does shapes the employee experience and falls into at least one of these environments. This subchapter is used to explore Morgan's framework and the three employee experience environments. The three employee experience environments and their specific variables (see figure 2) will be explained next.
The physical environment is the physical space in which employees actually work. It comprises 30% of the employee experience. Workspaces which energize and inspire employees will help them feel more creative, engaged and connected to the company they work for. Great physical environments also act as positive symbols and representations of the organization. Poor physical spaces act as negative symbols and representations in turn. (Morgan 2017, 59–75.)

In order to create a great physical environment for employees, organizations have to pay attention to four major characteristics. The first characteristic is whether employees bring in their friends and family members when and if allowed. This is one of the easiest and most effective ways for an organization to get a sense of whether employees feel connected to and are proud of their workspaces. The second characteristic is whether an organization offers flexibility to their employees or not. In this context, flexibility refers to employees being able to pick when and where they work. Flexibility provides multiple benefits to employees as well as the organization, such as more productivity, decreased absence, healthier, happier and less stressed employees. The third characteristic of a great physical environment is an organization’s values that are reflected in the workspaces. If an organisation claims to care or believe something but their actions don’t reflect that, then they
are not only lying to everyone who interacts with them but also to themselves. It’s not enough for a company to have values and to communicate those values with employees. Those values have to be physically externalised in the surroundings where employees work instead. The last great physical environment characteristic is whether an organization leverages multiple workspace options or not. Employees should be able to choose the environments that allow them to be most effective and efficient. (Morgan 2017, 59–75.)

The second employee experience environment is the technological environment. Technology is used to communicate, collaborate and to actually get jobs done. The technological environment covers everything from the apps and software used to work. Any technologies that are used for working are part of the technological environment. Just like the physical environment, the technological environment also comprises 30% of the employee experience. (Morgan 2017, 77–86.)

Morgan (2017) identifies three characteristic that create great technological environments for employees. The first characteristic is that the technologies used are available to everyone. If the same technologies are available to everyone within an organization, employees will more likely be committed to drive innovation, communication and collaboration across the organization. Another great technological environment characteristic is great consumer grade technologies. Technologies that are used to work should be so well designed, useful, valuable and pleasant to use that they could be considered to be used outside work too, if that was possible. This would not only encourage organizations to have a more forward-thinking approach to technology but also to enable employees to be the most effective and engaged in their jobs. The third characteristic for great technological environment is to listen to employee needs rather than to focus on business requirements when planning and deciding the technologies that employees are utilising to work. (Morgan 2017, 77–86.)

The third and final employee experience environment defined by Morgan (2017) is cultural environment. The cultural environment forms 40% of employee experience. Cultural environment is the only environment out of the three employee experience environments that can only be felt. It’s also the only environment that exists in spite of whether the organization chooses to create it. Corporate culture is always around the employees and it can always be felt. This is why it’s crucial to design and create one instead of just letting it exist. (Morgan 2017, 89–130.)

Morgan identifies 10 cultural environment attributes that form positive employee experiences. Firstly, whether the company is viewed positively or not by the people who are not
working there, shapes the way the employees feel about working for the company. The second attribute is that everyone feels genuinely valued. Compensation and benefits, having employees’ voices heard and recognizing them for the work they do all contribute to everyone feeling valued at the workplace. The fact that an organization has a program for recognizing its employees does not necessarily mean that the employees feel valued. (Morgan 2017, 89–99.)

The third cultural environment attribute is legitimate sense of purpose. Morgan (2017) says that it’s both the organization’s and the employees’ responsibility to create a meaning for the work they do. A sense of purpose helps employees feel more connected to the organization they work for and ensures that the employees are doing the work not because they need to do it but because they want to do it. Another attribute that generates a positive cultural environment is that employees feel like they’re part of a team. Employees who feel like they truly belong to a team are more self-assured and braver to share their ideas, think outside the box and are more willing to go above and beyond to help their peers. (Morgan 2017, 100–109.)

In addition, the level of respect and appreciation the employees feel from the organization towards themselves and people in general defines how much of an open and welcoming atmosphere there is. Therefore, the belief in diversity and inclusion play an important role in how the cultural environment in an organization is perceived. If employees feel like differences between people are praised and appreciated rather than disapproved, they will feel more positive about the environment and organization. This will also allow the organization to attract and retain the best talent. (Morgan 2017, 109–112.)

Another attribute that measures the positivity of the cultural environment, is whether the employees refer the organization for their friends and other people as a workplace. It is a great way to see if the employees genuinely like working for the organization and how committed and loyal they are. Many organizations have adopted an approach to measure employee loyalty with Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS) where the employees are asked a question: “On a scale of zero to ten, how likely is it you would recommend this company as a place to work?” Morgan suggests that instead of asking whether the employees would refer others to work there, they should focus on do they actually do so. (Morgan 112–114.)

The seventh attribute that creates a positive cultural environment for employees is the ability to learn new things and to be given the resources to do so and advance. Learning
and development means that employees never stop learning and adapting to the changing world through new skills, technologies, processes, behaviours, attitudes and values. It also helps employees to keep growing as individuals. Advancement, in turn, refers to the progress in an individual’s career path. It is typically indicated with a promotion and a pay rise. (Morgan 2017, 114–120.)

Another attribute that drives towards a positive cultural environment is that all employees are treated fairly. According to Morgan (2017), fairness doesn’t mean that employees should be treated the same but that they should be treated in a way that the actions would not be motivated by bias, dishonesty or injustice. (Morgan 2017, 120–122.)

In addition to treating employees fairly, executives and managers should act as coaches and mentors. Morgan (2017) names managers as the modern-day organizational fitness trainers and says that instead of seeing themselves at the top of the stereotypical company pyramid, where everyone climbs to them, executives and managers must see themselves at the bottom, where they push all the others up. (Morgan 2017, 122–123.)

Last but not least of the attributes building a positive cultural environment is organizations’ dedication to employee health and wellness. Forward-thinking organizations are aware that part of their responsibility is also to look after the employees and to take care of them, instead of just providing them a job. Employees will be more relaxed, have more energy to give inside and outside work, and do better in general when they feel that they are taken care of. Organizations, in turn, will benefit from this through reduced absenteeism, higher employee morale and lower employee turnover. (Morgan 2017, 124–126.)

2.3.2 Other definitions

Although Morgan’s framework of employee experience is the most credited and used in literature at the moment, there are some other outlooks as well. This subchapter is used to introduce some of the other theories.

In Deloitte’s 2017 Global Human Capital Trends, Bersin, Flynn, Mazor and Melian (2017) listed five factors that form employee experience: the meaningfulness of work, working environment, management support, leadership and possibility to develop. When all of these factors are taken into consideration so that the employee is in the centre of attention, an overall positive employee experience can form. Constant gross-organizational communication and collaboration is also required in order to create an admirable workplace where
only positive employee experiences are created. (Bersin & al. 2017.) All of the positive employee experience factors and their components are listed in the figure below.

Figure 3. Factors that contribute to a positive employee experience (modified Bersin & al. 2017)

In the Employee Experience Index (figure 4), IBM identifies five facets that define a good employee experience. Those facets are belonging, purpose, achievement, happiness and vigor. IBM defines the formation of employee experience so that leadership and management set the stage. The actions and behaviours of leaders and managers affect the level of how human the workplace practices are for employees. (IBM 2017.)

IBM (2017) defines a good employee experience through five factors, which are:

- Belonging – feeling part of a team, group or organization
- Purpose – understanding why one’s work matters
- Achievement – a sense of accomplishment in the work that is done
- Happiness – the pleasant feeling arising in and around work
- Vigor – the presence of energy, enthusiasm and excitement at work
Maylett and Wride (2017) define employee experience as the sum of perceptions employees have about their interactions with the organization in which they work (Maylett & Wride 2017, 12). According to them, employee experience forms through three concepts; *expectations, three contracts and trust* (see figure 5). All of these concepts are based on internal and external communication. The three contracts are *brand contract, transactional contract* and *psychological contract*. The framework of employee experience defined by Maylett and Wride is explained next.

