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Employee Engagement at a Hotel Case: Hotel Haven, Helsinki

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Abstract

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The purpose of the research study was to find out reasons and level of work engagement among front office staff at Hotel Haven. The study was designed to help develop an understanding of the staff's organizational commitment and its effect on the company's financial performance and to give suggestions for the employer for further actions to maintain the engagement level high. The study was also to find out if results of Hotel Haven differ from other hotels and restaurants studied in the same survey.

The research consisted of desk study, online questionnaire and face-to-face interviews, followed by an analysis of the results. Data for the desk study was gathered from multiple literary sources, as well as from electronic publications, researches and websites. The questionnaire was carried out among the permanent front office staff via online questionnaire and face-to-face interviews. The study first comprised desk study on the relevant concepts, then the analysis on the questionnaire and interview results as well as the comparison to other hotels and restaurants that had taken part in the same survey. Finally conclusions and recommendations were made.

Based on the findings, the staff is more engaged to their work at Hotel Haven than average hotel and restaurant worker in Finland. The results of the study show that company's financial performance is directly related to satisfied, happy and engaged employees. However, the study also reveals that there are factors in need of improvement also at Hotel Haven for the employees to feel more satisfied with their employer and not only with their colleagues and their team spirit.

Keywords: work engagement, work satisfaction, job demands and resources, company's financial performance

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1 Introduction

Due to uncertainty and constant changes in organizations nowadays, many people have started to require stability from good work. In every workplace it is possible to find work engagement and joy. However, many people might question if it is necessary to even like one's job and feel joy and happiness at work. Employees who are engaged to their work and to the organization and its values are more likely to succeed in their work, show more initiative and be innovative. Thus engaged workforce can contribute better results and in hotel and restaurant business this could mean better service as well. Several previous studies have also shown that engaged workforce is less likely to change or even think about changing job (Hakanen 2011.)

This research based thesis is aiming to find out how engaged employees are to their work at a hotel's front desk in Helsinki, Finland. The research will be done for Oy Union Hotels Ab, focusing on a five-star establishment called Hotel Haven. The research is designed to examine how engaged workforce at the front desk is and what are the reasons for their engagement, if they are committed to the organization and e.g. willing to help out colleagues, what the reasons and results are for the company for their commitment. The study is also to give suggestions for the employer of how to improve employee engagement at the hotel. The actual research will be done as an online questionnaire designed by Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, followed by face-to-face interviews to gain deeper responses on the online questionnaire results. In addition, the research is aiming to find out an overall understanding of how this specific hotel differs from other hotels and restaurants which have participated in a research in Finland performed by Finnish Institute of Occupational Health in 2009.

1.1 Justifications for researching the topic

The idea for the research was recognized after a respected corporate leader visited the hotel and was positively surprised about the staff at the front desk and the atmosphere they seemed to share. Afterwards this corporate leader invited Hotel Haven's manager to tell their branch managers about motivating working atmosphere and good customer service.

Hotel Haven is a relatively new hotel, currently three years old. Therefore from my point of view it is beneficial for the hotel and the staff to perform the survey, learn from the outcome and strengthen its status as a top hotel in Helsinki. Currently I am working at the Front desk of Hotel Haven. It is always fun to come to work and every time when asked if we like our work, the answer is "we have the best team and therefore we like our work". In addition, the hotel has also received guest feedbacks about the staff and their positive common attitude and atmosphere and how it must be a great place to work. All above mentioned matters justified to begin the research.

1.2 Aims and delimitations of research

The research will not concentrate on work exhaustion or depression but the staff's motivation "to go for the extra mile" at their daily work. By studying both work engagement and work exhaustion employer would gain comprehensive understanding of employees' work satisfaction and exhaustion. This thesis research however concentrates on the front desk staff's level and reasons for work engagement only. Nevertheless, to understand attributes of work engagement, the study will take a closer look at concepts of work satisfaction and work exhaustion as well. However, the questionnaire and interview exclude direct research for satisfaction and exhaustion.

1.3 Presentation of the partner

Royal Restaurants is the largest privately owned corporate entity in hotel- and restaurant field in Finland with 27 restaurants and 2 hotels, all operating in Helsinki. It consists of a parent company called Royal Restaurants Ltd. and its subsidiary Oy Union Hotels Ab. Royal Restaurants is employing more than 500 people in the capital area of Finland. Net sales target for 2010 was approximately 62.5 million euros. Oy Union Hotels Ab consists of two hotels, Hotel Haven and Hotel Fabian. (Royal Restaurants.)

Hotel Haven is a rather small boutique and luxury hotel in Helsinki, Finland, opened in March 2009. Hotel Haven is rated by the chain as a five-star hotel even though there is no national star-rating system at use in Finland. The hotel

is situated at the harbour yet in the city centre of Helsinki. The location is ideal for hotel's both main target groups; business and leisure travellers. The hotel is easily accessed from the city's all main congress centres as well as from the main tourist points. Helsinki-Vantaa Airport is within 30 minutes' drive away and Helsinki Central Railway Station just 10 minutes' walk away.

Hotel Haven has altogether 77 rooms with four different room categories; 22 Comfort -rooms, 25 Style -rooms, 29 Lux -rooms and one Suite. Some of the rooms are offering a view over the market square and the port of Helsinki, making Hotel Haven as one of the few hotels in the whole Finland to have a sea view available from rooms. There are five possibilities for connecting rooms at the property, and the largest rooms add up to 50 m² in size of the room (excluding the suite which is approximately 80 m²). There is also a compact gym at the hotel and spa services are available on request.

The three hotel restaurants at the hotel's property offer Finnish and/or Scandinavian cuisine. In the property there is one fine-dining restaurant. All of the restaurants have been operating before the hotel and have gained good reputation in Helsinki long since the hotel was established. All three restaurants also belong to one of the top restaurant chains in Helsinki – Royal Restaurants Ltd. The hotel has also good meeting facilities at the property and Hotel Haven actually won the “The Best Incentive Experience Award 2010” at the Best of Helsinki Awards -competition. Hotel Haven is a member of a marketing chain called Small Luxury Hotels of the World (later referred to the SLH). Hotel Haven is the first hotel in Finland to be a member of this world-wide luxurious chain. The SLH has strict standards of the service and product level, and therefore it is important for Hotel Haven to meet these standards to keep the membership of the SLH chain (Hotel Haven.)