As stated by Maylett and Wride (2017), *expectation alignment* is the foundation for employee experience. Expectation alignment measures how well an employees’ experiences of their work match their expectations. The closer the expectations and experiences are to each other, or the smaller the *expectation gap* is, the better the employee experience eventually is. Expectation alignment is built on six pillars which are fairness, clarity, empathy, predictability, transparency and accountability. Expectation alignment can be harmed for example by unmet promises, rumours and unrealistic expectations from the employer. (Maylett & Wride 2017, 3–65.)

The brand contract is all the implicit promises that a brand makes to anyone who is exposed to it. The brand contract consists of all the things that creates expectations intentionally and unwittingly, such as organization’s culture, reputation, marketing and the behaviour of the people working for the organization. In short, it’s the way the world sees the organization. (Maylett & Wride 2017, 92.)
Unlike the brand contract, the transactional contract is concrete and intentional. The transactional contract is mutually accepted, explicit two-way agreement between the employer and employee that defines the basic operating terms of the relationship. The transactional contract is usually a written document, although it can also be verbal. (Maylett & Wride 2017, 113.)

Although the brand contract and the transactional contract are both indispensable, the psychological contract has the major effect on employee experience. The psychological contract is the unspoken and unwritten, implicit expectations and commitments that define the terms of commerce in a relationship. (Maylett & Wride 2017, 132.)

Maylett and Wride (2017) compare the three contracts to an iceberg where the visible parts are the brand contract and transactional contract. The psychological contract, in turn, is the invisible part under the waterline. In other words, both the brand contract and the transactional contract consist of expectations between an employer and employee that are mutually known, spoken or written. The psychological contract is built up from all the expectations that stay mostly unspoken in the relationship. (Maylett & Wride 2017, 131.)

The third factor influencing employee experience is trust. Trust is rooted by managing the expectation gap and creating expectation alignment. Maintaining the three contracts in turn allows trust to evolve and strengthen steadily. Trust between employee and employer is measured in moments of truth. Moments of truth are those events that ultimately test the validity of the three contracts. The fact of whether the outcome of the moment of truth is positive or negative is quite irrelevant for the employee as long as it is alike to the expectations. Moments of truth are never neutral, and they always have an impact. The impact is either that one of the three contracts is reinforced by delivering expectations and increasing trust, or in contrary that a contract is violated by not delivering an employee’s expectations and therefore weakening trust. Moments of truth can also create a new contract that redefines the terms of a relationship between an employee and an employer. (Maylett & Wride 2017, 153–159.)
2.4 Organizational climate and culture

Related concepts to employee experience are *organizational climate* and *organizational culture*. This subchapter will focus on defining and exploring those concepts, by utilising some of the most famous and well-known theories.

Organizational culture and organizational climate are two alternative models that conceptualize the way people experience their work ambience. In the 1960s and 1970s the topic of organizational climate dominated the early studies on the human organizational environment. In the 1980s however, organizational climate moved to the background as the interest on organizational culture started to dominate the scenery. (Ehrhart, Macey & Schneider 2013.)

The climate of an organization is construed by its members, based on two issues: (1) how the organization functions in its daily business and (2) what goals the organization has. The assumptions that the members of the organization make about climate are based on the policies, procedures and practices that are supported, as well as the behaviours that are expected and get rewarded. (Brief, Guzzo & Schneider 1996.)

The distinction between organizational climate and organizational culture is that culture resides at a deeper level of people’s psychology than climate. Organizational culture apprehends a less conscious, more exquisite psychology of the organization. (Brief & al. 1996.)

In 1980, Hofstede introduced four cultural dimensions that define organization’s culture and the interaction between its people. According to Hofstede, there are four cultural di-
dimensions rooted in the basic issues with which all societies cope that categorize the different ways members of a culture respond to differing situations. Those dimensions are individualism–collectivism (I-C), masculinity–femininity (MF), power distance (PD) and uncertainty avoidance (UA). (Merkin 2005.) Later, Hofstede identified two more cultural dimensions; short-term–long-term orientation and indulgence–restraint (Hofstede & Hofstede 2019).

Individualism represents a society where everyone is expected to take care of themselves and their immediate family, whereas collectivism stands for a society in which people are integrated into ingroups which continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. In individualistic cultures members are ‘I’-conscious, opposed to the ‘we’-consciousness in collectivistic cultures. The masculinity–femininity dimension refers to the predominant gender role patterns in societies. According to Hofstede, the difference between the values of women and men is very big in masculine cultures and small in feminine ones. Power distance measures the extent to which the less authoritative members of organizations within a country expect and accept that power is dispensed equally. Uncertainty avoidance refers to the extent to which people are made anxious by situations that they consider uncertain or disorganised and the extent to which they aim to avoid such situations. (Hofstede & de Mooij 2010.) Long- vs. short-term orientation refers to the extent to which a society exhibits a functional future-oriented long-term perspective rather than a short-term perspective. Indulgent cultures emphasise freedom, trusting one’s impulses and belief that life is good and makes sense, whereas in restraint cultures a feeling that life is hard and duty instead of freedom is the norm. (Hofstede & Hofstede 2019.)

In 1988, Schein defined organizational culture as:

1) a pattern of basic assumptions, 2) invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, 3) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, 4) that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore 5) is to be taught to new members as the 6) correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (Schein 1988).

Schein (1988) specified three levels of organizational culture; artifacts, espoused values and basic assumptions, as shown in Figure 6. The level of artifacts deals with all the things that a person can note, observe and feel with all senses as s/he enters a new culture. Artifacts are easy to observe and document but difficult to decipher. Anyone can enter an organization and see things, hear things, feel things and smell things, but they don’t necessarily know nor understand what those things mean to insiders of that organization. (Schein 1988.)
The second level of organizational culture introduced by Schein (1988) is espoused values. Espoused values are typically organization’s espoused goals, ideals, norms, standards, moral principles and other untestable remises. The third and deepest level of organizational culture is underlying assumptions. Underlying assumptions usually start out as values, but as they continue to exist for long enough time, they come to be taken for granted. (Schein 1988.)

Figure 6. Levels of organizational culture (modified Schein 1988)

Luukka (2019) emphasises the link between organizational culture and employee experience. He defines organizational culture as organization’s conscious and subconscious values, structures and procedures, that direct the employees’ actions and thoughts, unite the employees as well as differentiates the organization from other organizations. According to Luukka, employees have an indispensable role in maintaining and representing organization’s culture. (Luukka 2019, 24–40.)

Customers typically experience organizational culture through products and services. In addition to these encounters, organizations can practice different marketing communications through which they try to shape the customers’ image of the organizational culture. However, the most accurate and efficient messengers of organizational culture are the attitudes and behaviours of the employees. (Luukka 2019, 24–40.)
Leaders and their perceptions of organizational culture are typically quite distant to customers (see left side of Figure 7). Leaders can communicate their visions through marketing procedures but the interaction with the employees plays a remarkably stronger role and shapes the customers’ perceptions more efficiently than any marketing strategy. This can be extremely harmful in situations where the leaders’ desirable state of organizational culture is not converging to the employees’ current state of the organizational culture. This usually results in creating a false and biased image of the organization to the customers, which doesn’t match the reality, and drives the customers to have a conflicting and negative experience. (Luukka 2019, 39–41.)

In an ideal situation, leaders are fully aware of the organization’s culture and understand the difference between the ideal and current states. They actively lead the culture through the employees, whom are aware of the desired culture as well as the procedures that are required in order to reach that state (see right side of Figure 7). Organizational culture actualizes in everyday life through the experiences of the employees and leads to positive employee experiences. In this kind of ideal situation, customers have a consistent experience of the organizational culture through the interaction with employees and the marketing practices. (Luukka 2019, 41.)

Others have also emphasised the role of organizational culture in terms of employee experience. According to the head of employee experience at Airbnb, Mark Levy, it is the culture that helps Airbnb deliver on their business goals and connects everyone from employees to hosts and quests. He says that the culture consists of all the shared values and behaviours of people at Airbnb. Their culture is based on a mission of creating a world where anyone can feel like they belong anywhere. Their employee experience mission consequently is to make sure that the employees feel that they belong at Airbnb. (Bajer 2016.)
2.5 The role of leadership

Train people well enough so they can leave. Treat them well enough so they don’t want to. (Branson 2014.)

Leadership plays a crucial role in the formation of employee experience, as it was clearly mentioned in all of the frameworks and theories in subchapter 2.3. This subchapter will concentrate on taking a closer look on leadership styles, their effects on employee performance and ultimately the role in employee experience.

Summerfield (2014) shortly defines leadership as the action of ‘making things better’. Ben- nis and O’Toole (2000) define it as a combination of personal behaviours that allow an individual to recruit dedicated followers and create other leaders in the process. According to them, real leaders move a human heart. Leadership styles that have been given the most credit recently are coaching based leadership and empowering leadership.

According to Federici and Moen (2012), coaching based leadership is generally about creating a helping relationship between a coach and a coachee with whom the coach is engaged to. When talking about coaching based leadership, a leader can be seen as the coach and an employee as the coachee. Whitmore (2008) states that coaching helps build responsibility in the other person by enhancing their capability to make choices and decisions on their own.

The true nature of coaching is built on mutuality, in which both individuals are equal in the relationship and enhance each other’s independence whilst working and developing together (Federici & Moen 2012). According to Rosinski (in Lloyd 2005), a good coach has qualities such as a genuine desire to help others benefit from their potential, a passion to help them grow and be more successful, an ability to listen without judgement and serves others.

Ahearne, Mathieu and Rapp (2005) explain empowering leadership as providing decision-making autonomy, expressing confidence in employees and their abilities, and removing constraints to performance. Similar expression has been given by Campbell, Liao and Martin (2013). They define empowering leadership as the process where leaders share power with their employees by providing additional responsibility and decision-making authority over work and resources and the support required to handle the additional responsibility in an efficient way.
Sinek (2009) also emphasises the meaning of empowerment, by saying that instead of being responsible for coming up with all the great ideas, leaders are responsible for creating an environment in which great ideas can happen. Sinek further explains that it’s the front-line people within a company that are best qualified to find new ways of doing things. (Sinek 2009, 99.)

In his 2016 Live2Lead-talk, Sinek highlighted the core of empowering leadership by saying: "At the end of the day, great leaders are not responsible for the job. They’re responsible for the people who are responsible for the job. They’re not even responsible for the results. They are responsible for the people who are responsible for the results." (Sinek 2016.)

Empowering leadership has been studied to have a positive effect on employees’ service innovative behaviour as well as to increase frontline employees’ creative and innovative behaviour throughout the whole organization in order to meet the company’s corporate goals. Empowering leadership is also positively related to creative improvisation self-efficacy as well as ultimately to employee engagement. (Adawiyah, Kurniawan, Kusumah & Wihuda 2017.)

Leadership has an immense influence in organizational success. Clowney (2001) states that organizational success is created by successful people and underlines that a lack of success can usually be attributed to people, whether it is a lack of teamwork, well defined vision, or training focus. Bennis and O’Toole (2000) also emphasise that great leaders indicate integrity, provide meaning, communicate values and create trust. By doing so, they energize their followers, push them to meet challenging business targets as well as establish leadership skills in others. (Bennis & O’Toole 2000.)

Maylett and Wride (2017) state that everything you say, do or write from a position of leadership has an impact on employee expectations and ultimately employee experience. Leaders of any kind should be mindful of the words they use and the face they show to the world, because people are paying attention all the time. (Maylett & Wride 2017, 67.)

According to Sinek (2009), the best and only way to move people as a leader is to inspire them with the clarity of why. He claims that “If the leader of the organization can’t clearly articulate why the organization exists in terms beyond its products or services, then how does s/he expect the employees to know why to come to work?” (Sinek 2009, 66.)
2.6 Restaurant industry in Finland

Hospitality industry, which includes restaurant and tourism industries, is one of the most important industries in Finland in terms of employment and shaping the county’s image around the world. The Finnish hospitality industry accounts for 2.5% of Finland’s total GPD. (Mara 2019.)

Between years 2012 and 2015 the profitability in restaurant industry was really low, as there was zero profit during that time. However, the profitability increased in the following three years as well as the purchasing power of consumers. The popularity of restaurant dining has also grown in recent years. (Hertsi 12.12.2018.)

The hospitality industry in Finland employs over 140 000 people from which 30% are under 26 years old. Hence, hospitality industry is a significant employer within young people and usually the first touch in working life for many. (Mara 2019.) The main reason why it is extremely popular for young people to have a restaurant job is that it doesn’t necessarily require education and is convenient to do together with studies (Urpelainen 5.9.2017).

There have been struggles for a long time in the restaurant industry to find staff for open positions and the situation started to escalate in 2018. The number of people who are making a career in the industry is becoming lower and most of the staff working in the industry is part-time staff. (Opetushallitus 2018.)

There aren’t enough people willing to work in the restaurant industry, mostly due to the seasonality of the work and the prevalence of zero-hour contracts. Many organizations are using staff leasing services, in order to avoid the complexity of recruiting new staff. (Opetushallitus 2018.) Every third organization in the restaurant industry is lacking from qualified staff (Mara 2018).

It is characteristic for the industry that it is mainly evening work and the salary rate is quite low, in comparison to other industries (Urpelainen 5.9.2017). Due to the fact that the dispensing regulations have changed, and restaurants are allowed to serve alcohol longer, restaurant workers’ shifts are longer and include more night work (Vesalainen 12.1.2018).
2.7 EX Framework for restaurant environment

All the theories and frameworks for employee experience covered in this study are made for organizations in general and are easily adapted to restaurant environments. However, some of the factors especially specified by Morgan (2017) can't be perceived in restaurant environments as such but can be adjusted to be more suitable and relevant for those environments.

The purpose of this subchapter is to compare the employee experience models introduced earlier and to discuss the similarities and differences. Eventually, a new model designed specifically for restaurant environment will be introduced. This model will be highly based on the findings from the conceptual analysis of employee experience.

2.7.1 Comparing the models

The model by Maylett and Wride (2017) represents the formation process of employee experience, whereas the ones by Morgan (2017) and Bersin and al. (2017) have included all the factors that make up a good employee experience. These models have a lot of similarities between each other, but they have just been articulated in different ways.

Morgan (2017) identifies physical environment as one of the three environments in which an employee experience gets formed. Bersin and al. (2017) also emphasize the importance of physical working environment in terms of an employee’s experience. Both Morgan as well as Bersin and al. highlight the role of flexibility in physical environment as well as the employee’s freedom to choose his/her workspace. In a restaurant environment this can be reflected in employee rotation and variability in working time. However, only Morgan’s model takes notice of the actual comfort of physical working environment.

As Morgan (2017) defines cultural environment as one of the three employee experience environments, Maylett and Wride (2017), Bersin and al. (2017) and IBM (2017) determine employee experience mainly through organization’s culture. Although cultural environment is distinctively the most significant out of all the environments in Morgan’s model, it is not given as much attention as in the other models.