1.4 Definition of the target group

Target group of the research is the employees, hospitality professionals working at the front desk at Hotel Haven. Some of them have been working for several years in tourism and hospitality business, especially at the hotel business, when a few are quite new to the field with only a couple of years' experience in the

field (mainly due to their age). Age range is quite high, varying from the youngest in her twenties and the oldest in his fifties. In addition, there are also different nationalities working at the front desk. In the tourism field the turnover of the staff tends to be quite high when at Hotel Haven the core staff at the front desk has remained the same for two years already.

2 Welfare at work & job enrichment

Work satisfaction, work exhaustion and work engagement are often confused to correlate together or thought to mean similar concepts. However, when work satisfaction appears it does not necessarily mean that work engagement occurs as well (Schaufeli et al. 2008.) Furthermore, work engagement has often been assumed to be the opposite of burnout. On the contrary to those who suffer from burnout, engaged employees have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work activities and they see themselves as able to deal well with the demands of their job. However, when an employee is not suffering from burnout it does not automatically mean that they are engaged in their work and vice versa. Finally, according to Professors William Schaufeli and Arnold Bakker on their UWES Manual (2004, p.4) it seems that work engagement is positively related to job performance. Hence, to be able to perform this research study, it is important to distinguish and understand the differences with these concepts.

2.1 Work satisfaction

One of the oldest and most researched descriptions of well-being is work satisfaction. It describes how much an employee likes and enjoys (work satisfaction) or does not like or enjoy (job dissatisfaction) one's work. Job satisfaction refers also to a collection of attitudes that employees have on their jobs. It is a combination of work, health, well-being and security (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health). Most often, work satisfaction is also studied, researched and described in a negative sense, whereas work engagement is studied through positive psychology (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004, p.3). In addition, Finnish labour legislation sets certain demands for corporations concerning their employee satisfaction and therefore the importance of work satisfaction is emphasized in the current

work life. Researchers have also proven that employee satisfaction correlates with organizational commitment. Employees are important determinants as well as leading factors to determine the success of an organization in a competitive environment -especially in the service field (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health).

Work satisfaction appears when an employee considers his/her work to be satisfying and fluent in a safe, health prolonging and career supporting work environment and work community. In healthy working environment information flows, communication and co-operation are fluent and possible issues and problems can be dealt with whenever they arise. Satisfaction at work is generated, appearing and developing mainly in every day working life and the positive changes do not have to be massive to produce positive effects. It is important that employees experience feelings of independence, cohesiveness and personal achievement at work (Hakanen 2009, Hakanen 2011.)

Demands at work, like rush and deadlines cause a lot of endeavour in employees. However, as a consequence of these endeavours an employee might feel personal achievements, as well as initiative and increased work engagement as well after succeeding in their work. According to several studies, different types of workload affect work exhaustion but not necessarily lack or diminishing of work engagement (Hakanen et al. 2008). Thus, when work engagement is to be strengthened, priority should be on improving job resources, and diminishing the job demands should be only second on the list (Hakanen 2011).

Nowadays work satisfaction is more and more connected to non-concrete substances such as motivation, know-how and atmosphere as well as support from colleagues and superior. However, physical health should not be forgotten as it has a significant effect on employee's ability to use their know-how at their daily work. Lack of social support from peers and employer, as well as too overloading work have negative effect on one's work satisfaction. Daily work can be seen as a source of wellbeing as well. Going to work regularly rhythms also life and prevents isolation (Kandolin et al. 2009.)

Figure 1 clarifies stress and anxiety of work life in Peter Warr's model of affective well-being, describing counterparts of emotions at work (modified by Jari Hakanen), e.g. depression - excitement, annoyance - pleasure. With this model it is possible to research and measure satisfaction at work, commitment and work engagement (Hakanen 2011, p. 24.)

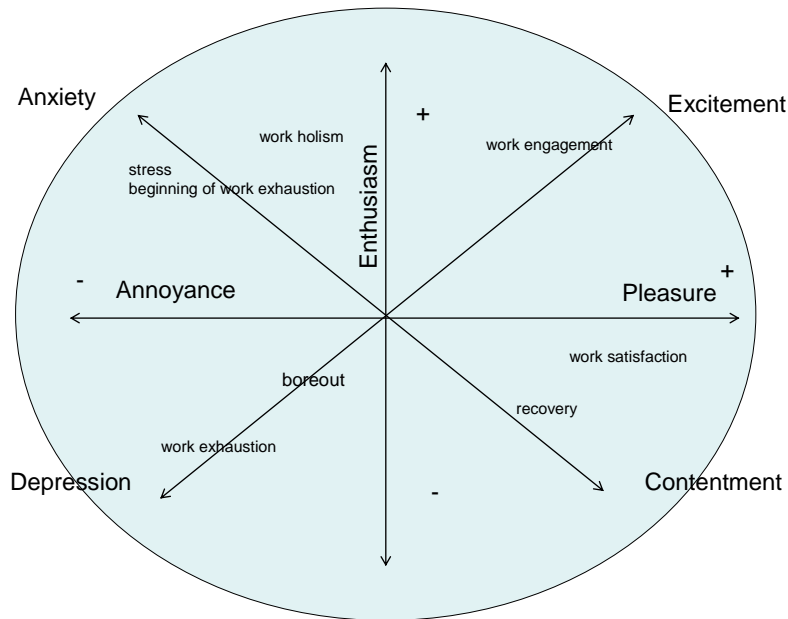


Figure 1. Factors of work satisfaction (Hakanen 2011, p. 24)

2.2 Work engagement

The method to evaluate and the concept of employee engagement were originally developed by Wilmar Schaufeli and Arnold Bakker for research purposes in the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands in 2003. Yet, employee engagement and its relative concepts (work satisfaction etc) have been studied for decades already, but Schaufeli and Bakker discovered the increasing need for studies in positive psychology when work satisfaction, exhaustion and burnout (negative psychology) have been studied for ages. Work engagement has attracted more and more attention during the 21st century. With the help of work engagement-concept, understanding of work satisfaction becomes deeper and more versatile. Several studies on working conditions reveal that at work places there are both positive and negative attributes at the same time. Employees might have feelings of rush, insecurity and contradictions but at the same time

they might enjoy working together with colleagues, feel excitement in succeeding and value and appreciate their work. This is why well-being of employees is to be studied through work satisfaction as well as work engagement (Hakanen 2011, p.106-107.)