Maylett and Wride (2017), Bersin and al. (2017) and IBM (2017) enhance trust as a main player in employee experience. Maylett and Wride introduce trust as one of the three factors that eventually form an employee experience, while Bersin and al. identify trust in leadership as one of the elements that shape an employee experience. Organizational
trust is introduced in IBM index as a factor that strengthens human workplace practices and drives for a positive employee experience. Morgan (2017) doesn’t necessarily use the word trust but it is strongly present in several factors which he defines to be forming cultural environment. Trust can be reflected in factors such as everyone feels like they’re part of a team, believes in diversity and inclusion, referrals come from employees, as well as executes and managers are coaches and mentors.

All of the models consider meaning of work as a high importance in terms of employee experience. Morgan (2017) talks about legitimate sense of purpose within cultural environment as well as reason for being together with the three environments. Bersin and al. (2017) and IBM (2017) emphasize meaningful work as one of the main factors in a positive employee experience, while Maylett and Wride (2017) enhance the meaning of work through employee expectations as well as the three contracts between an employee and an employer.

While all these models include meaning in some form, Sinek (2009) has famously introduced his Golden Circle, in which meaning is the core of all operation (see figure 8). Sinek claims that The Golden Circle, a naturally occurring pattern, is an alternative perspective for why some leaders and organizations have achieved such a high degree of influence through inspiration. The Golden Circle consists of three levels; why, how and what inside out. According to Sinek, every successful organization starts with why. (Sinek 2009, 37–51.)

![Figure 8. The Golden Circle (modified Sinek 2009)](image-url)

According to Sinek (2009), every organization knows what they do, no matter how big or small the organization is or what the industry is. Everyone in that organization is capable
of explaining all the products and services that they provide, and the job function they have within that organization. In other words, what is easy to identify. (Sinek 2009, 39.)

However, only some companies and people really know how to do what they do. Sinek claims that how is usually determined to explain the degree of how something is better or different. This could be things such as differentiating value proposition, proprietary process or unique selling proposition. (Sinek 2009, 39.)

Ultimately, Simon states that only very few organizations and people can clearly explain why they do what they do. Sinek defines why as the purpose, cause or belief. Most organizations and people communicate and think from outside in, because it is the easiest way. However, in order to inspire others, it should be done inside out. (Sinek 2009, 39.)

Although Sinek doesn’t necessarily speak about employee experience nor created The Golden Circle for understanding employee experience, it is still relevant to the subject. If meaning of one’s work is undoubtedly a great player in employee experience, and if meaning in general is the core of any organization’s success (Sinek 2009, 47), it is only fair to give the why or meaning the attention it deserves.

2.7.2 Employee Experience Wheel

In this subchapter, a new framework for this study is designed, based on the conceptual analysis of employee experience. A new model for employee experience is introduced and explained. The model is designed based on literature review and is generated from the findings of the existing employee experience models. The new model is called Employee Experience Wheel (see figure 9), as its aim is to provide direction towards a better employee experience.
In the core of Employee Experience Wheel is MEANING. According to Sinek (2009, 73), only when people believe what you believe and the *why* is clear, a true and loyal relationship can develop. Morgan’s (2017) model also highlights that *Reason for Being* is the core for a great employee experience. According to Morgan (2017, 51), a well-defined organizational purpose connects the actions of the organization to its people. Based on these statements, a clear and mutual MEANING should be shared between an employee and the organization one is associated with. The MEANING provides an answer to issues such as why the organization exists, what is an employee’s purpose in that organization and why does one want to be a part of that organization. All these should be ultimately aligned to each other without confusion.

Based on all the frameworks and models covered in this study, it seems that leadership plays a crucial role in the formation of employee experience. The second composer of a good employee experience is LEADING. Hence, it is placed as the second layer in the Employee Experience Wheel.

According to Maylett and Wride (2017, xiii), a leader’s most important role is to give employees a reason to join their cause, a reason to stay and a reason to engage. Although MEANING is already existing for the organization as well as every individual employee, leaders should strengthen it with their actions and words.
Lastly, on the outer layer of the Employee Experience Wheel is SURROUNDINGS, which consists of culture as well as physical space. All of the employee experience models include organizational culture strongly as a part of employee experience. Thus, it is inevitable that positive culture within an organization is a major generator of a great employee experience. SURROUNDINGS also include physical space, as physical environment is identified in all of the employee experience frameworks.
3 Hawaii Restaurants

Hawaii Restaurants is a restaurant group consisting of three individual restaurants; The Cock, Holiday and Yes Yes Yes. The Cock was founded in March 2015 next to Kasarmitori Square. Holiday was opened a year after in Katajanokka, in May 2016. The latest member, Yes Yes Yes, was opened in November 2017 on Iso Roobertinkatu. (Paljakka 5.1.2017.)

![Logos of the restaurants](Royal Ravintolat 2019a; Royal Ravintolat 2019b; Royal Ravintolat 2019c)

Hawaii Restaurants is owned by NoHo Partners Plc, which is a Finnish restaurant group consisting of 200 restaurants, bars, pubs, nightclubs and entertainment centres (NoHo Partners 2019). In April 2018 Restamax group bought Royal Ravintolat and in December 2018 the corporation started to operate with a new name; NoHo Partners (Eskola 21.9.2018; STT 27.11.2018). Restaurateurs Ville Relander and Richard McCormick are operative leaders as well as in charge of the profitability in Hawaii Restaurants (STT Info 2017).

The Cock is a casual style eatery and bar, serving lunch and dinner six days a week, from Monday to Saturday. The restaurant operates in two floors and is suitable for organizing events and bigger groups. There are 226 seats in the restaurant. (Royal Ravintolat 2019a.)

Holiday is a relaxed bar and kitchen, open from Wednesday to Saturday. The restaurant is famous for its big terrace which is perfect for sunny days and evenings. The menu has mainly seafood and fish as well as fresh vegetarian bites. There are 90 seats inside the restaurant. (Royal Ravintolat 2019b.)

Yes Yes Yes is a restaurant and bar, serving vegetarian and vegan food from Tuesday to Saturday. There are 100 seats in the restaurant, in addition to the seats in front of a long and spacious bar table. (Royal Ravintolat 2019c.) Although Yes Yes Yes has a menu that
consists of vegetarian food, the restaurant is not promoted as a vegetarian restaurant. Instead, Yes Yes Yes is a restaurant for everyone and happens to serve vegetarian food. (Rantanen 6.11.2017.)
4 Research Methods

The purpose of this thesis was to explore and understand employee experience in Hawaii Restaurants. The thesis had three objectives. The first objective was to explore employee experiences in Hawaii Restaurants and to gain knowledge of employees’ perceptions. The second objective was to deepen understanding of employees’ experiences. The third and final objective was to provide suggestions for improvement.

After studying employee experience as a concept, the first objective was to explore employee experiences in Hawaii Restaurants. This was done by conducting a quantitative as well as a qualitative research in the restaurants in question. Quantitative research methods focus on gathering numerical data through polls, questionnaires or surveys and generalizing it across groups of people (USC Libraries 2019), whereas qualitative research methods focus on collecting data through open-ended and conversational communication, allowing for in-depth and further analysis of responses (QuestionPro 2019).

First, employee experiences were explored through a survey. Second, a deeper understanding was obtained with a group interview. The methods used are explained and justified next.

4.1 Survey

A survey was used as a quantitative research method and the questionnaire questions were designed based on the theoretical framework of employee experience. The questionnaire questions were created from the issues that arose from the conceptual analysis of employee experience.

There were two background questions in the questionnaire, concerning which of the three Hawaii restaurants is the respondent’s workplace and how long the respondent has been working for the organization. Other background information, such as the sex, age or education of the respondent were considered to be irrelevant for the research and therefore were not included in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of 28 statements, to which the respondents were asked to agree or disagree on a scale from one to five (1=strongly disagree, 2=partly disagree, 3=can’t say, 4=partly agree, 5=strongly agree). The purpose of the statements was to explore the different experiences of the employees in Hawaii Restaurants. The statements were associated with issues related to the concept of employee experience, such as job
engagement, satisfaction, meaningfulness and leadership. Ultimately, all of the 28 statements were related to the layers of Employee Experience Wheel (figure 9); meaning, leading or surroundings.

The questionnaires were distributed to all restaurants in question; The Cock, Holiday and Yes Yes Yes. Paper questionnaires were used at The Cock and an online version in both Holiday and Yes Yes Yes. The online questionnaire was done by using Webropol 3.0 program. The answers from the paper questionnaires were later transferred to Webropol.

The reason why I chose to use different methods was that the restaurants have different opening times and only The Cock is open six days a week. Therefore, I considered that it would be more practical if the employees at Holiday and Yes Yes Yes could have an online access to answering so that they could have more flexibility.

The survey data is analysed and by using frequencies, averages and standard deviations. The background information from the respondents is presented in frequencies and pie charts. The results of the statements are analysed and presented by using averages and standard deviations. Standard deviation is a measure of the spread of scores within a set of data (Laerd Statistics 2019).

In addition, the results are grouped into three themes; meaning, leading and surrounding, to adapt the framework created for this study, the Employee Experience Wheel. The averages to each statement are presented using diagrams. The exact numbers of each answer, as well as the standard deviations, are presented in tables.

4.2 Group interview

A group interview was executed as a qualitative research method, in order to understand the survey results and employees’ experiences on a deeper level.

An interview as a research method can be conducted as an individual or group interview. An interview can be performed either face-to-face or through interview form or phone call. The duration of an interview can vary from five minutes to several days. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 111–112.)

There are three different types of interviews: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and open interviews. Structured interviews consist of a set of predetermined questions, to which all interviewees answer in the same order. In semi-structured interviews, or
theme interviews, a set of questions is prepared, but unlike in structured interviews, the order of the questions is not specified. Open interviews resemble a discussion, where the interviewer doesn’t necessarily guide the direction of the interview, and the interviewee’s initiative decides the phase and the pattern of the interview. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 114–115.)

The group interview was conducted as a semi-structured interview, allowing interviewees to have a relaxed and to some extent a free discussion. After collecting and analysing the questionnaire results, a set of interview questions were designed (see appendix 2). The purpose of the predetermined questions was to guide the direction of the discussion as well as to clarify certain issues.

There were six interviewees in the group interview, two from each unit. The interviewees were mostly front of house staff but also one kitchen staff member took part. None of the interviewees were shown the questions beforehand. The duration of the interview was roughly an hour.

The interview was recorded using a mobile voice recorder. The recorded interview was later transcribed for more convenient analysis. The full transcription of the interview is not included in the report, in order to retain interviewees’ anonymity.

The data was analysed by using qualitative content analysis. First, the transcription was read several times, in order to gain a clear comprehension of the data. Second, the similarities and differences between the responses from the interviewees were identified from the data. The main findings from the group interview are presented in subchapter 5.2.
5 Results

In this chapter, the results from the survey as well as the group interview are presented and analyzed.

5.1 Survey

The data from the survey is analysed and grouped into three themes and subchapters; meaning, leading and surroundings. First, some data of the respondents’ background information is presented. Although the background information shows the exact workplaces as well as the amount of time that the respondents have been working for Hawaii Restaurants, the emphasis on the following analysis is not based on this data. The reasoning for this is that instead of observing the results by comparing them between the three restaurants, Hawaii Restaurants is surveyed as an organization.

After viewing the background information, the rest of the survey results are analysed by grouping them into three themes. The questionnaire consisted of 28 statements, which were all related to either meaning, leading or surroundings. The exact number of each answer to the statements, as well as the standard deviations, are presented in tables.

5.1.1 Background information

Overall there were 35 respondents in the questionnaire. In figure 11 below the number of respondents from each unit as well as the percentages can be seen. The majority of respondents (54%) were from The Cock with 19 respondents. 10 respondents (29%) were from Holiday and 6 (17%) from Yes Yes Yes.
In Table 1 below are listed the number of employees as well as the response rate from each unit. The response rate was 100% at Holiday and 95% at The Cock. At Yes Yes Yes the response rate was a bit lower, 67%. All together the response rate from all three restaurants was 90%. The data represents the population well, especially in cases of The Cock and Holiday.

Table 1. Response rates in each unit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Employees in total</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Response rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Cock</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes Yes Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Figure 12 are the percentages of the time that the respondents have been working for Hawaii Restaurants. Majority of the respondents (18) have worked for Hawaii Restaurants for 7–12 months. 12 respondents have worked for more than two years. Smaller numbers were for those who have worked for 1–2 years (4) and for 0–6 months (1).
5.1.2 Meaning

Several of the statements in the questionnaire were concerning meaningfulness. This included the meaningfulness of respondents’ work to themselves and to others, as well as the meaningfulness of the organization.

The data shows that the respondents experience their work as more meaningful for themselves (average 4.09) than for others (average 3.91). The respondents partly agreed to have a sense of purpose at work (average 4.03).

The majority of respondents partly agreed that Hawaii as an organization has a meaningful purpose (see table 2), the average answer being 3.97. However, respondents were more likely to agree that Hawaii has a strong positive brand perception (average 4.14).
The average of the answers to statements about meaning is shown in table 2. There was a wider spread of answers when asked if the respondents find their work meaningful for them (standard deviation 1.01). The majority of the respondents (19) strongly agreed, nine (9) partly agreed, seven (7) couldn’t say and three (3) partly disagreed.

The statement with the least divergence between answers was examining if the respondents think that Hawaii has a strong positive brand perception (standard deviation 0.69). The vast majority of respondents (21) partly agreed, ten (10) strongly agreed and three (3) couldn’t say. Only one (1) respondent partly disagreed.
Table 2. Distribution of answers about meaning (n=35)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii has a strong positive brand perception.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4,14</td>
<td>0,69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My work is meaningful for me.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4,09</td>
<td>1,01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel a sense of purpose at work.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4,03</td>
<td>0,86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think that Hawaii as an organization has a meaningful purpose.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3,97</td>
<td>0,95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My work is meaningful for others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3,91</td>
<td>0,95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.3 Leading

The majority of respondents felt that they are treated fairly by their managers or supervisors (average 4,2). The respondents were also likely to agree with trusting their managers or supervisors (average 4,14).

The statement that got the lowest scores concerned the development of skills. The respondents felt that they are not given the resources to develop their skills at work (average 3,29). However, at the same time they felt that they are more likely to be encouraged to develop their skills (average 3,66).

The respondents didn’t strongly see their managers or supervisors as their coaches or mentors (average 3,43.) The results also show that the respondents didn’t really feel that they get recognized for the work they do (average 3,63).
All in all, there were a lot of differences between the answers of the statements, as can be seen from the standard deviations in table 3. The statement with the most differences between answers was whether the respondents see their managers or supervisors as their coaches or mentors (standard deviation 1,33). Yet, the majority of respondents (11) partly agreed.