The concept of work engagement has been characterized in two different ways; according to Maslach & Leiter (1997) engagement refers to energy, involvement, and professional efficacy, which are considered to be the direct opposites of burnout dimensions (i.e. exhaustion, cynicism, lack of professional efficacy). According to Schaufeli & Bakker (2003), on the other hand, work engagement is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind which is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. Vigor refers to high levels of energy, mental persistence while working and also confronting difficulties as well as willingness to invest effort in one's work. Dedication is characterized by a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge when absorption is characterized by a sense of being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work so that time passes quickly and detaching oneself from work may seem difficult (Hakanen 2009, p. 8.) Work engagement is not a specific "wow-experience" neither a "flow"-type of moment but a more stable, overall state of mind, which is not specifically concentrated on any specific event, person or behaviour. However, recently some researchers have noticed similarities with characteristics of absorption and flow. Flow has been defined as a state of mind in which people are so intensively involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter, resembling a short-term peak experience. This is typical to occur outside of work, e.g. during hobbies. Absorption, on the other hand, is presumed to be a more persistent state of mind which takes place specifically in the work domain. According to Mauno et al. (2006), researchers have just recently pointed out that vigor and dedication are the core dimensions of work engagement whereas absorption closely resembles flow. Furthermore, work engagement plays a mediating role between job resources (e.g., technical equipment, participation in decision making) and service climate and job performance (i.e., extra-role behaviour and customer satisfaction). In the current work life employees are expected to show initiative, be innovative and good co-workers and team players, take responsibility of their own high-quality work per-

formance and constantly develop their know-how. At the same time the quantitative demands of daily work are high. In the middle of these demands, innovations for work life which help to add control of work, satisfaction and understanding of happenings in the environment are in need (Hakanen 2011.)

However, according to Hakanen (2011, p. 19), everything producing eudemonia is not necessarily producing immediate pleasure. Many employees describe their best and most rewarding experiences as the ones, which at first were the most difficult and challenging ones but then managed to defeat them. Therefore, work engagement is not predominantly work being just fun but it could be fun and rewarding as a consequence of struggle and succeeding.

Job demands and resources

Work engagement is studied through job demands and resources. According to e.g. Bakker and Demerouti (2004) job demands are physical, psychological, social or organizational features of job that require physical and/or psychological effort from an employee and are consequently related to physiological and/or psychological costs (i.e. strain). Job demands could mean e.g. quantitative workload, role ambiguity and job insecurity. Job resources, on the other hand, are defined as physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that not only potentially reduce the negative effects of job demands and help to achieve work goals but may also stimulate personal growth, learning and development -and positive state of work engagement. Job resources can be referred to as energizers and therefore they may increase the employee's inner and outer motivation as well. According to Stevan Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources theory, various resources are considerable factors in gaining new resources and enhancing well-being. These resources are factors that people value and therefore strive to obtain, retain and protect. (Hakanen et al. 2007, p. 2) In other words, job demands are primarily related to the exhaustion component of burnout, whereas lack of job resources is primarily related to disengagement.

Bakker and Demerouti (2003) have proposed the Job-Demands-Resources (JD-R) model which can be used to predict employee burnout and engagement,

and consequently organizational performance. The model also proposes that working conditions can be categorized into two broad categories, job demands and job resources, which are differentially related to specific outcomes. See picture 2.