The respondents had differing answers when asked if there is variety in their working times (standard deviation 1,19), if they are given the resources to develop their skills at work (standard deviation 1,15), if they are encouraged to learn new things at work (standard deviation 1,14) or if their ideas and suggestions for improvement are taken seriously (standard deviation 1,12).
Table 3. Distribution of answers about leading (n=35)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am treated fairly by my managers/supervisors.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4,2</td>
<td>0,83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust my managers/supervisors.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4,14</td>
<td>0,88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand why we have different processes and procedures in Hawaii.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3,94</td>
<td>0,94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel inspired at work.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3,89</td>
<td>0,99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am encouraged to learn new things at work.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3,66</td>
<td>1,14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is variety in my working times.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3,66</td>
<td>1,19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get recognized for the work I do.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3,63</td>
<td>0,97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My ideas and suggestions for improvement are taken seriously.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3,54</td>
<td>1,12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see my managers/supervisors as coaches or mentors.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3,43</td>
<td>1,33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am given the resources to develop my skills.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,29</td>
<td>1,15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.4 Surroundings

The rest of the statements in the questionnaire were concerning the surroundings. This included the culture and physical space in Hawaii Restaurants. The results on the physical space were positive. The majority of respondents agreed when asked if they like their restaurant’s physical space (average 4,6). The respondents were also proud to bring friends or visitors to their restaurant (average 4,43).

The respondents seemed to trust their peers (average 4,23), be happy to work for Hawaii (average 4,2) and be respected as a unique individual at work (average 4,2). The respondents also felt that they belong to their team (average 4,51). When asked if the respondents feel like they belong to their team, the vast majority (21) strongly agreed, whereas eleven (11) partly agreed. Only three respondents (3) neither agreed nor disagreed.
Statements with the lowest average answers concerned Hawaii’s organizational values. The respondents were quite unlikely to be aware of Hawaii’s organizational values (average 3.29) or to think that the organizational values are reflected in the physical spaces (average 3.37). The respondents didn’t really think that they act in alignment with their organizational values (average 3.54).

Statements about well-being didn’t get very positive results either. Respondents didn’t really agree that their well-being is understood in Hawaii (average 3.69) or that their well-being is taken care of in Hawaii (3.63).
Figure 15. The averages to statements about surroundings (n=35)

The respondents had a consensus when asked if they like their restaurant’s physical space (standard deviation 0.55) or if they feel like they belong to their team (standard deviation 0.66). The respondents gave similar answers when asked if they are respected as a unique individual (standard deviation 0.72) or if they trust their peers (standard deviation 0.77).

Statements that were most likely to get different answers were ‘I am aware of Hawaii’s organizational values’ (standard deviation 1.23) and ‘The importance of my well-being is understood in Hawaii’ (standard deviation 1.18).
Other statements that had quite a lot of variety among answers were examining whether the respondents think that their well-being is taken care of in Hawaii (standard deviation 1.11), they act in alignment with their organizational values (standard deviation 1.07) or that the organizational values are reflected in the physical spaces (standard deviation 1.03).

Table 4. Distribution of answers about surroundings (n=35)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Standard deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like our restaurant’s physical space.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel like I belong to our team.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud to bring friends/visitors to our restaurant.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I trust my peers.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am happy to work for Hawaii.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am respected as a unique individual at work.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to go to work most days.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel valued at work.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of my well-being is understood in Hawaii.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My well-being is taken care of in Hawaii.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We act in alignment with our organizational values.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organizational values are reflected in the physical space.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of Hawaii’s organizational values.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Group interview

The group interview consisted of a set of questions (see appendix 2) that were formed after analysing the survey data and identifying the main findings. Each question was related to the themes of the questionnaire and aimed to gain a better understanding of the questionnaire results.

The survey results suggested that the majority of the respondents perceived their work as meaningful. When asked about the things that make their current work meaningful for the interviewees, several issues came up. The importance of atmosphere and solidarity among the work community was emphasized as a factor to create meaning. The functionality of the team was also mentioned.

Creation of customer experiences was also said to make work meaningful. The interviewees agreed that they feel their work is meaningful when they see that they have created a positive experience for a guest. That was said to generate a feeling that the work is important. One interviewee described the feeling like this: “I like to see a nice reaction from the customer. To see the satisfaction. I’ve done something that’s worth doing. You might have done something that other people can’t.”

Being able to create great experiences for others was also said to be a source of inspiration also. One interviewee said that guests who are open to good service inspire her/him. By being open s/he meant that the guests appreciate the service and take the time to listen.

It was also pointed out that it can sometimes be difficult to be inspired at work. One interviewee felt that it’s difficult because you get paid the same amount of money, regardless of the quality of work you do. According to him/her, the inspiration has to come from people themselves in service work.

The survey results suggested that the culture within Hawaii Restaurants was perceived positively. Among the interviewees, the culture was described as multicultural, fun, energetic, hyped and supportive. Multiculturalism was said to increase the awareness of different ways of acting and working. Supportiveness was said to be externalised in situations when someone from the team is having a bad day and the rest of the team is there to ‘keep the good vibes up’.
Most of the interviewees agreed that the management is open and creative. Some of the interviewees felt that they are supported during difficult times and that the managers create an atmosphere where the rest of the team members don’t have to panic if something has gone wrong.

The results from the survey proposed a high level of trust towards managers and peers. In addition, the interviewees were asked if they feel that they are trusted. The majority of the interviewees said yes, only one said no. Some of the interviewees felt to be trusted too much sometimes, based on the amount of work and responsibility that is given.

The following quotation illustrates trust towards one interviewee: “We have lots of freedom here. Mostly because of our boss. If you have a good idea you can have a try, and if it doesn’t work then we’re not going to do it again.”

It was brought up that sometimes there are breaks in the communication between staff members or between management and staff. All of the interviewees requested regular staff meetings with the whole team. The staff meetings were believed to help avoid the occasional problems that sometimes occur:

Group meetings between the staff management in order to fix problems together. That’s something this business is missing. To get all the staff together every now and then to talk about problems and how to solve them together. Because nobody usually knows better than you because you are there to work every day.

It was also requested that in addition to the members of the staff, also the people from the higher management could sometimes participate. This was believed to bring people closer together and to increase understanding on both sides.

Based on the survey results, the respondents didn’t strongly feel that they get recognized for the work they do. When asked about ways to get recognized at work, the interviewees had quite differing opinions. All of the interviewees agreed that verbal recognition gives them satisfaction and makes them feel good.

Some of the interviewees thought that the best way to recognize employees at work would be to give them a raise. It was also pointed out that smaller things would make a difference too. The following quotation illustrates the meaning of rewarding: “I don’t think it has to be a raise, but it could be something. Some bonus for example, or a dinner somewhere. They do that all the time to people. It’s actually a small thing but it would mean a lot.”

One interviewee shared a positive experience from being recognized at work by a manager:
One time that happened that I was told by a customer that I was the best waitress they’d ever had, and he (manager) just came to me, and said that he was very proud of me, and put a bottle of my favorite wine in my hand. Feels like making a parent proud. That motivates me.

The survey results also suggested that the respondents didn’t really feel encouraged to develop their skills nor to be given the resources to do so. Based on the responses from the interviewees, this can be derived from the fact that they feel there aren’t many things to develop. However, it was mentioned that certain skills can always be developed, no matter which position you work or how much experience you have. One interviewee mentioned the development of people skills and individual qualities and emphasized that those kinds of skills can always be developed.

Well-being at work was experienced quite poorly, based on the survey results. The interview results suggest that a major reason for this could be the lack of functionality of breaks during shifts. The following quotation from an interviewee describes the situation:

> We used to have one manager who would force breaks on people, but that's something that kind of has diminished. Now it's like you take a break when you can. But I think often people are working like 12-hour shifts constantly without barely eating anything because it's busy. I don't think that should be an excuse.

Another interviewee had similar thoughts. It was believed that because of the fact that very often there aren't enough employees to work during busy times, the breaks are impossible to organize. However, it was believed that breaks could, and should, be arranged in a way that they would be functional.

One interviewee believed that in addition to breaks during shifts, well-being at work could be improved by organizing time for the teams outside work. Small event and going to eat somewhere as a team outside work was suggested.