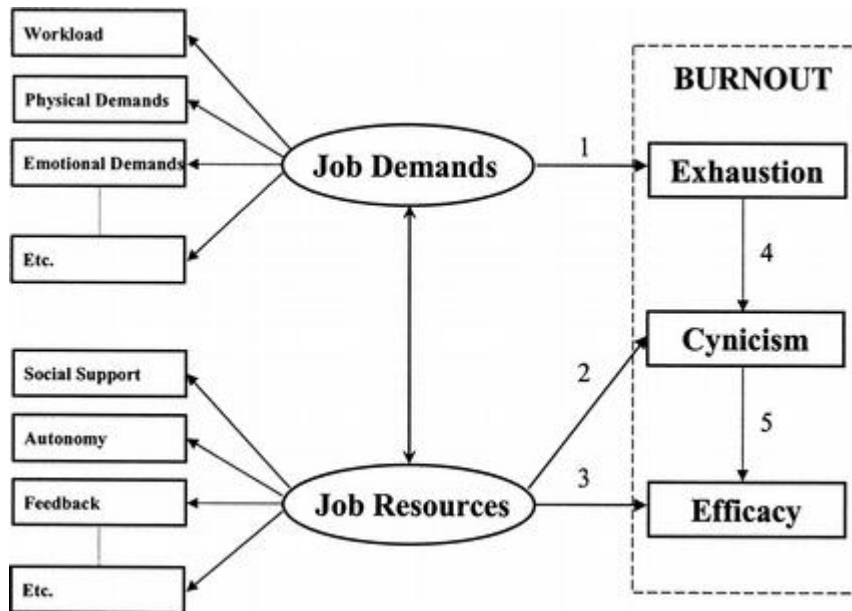


Figure 2. JD-R model, Bakker and Demerouti 2003

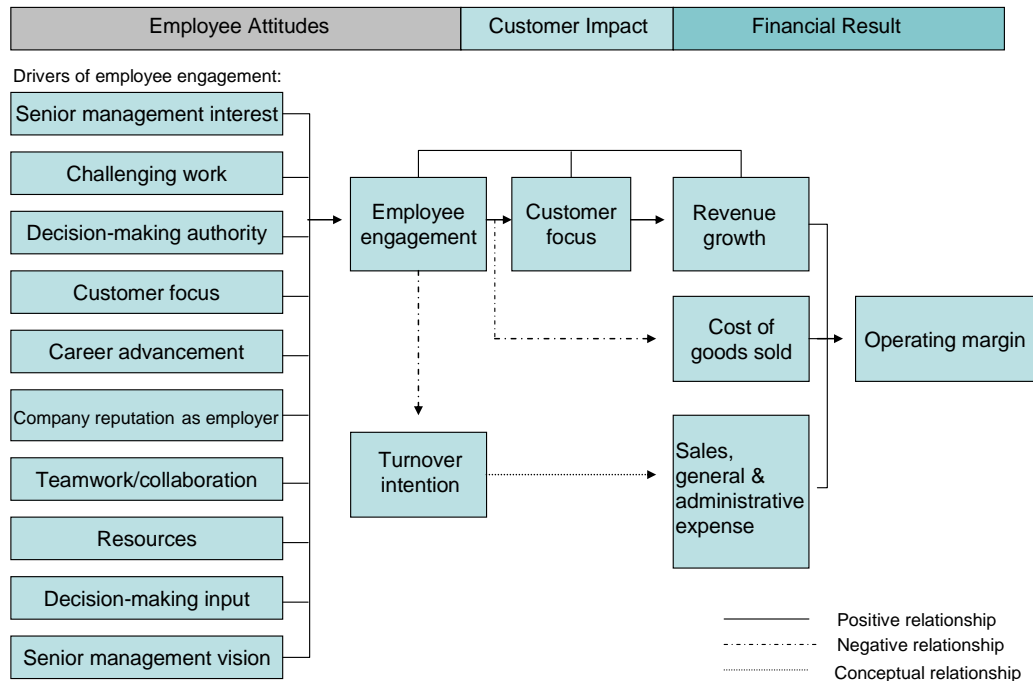
Employees' individual resources are important to take into consideration as well. Work engagement is only partly explained by employee's personal characteristics, such as outgoingness, positivism and initiative. Individual and somewhat permanent resources are directly and indirectly significant to work engagement. They affect how physical working environment and job resources are experienced and how they are utilized. Individual resources supporting work engagement are for example optimism, positive insight on employee's own professional capability and self-esteem. These resources are empowering and they affect how work and working conditions are seen (Hakanen 2011, p. 71.)

2.3 Employee engagement and company's economical wealth

There is a strong connection between economy and quality of work life. Several studies have shown that it is possible to seek for both high profitability and quality of work life. According to several researchers, work places with good quality

and economy of work are clearly more likely to succeed and be competitive during bad times as well, such as recession (Antila et. al. 2009, p.12-14.)

Linking Employee Engagement to Financial Performance



(The 2003 Towers Perrin Talent Report, p. 18)

Figure 3. Linking employee engagement to financial performance

Figure 3 clarifies the meaning of employee engagement to financial performance. In the picture on the left are the drivers of employee engagement, in order of importance. According to the 2003 Towers Perrin Talent Report, senior management's interest in employees' well-being is the most important driver of engagement. This to appear in organizations, the employees need to feel that they are not too distanced from senior management and they need to share mutual trust. Secondly, challenging work is nearly as important as management trust. The third-most important driver is freedom to make decisions related to one's job, thus decision-making authority. Furthermore, when employees know their companies are in business to serve customers and that financial performance depends on doing that well, they care whether their company is performing well in that area. This is why customer focus is on the fourth place. On the fifth place are career advancement opportunities. If employees do not see the potential for career advancement, they are likely to look for another job or at

least consider changing job when the right opportunity comes. Important drivers are also company's reputation as an employer, how colleagues work together as a team, and what kind of resources the employees have in order to perform well in their job, decision-making input and vision of the senior management.

These ten workplace attributes help drive employee engagement, and as engagement rises, there are two important outcomes; employees are less likely to leave the company and they have stronger orientation to meet the customer needs. The right side of the picture addresses the financial results, where there is the relationship between customer focus and revenue growth. There is also an inverse relationship between engagement and the cost of goods sold. The picture clarifies that the cost of production tends to drop as employees become more engaged in their work. In other words, when an engaged employee focuses on customer service, it gives the customer a reason to return and buy more goods and services. Such employees build customer loyalty over time (The Towers Perrin Talent report 2003.)

When aiming at the highest possible work engagement level among employees, it is important for the employer to remember to reward and recognize the employees who have worked hard and put effort on their work. According to Hakanen (2009), an employee who is used to making effort, being flexible and giving their best but whose efforts are never rewarded or recognized in the working community, begins to realize that working hard is in vain and that it is possible to contribute less. A frustrated employee is more likely to change job easier as well.

2.4 Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Theory of Job Satisfaction

Frederick Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene theory -also known as the Two-Factor theory (Maidani 1991), suggests that every employee has two sets of needs or requirements; motivator needs and hygiene needs. Motivator needs are associated with the actual work itself and how challenging the work is, when hygiene factors are associated with the physical and psychological context in which the job is performed (George & Jones 2012, p. 107). The motivator factors include achievement, advancement, the work itself, responsibility, and recognition when

the hygiene factors include company policy and administration, technical supervision, working conditions, salary, and interpersonal supervision (Maidani 1991). Researchers have concluded that the factors that contributed to job satisfaction were different from those factors that contributed to job dissatisfaction. Herzberg indicated that the satisfiers do indeed motivate the employee productivity whereas the dissatisfiers do not (Gaziel 2001). Traditionally job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are seen at the opposite ends; an employee is either satisfied or dissatisfied. However, Herzberg suggests that an employee could experience job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction at the same time. For example, an employee might find the work interesting and challenging (motivator needs are met) yet feeling dissatisfied when the position offers little job security (hygiene needs are not met) (George & Jones 2012, p. 107).

As Herzberg's theory suggests that employees' motivator needs are satisfied by things such as having autonomy on the job and being responsible for one's work, and that employees are satisfied only when these needs are met, job enrichment is a way to do that. Job enrichment involves designing jobs to provide opportunities for employee growth by giving employees more responsibility and control over their work. Another way to meet of the motivator needs is to practise job enlargement. It involves increasing the number of tasks an employee performs but keeping the tasks at same level of difficulty and responsibility. Like job enlargement, job enrichment is aimed at increasing intrinsic motivation so that employees enjoy their jobs (George & Jones 2012, p. 211.)

3 Research methods

The thesis work needed different types of research methods to justify and prove the studied findings. In the research were used combined strategies, such as quantitative and qualitative methods to improve the reliability of the results (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006.)