When asked if the interviewees would recommend Hawaii as an organization to work, most of the interviewees said yes. The interviewees would recommend Hawaii as an organization because of the special atmosphere and feeling that the restaurants create. The interviewees would recommend Hawaii as an organization also because of the fun and the great teams.

One of the interviewees said that s/he thinks Hawaii as an organization is unique as the employees are encouraged to be themselves at work: “If you compare this place to many other restaurants in Finland, many times you are told what to say etc., but here we get pretty much free hands. And you can be you.”
Lastly, the interviewees were asked what kind of customer experiences they personally want to deliver. Most of the interviewees said “special”. It was mutually understood among the interviewees that every single one of the employees has an important role in creating customer experiences. The following quotation illustrates the role of the people in Hawaii Restaurants according to one interviewee: “The food is pretty good, and the cocktails are pretty good, but I think it’s really about the atmosphere and the people that make the place. You come here because you want to have fun.”

The main findings from the group interview are gathered in figure 15 below. Based on the group interview, the strengths of Hawaii Restaurants are team spirit, support from team, atmosphere, uniqueness and trust. Issues to improve seems to the pressure, staffing during shifts, breaks during shifts and communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• team spirit</td>
<td>• pressure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• support</td>
<td>• staffing during shifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• atmosphere</td>
<td>• breaks during shifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• uniqueness</td>
<td>• communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• trust</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 16. Strengths and weaknesses in Hawaii Restaurants, based on interviewees’ experiences
6 Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to explore and understand employee experience in Hawaii Restaurants. The thesis had three objectives. The first objective was to explore employee experiences in Hawaii Restaurants and to gain knowledge of employees’ perceptions. The second objective was to deepen understanding of employees’ experiences. The third and final objective was to provide suggestions for improvement.

In this chapter, the main findings from the research as well as suggestions for improvements and future research are discussed. The chapter also includes evaluation of trustworthiness and ethicality of the research, as well as an assessment of the thesis process.

6.1 Main findings

A new model of employee experience, the Employee Experience Wheel, was developed in this thesis. The new model is based on conceptual analysis of employee experience and is designed to be suitable especially for restaurant industry. There are three layers in the Employee Experience Wheel that help employees and organizations drive towards greater employee experiences. These layers are meaning, leading and surroundings. The new model can raise awareness of employee experience and deepen understanding of the concept. In addition, the new model can be used as a tool when designing better employee experiences.

A survey was used as a quantitative research method, to explore the employee experiences in Hawaii Restaurants. The questionnaire questions were formed based on the new model of employee experience. The response rate in the questionnaire was 90%. The high response rate suggests that the topic was considered important among the employees in Hawaii Restaurants.

The results of this study suggest that the employees in Hawaii Restaurants found their work to be meaningful for themselves, but a little less meaningful for others. Morgan (2017, 100) believes that a sense of purpose makes employees feel connected to the organization they work for and it is both the employees’ and organization’s responsibility to create meaningfulness for their work.

Based on the results of the survey, employees’ perceptions of developing their skills seemed to be a bit complex. Employees didn’t very strongly feel that they are encouraged to develop their skills, nor to be given the resources to develop them. However, it was
later pointed out in the group interview that some of the employees felt that there aren’t many things to develop at work. This was a quite interesting finding, although it can tell about differing experiences from the employees; some may think that they aren’t given the resources to develop although they could learn and grow, whereas some may feel that there aren’t things for them to develop in their current positions.

Morgan (2017) highlights the importance of personal development as a major factor in the formation of positive employee experience. He says that when people learn they grow, both as employees and individuals. Employees should always feel that whenever they want to grow and learn, they can. (Morgan 2017, 114–115.)

The results of the study suggest that the employees’ trust towards their managers and supervisors, as well as their peers, seemed to be strong in Hawaii Restaurants. Maylett and Wride (2017) say that trust is the basis of employee experience. It is leaders’ responsibility to build trust that’s embedded in the organization’s culture, trust that frees employees to engage fully by making them feel confident, secure, heard and taken care of. (Maylett & Wride 2017, 168.)

Employees in Hawaii Restaurants seemed to share a strong feeling of belonging, based on the study results. According to Morgan (2017, 108), all employees want to feel like they belong and are a part of a team where they know that they can rely on others to have their back. These findings suggest that the feeling of belonging and the strength of trust are highly linked to each other.

Based on the results of this study, employees in Hawaii Restaurants didn’t think that their organizational values are reflected in the physical spaces, nor that they act in alignment with their organizational values within the organization. Over half of the questionnaire respondents weren’t aware of their organizational values. This was quite surprising but can easily explain the previous findings about organizational values. Morgan (2017, 68) suggests that in addition to communicating organizational values and having employees memorizing the values, values need to be physically manifested in the spaces in which the employees work.

Based on the group interview results, some of the employees wished that the communication within the organization would be better. Regular staff-meetings were requested, in order to help solve problems together and to prevent problems in the future. Also Bersin and al. (2017) state that in order to create an admirable workplace where only positive employee experiences may be formed, gross-organizational communication is required.
The survey results proposed that the employees’ perceptions of their well-being at work were quite diffused. Later, the group interview results suggested that coping with workload was experienced with more difficulty because of lack of properly functioning breaks during shifts. Morgan (2017) states that forward-thinking organizations are those that understand that in addition to providing a job for their employees, their responsibility is also to take care of them and to look after them. Taking care of employees’ health and wellness doesn’t mean providing short-term solutions to long-term employee needs. (Morgan 2017, 125.)

The main findings from this study provide valuable information about employee experiences in Hawaii Restaurants. This information can be used to gain a deeper understanding of employees’ feelings, attitudes and behaviours. Leaders and managers in Hawaii Restaurants may get new ideas and aspects to their daily leading activities. Based on the main findings of this study, suggestions for improvement are also made. The suggestions are covered in subchapter 6.2 and can be used to improve employee experience in Hawaii Restaurants.

6.2 Suggestions for improvement and future research

Based on the main findings of this study, the communication between all staff members should be improved. It would be desirable to organize regular team meetings in each unit, where every team member would be involved. The participants of the group interview requested such meetings, in order to enhance the communication, as well as to solve and prevent difficulties.

In addition to team meetings in each unit, events for the whole Hawaii Restaurant staff could be organized. This could strengthen Hawaii Restaurants as an organization by bringing all the members together and increasing the feeling of fellowship.

Another main issue that arose from the research results was employees’ experiences of their well-being at work. What seemed to be problematic was the functionality of employees’ breaks during shifts. In order to improve employees’ well-being at work, and in general, attention should be directed to the actualization and functionality of breaks during shifts. It would be fundamental that everyone could have at least 10 minutes time to eat or just to sit down for a while during a shift.
In order to make Hawaii Restaurants a more consistent and connected organization, the organizational values should be communicated in a more convenient way so that each and every member of the organization would be aware of them. It would be advisable to share the organizational values with all new staff members from day one. The values should also be considered and kept in mind in external as well as internal interactions. This could better allow employees to act in alignment with the organizational values and to strengthen the organization as a whole.

It would be extremely good to perform individual development discussions regularly with all team members in each unit. Development discussions could encourage people to share their concerns with their managers and together they could be solved. These kinds of discussions would also increase understanding on both sides and to provide new perspectives.

For future research, employee experience could be studied from the management’s point of view in more detail. In Deloitte’s 2019 Global Human Capital Trends, Bersin and al (2019) suggest that the term *employee experience* could be expanded and addressed as *human experience*. According to them, “a true human experience is one that embeds meaning into work and enables every employee to contribute in the most positive, supportive, and personal way.” (Bersin & al 2019.) A future research could also study the human experience of all members of Hawaii Restaurants, regardless of the current positions of the members.