To start with, a desk study was needed to understand the core concepts; work satisfaction, work engagement and work exhaustion and their meaning to working life and companies. To collect data, an online questionnaire took place for the employees at the front desk. The questionnaire is found at the website of

the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. This questionnaire on work engagement was measured by the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (later referred as UWES) developed by Schaufeli and his colleagues (2002). The scale has been translated into Finnish by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (Hakanen 2002). The results of the online questionnaire were then analysed and compared with the results from other hotels and restaurants in Finland which have taken part in the same UWES 9 statements survey. By reading, analysing and reviewing existing literature, studies and online-sources as well as work environment, the researcher has gained deeper understanding on the subject. After collecting data and analysing the questionnaire results, interviews for the front desk employees took place to justify and to broaden view of the results from the questionnaire. The interview questions were based on the questionnaire results to gain deeper and wider answers on the research questions. All results were then analysed based on the knowledge gained from the former desk study.

4 Research results

There are 13 permanent front desk employees at the front desk of Hotel Haven. Also the hotel manager was asked to take part in the questionnaire since we work at very close proximity on our daily work. The researcher herself did not take part in the questionnaire to avoid contradiction. In total there were 12 questionnaires sent and nine of them replied. At first a fortnight was given to the colleagues to fill the questionnaire in. However, the time had to be prolonged since not enough answers had come in. The questionnaire (based on the 9 statements version, UWES 9) is found on the website of Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (only in Finnish), link is found below:

http://www.ttl.fi/fi/tyohyvintointi/tyon_imu/testi/Sivut/default.aspx.

Work engagement Test results / Hotel Haven front desk				
November 2011				
Number of respondents; 9 out of 12. Scale 0-6.				
Respondent	Vigor	Dedicati- on	Absorption	Work Engagement
1	5,33	6,00	5,67	5,67
2	5,33	6,00	5,33	5,56
3	4,67	5,33	4,67	4,89
4	3,67	4,00	4,00	3,89
5	6,00	6,00	6,00	6,00
6	6,00	6,00	5,33	5,78
7	4,33	4,33	4,33	4,33
8	5,00	6,00	5,67	5,56
9	4,67	5,67	5,33	5,22
Total	5,00	5,48	5,15	5,21

Figure 5 Work engagement test results, Hotel Haven front desk

Source of the questionnaire: <http://www.ttl.fi/tyonimu>

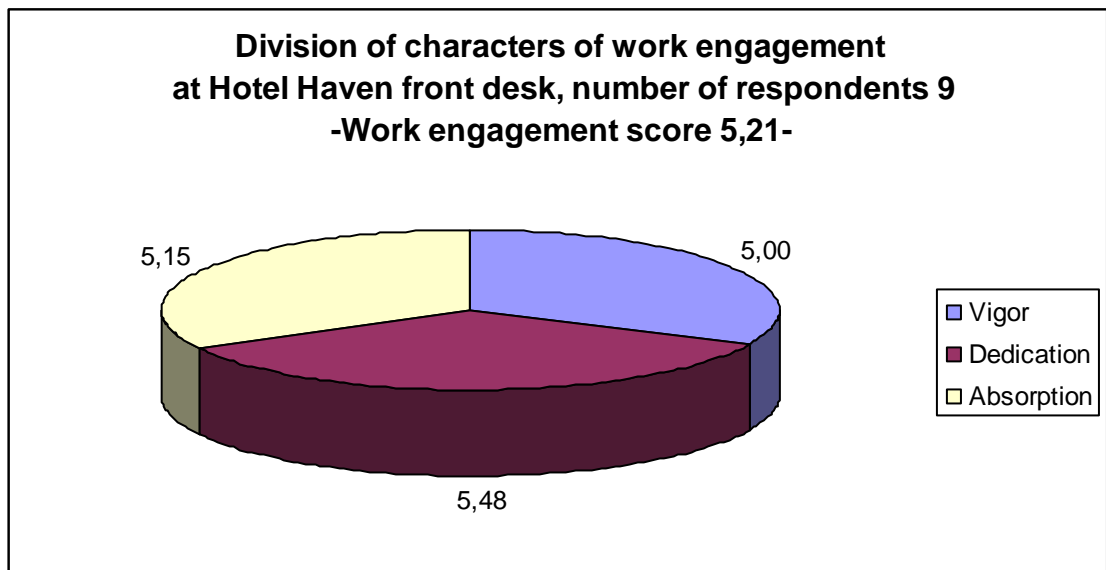


Figure 6. Pie chart of the questionnaire results of Hotel Haven front desk

Work engagement is divided into three different characters; vigor, dedication and absorption. These characters were measured in the questionnaire.

An employee is feeling vigor when s/he is energetic and persistent at work. Vigorous employee likes to go to work and feels obstacles at work as a challenge rather than overwhelming problem.

Dedication is experience of the significance and challenge of one's work. It is also about being enthusiastic and feeling inspired at work. Dedicated employee considers his work is important and is proud of what he does.

Absorption at work describes an employee that is deeply concentrated and feels pleasure in delving into the work. Time flies and it might be hard to detach oneself from work.

4.1 Questionnaire results

Figure 5 shows the overall numeral results of the questionnaire. The scale of the questionnaire is 0-6, six being the highest and zero being the lowest score. The total employee engagement score for the front desk at Hotel Haven is 5.21 out of 6. The number is respectful and tells about good and motivating working environment and rather high level of work engagement at the front desk of the

hotel. However, the division of the scores is rather interesting. Respondent number four has the lowest scores, total employee engagement number being "only" 3.89 when the highest score was 6.00 with respondent number five. Even the lowest score is not unsatisfactory. Approximately half of the respondents have the total number above five, which is really satisfying. Overall the results are surprisingly even, only a few of them standing out more than other.

The pie chart of the questionnaire results (figure 6) shows the division of all three characters of work engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption) between the employees at the front desk of the hotel. Of all three characters dedication has clearly the highest points (5.48) and vigor has the lowest (5.00). According to the results employees feel a little bit more absorption (5.15) than vigor.

4.2 Comparison of results with Hotel Haven front desk and other hotel and restaurant employees in Finland

Finnish Institute of Occupation Health has gathered research material from ongoing or completed studies about work engagement during years 2001 to 2007. These studies have gathered results from several fields but in the respected research study the interest is only in hotel and restaurant results. For this field of work they have used the same nine statements (UWES 9) version as was used in the thesis study as well. Therefore the comparison between the test results from Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and Hotel Haven front desk is more trustworthy as well.