6.3 Reliability, validity and ethics

Reliability and validity measure the trustworthiness of research. It is very important that the whole population is presented in the research and the research questions are relevant and cover the whole research problem. (Heikkilä 2014.)

Validity refers to the degree of how well the used research methods measure the issues that were intended to measure. Validity is high when the focus group as well as the questions in the research are relevant. Reliability, on the other hand, refers to how reliably the used research method measures a certain phenomenon, as well as how repeatable the method is. (Hiltunen 2009.)

A survey was used as a quantitative research method in this thesis. The questions used in the survey were formed based on the existing literature of employee experience and the
population of the survey were all employees in Hawaii Restaurants. The response rate in the survey was 90%. This means that the population was well represented in the data.

The research hasn't been implemented before, but it can be repeated in the future. Some of the questionnaire questions may have been understood in various ways among the respondents, as they were not explained in more detail, and this may have affected the reliability of the results. However, the questionnaire questions were designed in a way that they would be easy to understand by everyone.

A group interview was used as a qualitative research method. The purpose of the group interview was to understand the questionnaire results and to deepen understanding of certain issues. The interview questions were designed after analyzing the questionnaire results.

All the interviewees in the group interview were employees of Hawaii Restaurants. The focus group consisted of six employees, two from each unit. Consequently, all units within Hawaii Restaurants were equally represented in the group interview, which helped to get richer data. However, only one out of seven of the population were involved in the group interview and therefore some perspectives might have been excluded.

During the thesis process, some changes occurred inside the organization. This involved changes in the management as well as the workforce. This may have had an effect on the validity and reliability of the research.

Ethical principles of research are composed from issues such as respecting the autonomy of research subject, avoiding harm, privacy and data protection (TENK 2019). None of the survey respondents or group interview participants were forced to take part. All respondents and interviewees participated of their free will. The intention of this thesis was not to cause harm of any kind, but to recognize the strengths and improvement points within Hawaii Restaurants, based on employee experiences.

The survey respondents’ anonymity was preserved as there were no such questions that would have made identifying respondents possible. Also, no results were separated between the three units of Hawaii Restaurants, in order to maintain the anonymity as well as to focus on the organization as a whole. The names of the group interviewee participants were not mentioned, and none of the names mentioned during the interview were included in the report either. The transcription of the interview was not included in the report, in order to preserve the interviewees’ anonymity.
Researcher’s own subjective assumptions could have influenced the thesis process. This includes the topic choice, questionnaire design and selection of the group interview questions. The fact that the researcher is also an employee in the organization in question might have affected the interviewees’ sincerity and openness during the group interview.

6.4 Personal learning

The process of writing this thesis was extremely educational for me in many ways. I learned several new things developed my competencies. Looking back to the last four months, the whole thesis process gave me a lot and taught me more than I had expected.

Most importantly, I became familiar with employee experience as a concept. I had heard the term *employee experience* before but wasn’t really aware of the concept. Now, after several months of research I’m brave enough to say that I gained expertise in the field of employee experience as a result of the thesis process. It was extremely interesting to study a concept that hasn’t been given that much attention yet as the topic has been merging only for a few years. I feel privileged to some extent to have written my thesis about a topic that not many are even aware of.

However, the novelty of the concept brought some challenges in the thesis process as well. As the concept is fairly new, there isn’t that much literature of the topic. Therefore, it was inevitable to lean on specific sources as the literature of employee experience was limited.

Although the literature was limited, I was able to study several employee experience models and to do some conceptual analysis. This was both intriguing and instructive and enabled me to gain even deeper understanding of the concept. Based on the conceptual analysis, I developed a new model for employee experience. The creation of the new model was fascinating and rewarding as I got to design new framework for this study.

The new framework and employee experience model helped me to plan the questionnaire questions as well as to design the group interview. Later, the new framework and model enabled a profound data analysis. I learned a lot about conducting both a quantitative research as a survey as well as a qualitative research as an interview.

This thesis also took me out of my comfort zone at times. Conducting the group interview for example was something that made me feel extremely nervous at first, as I hadn’t really done that kind of thing before, but afterwards made me feel accomplished and satisfied.
That proved me that I am capable of going out of my comfort zone whilst also enjoying it. In addition, listening to my colleagues share their feelings and visions was really interesting and enlightening itself. I’m thankful for those six colleagues for making the discussion possible and for giving me the opportunity to hear and understand their personal experiences on a deeper level.

During the thesis process, I learned about leadership in general and got some new aspects to human resource management. I believe that these learnings will be beneficial for me not only in my career but also in other aspects of my life.

I became better in critical reading and writing by assessing the reliability of different sources. I also developed my skills in time planning and working under a lot of stress. I was happy to see the improvement during the writing process, as I got better in handling pressure and stress.

A factor that may have caused a bit more stress was the fact that I was working at the same time while writing this thesis. This meant that my time and resources for working on my thesis were quite limited from time to time. However, as I had planned to complete my thesis process in four months, I didn’t have a very strict time frame and that allowed me to continue going to work in addition to writing the thesis.

Although I did this thesis for my workplace and worked at the same time, I didn’t feel overloaded. Conversely, I felt that being at work motivated me to work on my thesis and my thesis inspired me to do better at work. All in all, the thesis process gave me new aspects into my work; it made me realise some issues that I haven’t maybe paid attention before. This includes both improvements and the strengths of Hawaii Restaurants as an organization.
References


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Appendix 1. Questionnaire

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE
Hawaii Restaurants

I work at…
The Cock  Holiday  Yes Yes Yes

I’ve worked for Hawaii Restaurants for…
0–6 months  7–12 months  1–2 years  more than 2 years

On a scale from 1 (=strongly disagree) to 5 (=strongly agree), please rate the following statements:

I am happy to work for Hawaii.
1  2  3  4  5

I like to go to work most days.
1  2  3  4  5

I feel a sense of purpose at work.
1  2  3  4  5

My work is meaningful for me.
1  2  3  4  5

My work is meaningful for others.
1  2  3  4  5

I think that Hawaii as an organization has a meaningful purpose.
1  2  3  4  5

I understand why we have different processes and procedures in Hawaii.
1  2  3  4  5
I feel inspired at work.

1  2  3  4  5

I trust my managers/supervisors.

1  2  3  4  5

I am treated fairly by my managers/supervisors.

1  2  3  4  5

I get recognized for the work I do.

1  2  3  4  5

My ideas or suggestions for improvement are taken seriously.

1  2  3  4  5

I am encouraged to learn new things at work.

1  2  3  4  5

I am given the resources to develop my skills at work.

1  2  3  4  5

I see my managers/supervisors as coaches or mentors.

1  2  3  4  5

I am aware of Hawaii’s organizational values.

1  2  3  4  5

We act in alignment with our organizational values.

1  2  3  4  5

The organizational values are reflected in the physical space.

1  2  3  4  5

I am proud to bring friends/visitors to our restaurant.

1  2  3  4  5

I like our restaurant’s physical space.

1  2  3  4  5

I feel valued at work.

1  2  3  4  5
I feel like I belong to our team.

I am respected as a unique individual at work.

I trust my peers.

There is variety in my working times.

The importance of my well-being is understood in Hawaii.

My well-being is taken care of in Hawaii.

Hawaii has a strong positive brand perception.

Thank you! <3
Appendix 2. Group interview questions

What makes your work meaningful to you?

What makes you feel inspired at work?

How would you describe your organizational culture?

Do you feel that you are trusted at work?

How do you get recognized for the work you do?

How are you encouraged to develop your skills at work?

How do you think your well-being at work could be improved?

Would you recommend Hawaii as an organization to work?

What kind of customer experiences do you want to create?