The average score for employee engagement of the Finnish Institute of Occupation Health questionnaire in hotel and restaurant field is 4.17. Number of respondents in the research is 1,082. The picture 7 shows the division of vigor, dedication and absorption. The division in general is similar to Hotel Haven's results in the sense of quite even numbers of division of the attributes. However, dedication seems to be higher at Hotel Haven, when overall it seems that employees feel more vigor about their work. The questionnaire of the Finnish Institute of Occupation Health does not reveal how many of the respondents are working in family- or privately owned companies or in large chain corporations.

This might have a significant difference especially in the employees' mean of dedication to one's work.

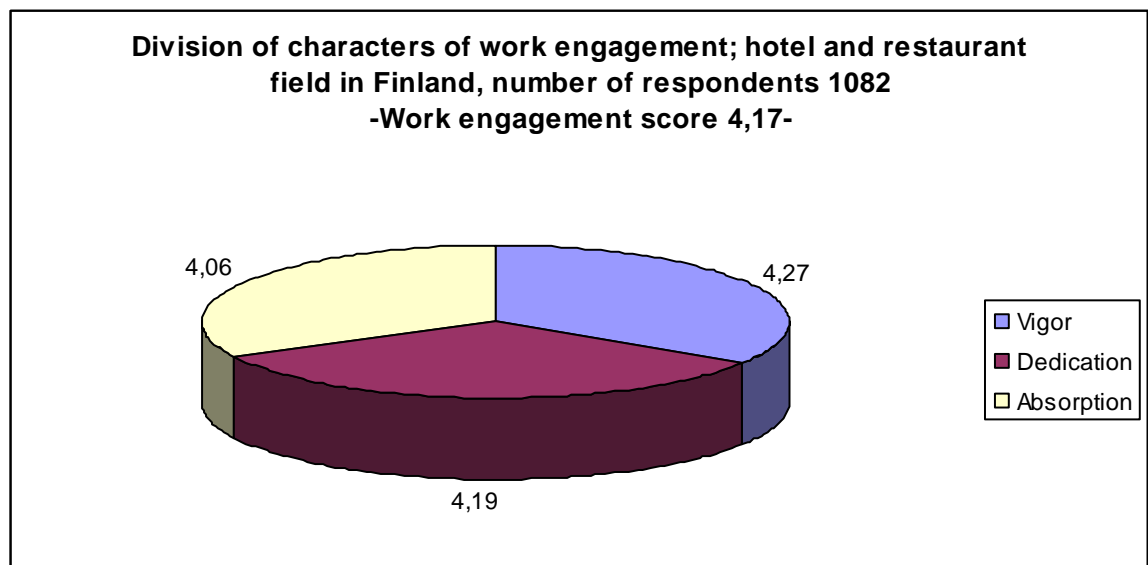


Figure 7. Chart modified by the researcher from the results of the questionnaire material of the Finnish Institute of Occupation Health (Hakanen 2009)

To compare the research results of Hotel Haven front desk, above are the summarized research results of other hotels and restaurants who took part in the same 9 statement UWES research.

4.3 Interview results

Interview questions are based on the results of the online-questionnaire by Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. All three characters of work engagement (dedication, vigor, absorption) are dealt separately in the interview and results are summarized below. Interview questions are seen as an appendix.

According to the average of the questionnaire results in terms of dedication, employees are enthusiastic and inspired at work. The staff at the front desk experience dedication approximately once a month or once a week. The goals and results of the work seem to be somewhat important and widely useful to many. Many consider the work tasks at least partly challenging enough and enjoy working - from time to time at least. Interviewees were asked to consider if they were fully satisfied with their current situation. Why would they think the

staff is so dedicated to their work? Which could be the ways to strengthen resources and increase their enthusiasms and proudness of their work? Which factors affect their dedication?

Nearly all of the interviewees pointed out that colleagues are the main reason for their great dedication. A few mentioned that the company itself is not the reason to be so keen on their work, but the challenging enough work tasks, colleagues and their teamwork as well as similar high professional ethics they seem to share. Employees would like to have an update to their work tasks and more training in specific skills such as security, selling, crisis management and service quality. Also employees are in need of recognition and rewarding for work well-done. It was mentioned that the hotel could not be as successful as it is without the dedicated staff at the front desk.

According to the average of the questionnaire results, the front desk staff feels absorption in their work and enjoys concentrating on work assignments at least once a week. They consider their work interesting and satisfying. Their job description allows them to concentrate on their work without constant interruptions at least sometimes and therefore they may enjoy absorption at their work. Interviewees were asked to consider if any rearrangements at work, such as time control, prioritization of tasks or minimizing interruptions could help them concentrate even better. Why would they think "absorption" got higher score in the results than "vigor" even though the field of work is mostly really hectic and vulnerable to interruptions?

According to the interviews, the front desk staff seems to be in need for a sales office which would be open later in the evening, to help deal with the evening rush by mail and phone (currently sales office is open from Monday to Friday from 9 AM to 4:30 PM). Concentrating on the emails and phone calls at the front desk disturbs the customer service on the spot and vice versa. Therefore, the rush results in having everything done in time rather than having everything done properly. All respondents agreed that it is truly beneficial to have two staff members per shift at the front desk. It was also pointed out that in our field of business the employees have certain type of personalities who handle stress and hectic times better than others. Furthermore, an interviewee thought that

the time of the questionnaire (in November), might have had an effect on the results of absorption, since there was lack of staff and many felt forced to be at work even if they were ill -and therefore were very tired and exhausted at the time of responding to the questionnaire.

According to the questionnaire results, staff feels themselves energetic at work nearly as often as average respondent in the survey. They feel themselves vigorous approximately once a week. Possibly at work there are at least certain positive assets supporting them being active. Interviewees were asked to consider if they were satisfied in their state of vigor, if there could be any opportunities at work or in their working society, which would make them go to work even happier in the future, feeling them even more vigorous and put even more effort to their work tasks. From their point of view, they were asked to point out which are their positive assets that provide strength, energy and pleasure at work.

All of the respondents clearly pointed out that the lack of sleep and rest due to difficult and unsteady working schedules affect their state of vigor at work. Also the fact that many times there is no possibility for proper lunch breaks and consequently it affects energy levels. In addition, all of the respondents mentioned the lack of rewards; "*If we are seen as such a great hotel, why could we not get salary accordingly?!*" It was also mentioned that it is visible that all of the employees give so much at work that the line for vigor to turn into tiredness and exhaustion is very thin. However, work tasks, colleagues and guests inspire and give energy to all of the respondents.

The interviewees were also asked to compare results of employee engagement at Hotel Haven and other hotels and restaurants. They were also asked to think of reasons, which from their point of view affect the differences the most.

All respondents pointed out the amount of employees per shift, especially in relation to the number of rooms. An example was mentioned of large chain hotels, having 300-500 rooms and only two receptionists, when at Hotel Haven there are always at least two per shift, in addition to a trainee and only 77 rooms to deal with. Also employees at other hotels get less salary and they have more difficult working schedule. In other hotels and restaurants there is a relatively

high staff turnover when at Hotel Haven, the core staff has remained the same for the past two years already. When there is a very high staff turnover, it affects the feelings of insecurity at work in the way that one does not get to know their colleagues and their ways of working. In other words, other hotels may lack real team work as well. Furthermore, there might not be so in-depth training in other hotels. They use a lot of extra staff, and they might not have real interest in the field. Also corporate goals might be unclear in other hotels. It was also pointed out that at Hotel Haven, some interviewees felt that the employer truly cares for their staff and is interested in their wellbeing, while in larger chain hotels an individual might end up forgotten in the large number of employees.

5 Conclusions

Firstly, it can be arguable if the research results are reliable as the number of respondents is rather small (9 replies) compared to the number of the comparable research results with other hotel- and restaurant staff (1,082). On the other hand, within the thesis research, the number of respondents is rather respectful, 75% of the front office staff replied. Furthermore, the researcher has a preliminary idea of the test and interview results based on the atmosphere the employees share daily at work. However, the researcher herself did not take part in the questionnaire but yet is working in close contact with all respondents which might have an effect when interpreting the results -especially in the interview section. Secondly, the questionnaire was sent to respondents in November, at the darkest time of the year in Finland. It was anticipated that the time of the year would have an effect on the results in a negative sense. It would be interesting to see if results would vary according to the time of the year, e.g. fall vs. spring. Thirdly, the subject of studying work engagement is rather new and therefore relevant literature and research material is limited -or relatively aged. However, the material and resources to be used to perform the research were carefully chosen.

According to the questionnaire results and the face-to-face interviews, employees at Hotel Haven front desk seem to be rather satisfied with their work. However, as noted earlier, when work satisfaction appears it does not necessarily

mean that employees are also engaged with their work. Some respondents also mentioned the thin line between engagement and burnout when being so engaged and giving their all, the situation might result in exhaustion. However, work engagement is not the opposite of burnout either.

The employees at Hotel Haven front desk seem to be highly engaged to their work according to the questionnaire results. Factors mentioned affecting work engagement and satisfaction in a positive sense are e.g. colleagues and their team work, similar high professional ethics, number of staff per shift, customers and employer's interest and mutual trust with employees. However, the interviews reveal that there are a few issues which are in need of consideration for the employees to be happier about their employer and work. Perhaps the most important factors raised from the interviews are the employees' need for reward and recognition as well as updating their work tasks. Front desk work is mainly repetitive procedures and therefore it might feel boring for the employee rather easily, leading the personnel wishing for an update to their work tasks and more skills training. At Hotel Haven, job enrichment is already quite well organized, as there are so-called back office shifts for almost all employees as well as many of the front desk clerks are trained to perform as duty managers as well if needed. This broadens the work tasks already. Basically all of the employees are responsible for the trainees as well, which adds alternation but also more workload and responsibility to their daily work. Skill improvement opportunities seem to be in need as well. According to the interviews, the so-called hygiene factors seem to be in order, except for the salary. However, it seems that employees are willing to work and invest in customer service, they are committed to the company and care about the financial result the company is making. This justifies Herzberg's statement of money not being a motivator but primarily a dissatisfier. It seems that some motivator factors need improvement, such as advancement opportunities and gaining recognition.

The research results justify the statement of employee engagement's linkage to company's financial performance in terms of happy and engaged employees serving customers and giving them a reason to return and purchase more goods and services and building customer loyalty over time. By the results of a

benchmarking company STR Global, Hotel Haven has a competitive advantage over their competitive set. Hotel Haven's revenue per available room has increased 9.5 percentage points more compared to its biggest competitors during the past year 2011-2012. Furthermore, Hotel Haven's occupancy rate has increased 5.5 % during the past year, when competitors have gained only 1.1 % increase. (STR Global 2012) In addition, as an interviewee stated: "*The hotel could not be as successful as it is without the dedicated staff at the front desk*". The company also wins in terms of keeping these employees in the company, reducing or even minimizing training and recruiting costs.

It is important for the employer however, to keep in mind that a frustrated employee whose efforts are not rewarded or recognized, easily begins to realize that working hard is in vain and it is possible to contribute less and the situation results quickly in poorer customer service or changing job. Employer should keep in mind that recognition is important as well as updating the employees' skills in e.g. selling and customer service. For example, the SLH chain has strict codes of conduct in service quality which could be one part of updating the skills of the staff. Also an inspirational sales skills and customer orientation training might be needed for the front desk staff to get new insights and tools for their daily work. The company could also think about supporting the staff's language training as a part of the skill training, e.g. Russian or Swedish languages which are not known at the hotel enough but are confronted daily at work.

All in all, according to the research results, Hotel Haven has very dedicated staff at the front desk. They are committed to the organization, they come happily to work day after day and they go for the extra mile -especially for their colleagues. The challenge for the employer seems to be now how to keep the engagement level this satisfactory and keep the staff turnover as low as it is. The company should find ways for recognition and rewarding their staff. By keeping staff satisfied and giving them reasons to do their best at work, customers will have reasons to return as loyal customers and the company's financial results will be satisfactory as well.

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APPENDIX

Interview

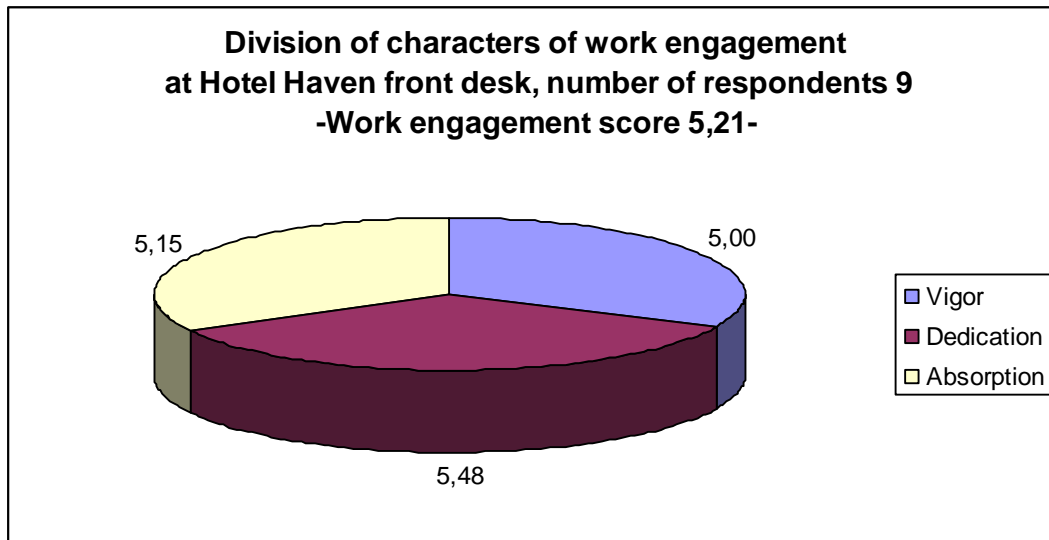


Chart 1. Hotel Haven questionnaire results:

1. Dedication 5,48
2. Absorption 5,15
3. Vigor 5,00

Scale 0-6; 6 being the highest, 0 being the lowest.

Work engagement is a positive psychological- and motivational state of mind at work, characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. It describes work as significant experience as well as joy and excitement related to work. Unlike serious work dissatisfaction symptoms, work engagement is rather common at work places and it touches most of us at least time to time.

Vigor is experienced through feelings of energy and consistency at work. Employees experiencing vigor are happy to come to work every day and they have energy to confront any obstacles and challenges they might face at their daily work.

Dedication is experiences on significance and challenge, excitement and inspiration of work. Dedicated employee considers their work important and is mostly proud of their work.

Absorption is deep concentration and giving ones all in their work and feeling pleasure on these. Time might fly and it might be hard to detach oneself from work.

Please answer to the following questions.

1. DEDICATION:

According to the average of our results, we are enthusiastic and inspired at work. We experience dedication approximately once a month or once a week. The goals and results of our work seem to be somewhat important and widely useful to many of us. Many of us consider our work at least partly challenging enough and we enjoy working, from time to time at least.

However, consider if you are fully satisfied with your current situation. Why do you think you/we are so dedicated to our work? Which could be the ways in strengthening the above resources and increase your enthusiasms and proudness of your work? Which factors affect to your dedication?

2. ABSORPTION

According to the average of our results we feel absorption in our work and enjoy concentrating on our work assignments at least once a week. We consider our work interesting and satisfying. Our job description allows us to concentrate on our work without constant interruptions at least sometimes and therefore we may enjoy absorption on our work.

However, consider if any rearrangements at work, such as time control, prioritization of tasks or minimizing interruptions could help you to concentrate even better. Why do you think "absorption" got higher score in the results than "vigor" even though our field of work is mostly really hectic and vulnerable to interruptions?

3. VIGOR

According to our results, we feel ourselves energetic at work nearly as often as average respondent in the survey. We feel ourselves vigor approximately once a week. Possibly at our work there are at least certain positive assets supporting us being active.

However, consider if you are satisfied in your state of vigor. Could there be any opportunities at your work or in your working society, which would make you go to work even happier in the future, feeling yourself even more vigor and put even more effort to your work tasks? From your point of view, at your work, which are your positive assets that provide you strength, energy and pleasure?

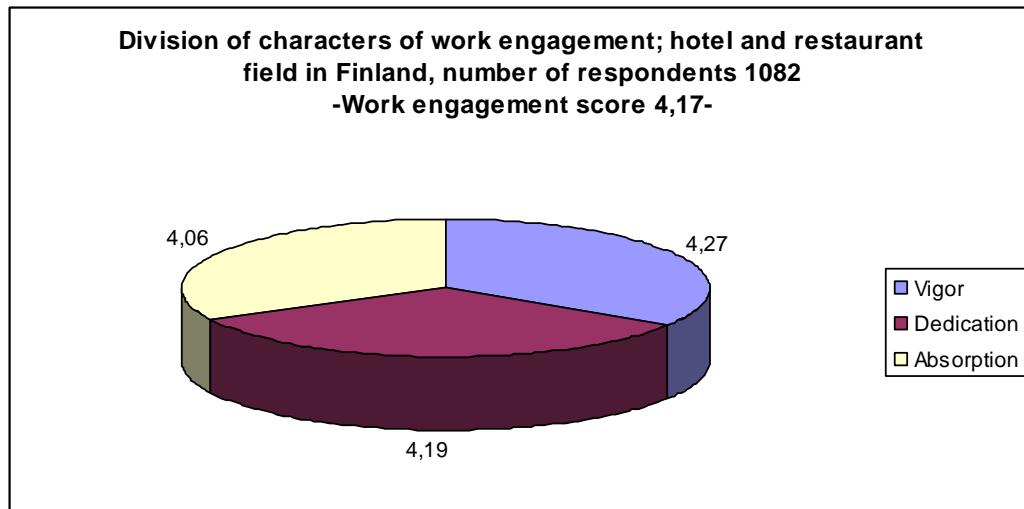


Chart 2. Questionnaire results of other hotels and restaurants in Finland, survey by Finnish Institute of Occupation Health

1. Dedication 4,19
2. Absorption 4,06
3. Vigor 4,27

Scale 0-6; 6 being the highest, 0 being the lowest.

Compare the questionnaire result charts of Hotel Haven and other hotel and restaurant responds. Why do you think the difference is so high? What do you think are the factors causing these differences?

1. Vigor

2. Dedication

3. Absorption