

UNIVERSITY of WORCESTER

Exploring the Psychological Contract of Hotel Employees in Northern Germany

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

2025

University of Worcester

Worcester Business School

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Table of Contents

Declaration I
Table of Contents II
Abstract IX
Acknowledgements X
Dissemination of DBA Work XII
List of Tables XIV
List of Figures XVI

Chapter 1: Introduction 1
1.1 Background and Context 1
1.2 Challenges 2
1.2.1 Productivity 2
1.2.2 Labour shortage 3
1.2.3 Leadership 5
1.2.4 Staff retention 6
1.3 Research Aim and Questions 7
1.4 Knowledge Gap 9
1.4.1 Context-Specific PC Research 9
1.4.2 Research on Employee Retention in the Hotel Industry 11
1.5 Studying Psychological Contracts of Hotel Employees 13
1.6 Positionality Statement 14

Chapter 2: Literature Review 16
2.1 Outline 17
2.2 The Psychological Contract 18
2.2.1 Origins and Trajectory of Psychological Contract Research 19
2.2.2 Formation and Function of Psychological Contracts 20
2.2.3 Parties to the Psychological Contract 22
2.2.3.1 Advocates of a Unilateral Approach 23
2.2.3.2 Advocates of a Bilateral Approach 25
2.2.3.3 Summary 27

2.2.3.4 The Approach Taken 28
2.2.4 Types and Elements of Psychological Contracts 30
2.2.4.1 Dimensions and Types of PC 30
2.2.4.2 Breaches and Violations 38
2.2.4.3 Implicitness 39
2.2.4.4 Expectations 40
2.2.5 Psychological Contract Literature 41
2.2.5.1 Location of Studies on the Psychological Contract 41
2.2.5.2 Cross-Cultural Applicability 44
2.2.6 Criticism of the Psychological Contract 45
2.2.7 Measuring the Psychological Contract 47
2.2.8 Psychological Contract Breaches and Fulfilment 52
2.2.8.1 The Effect of PC Breach on Hotel Employees 52
2.2.8.2 Needs Fulfilment and Psychological Contract Fulfilment 55
2.2.8.3 Challenges 57
2.2.8.4 The Effect of PC Fulfilment on Hotel Employees 58
2.2.9 The Impact of Covid-19 on PC 61
2.3 The Psychological Contract Applied 63
2.3.1 Influence of Contextual Factors 63
2.3.2 The Role of Psychological Contracts 65
2.4 Labour Shortage 67
2.4.1 Reasons for Turnover of Hotel Employees 67
2.4.2 Reasons for Hotel Employees to Remain 69
2.5 Job satisfaction 73
2.6 Generational Differences in Values regarding Work 76
2.7 Core Elements of Employment Relationships 80
2.7.1 Remuneration 80
2.7.2 Job Security 82
2.7.3 Career Advancement 84
2.7.4 Person-Job Fit 87
2.8 Employee Well-Being 96

2.9 Work-Life Balance 99
2.10 Work Stress 103
2.11 Psychological Contracts in the Hotel Industry 109

Chapter 3: Methodology 110
3.1 Purpose 111
3.2 Research Philosophy 112
3.2.1 Ontology 112
3.2.2 Epistemology 112
3.2.3 Axiology 114
3.2.3.1 Insider and Outsider Research 114
3.2.3.2 Pracademic Research 117
3.3 Research Design 119
3.3.1 Q Methodology 119
3.3.1.1 Overview of Q Methodology 119
3.3.1.2 Use of Q Methodology in this Study 121
3.3.2 Process 124
3.3.3 Software 125
3.3.4 Concourse 126
3.3.4.1 Basic Considerations 126
3.3.4.2 Concourse Exploration 127
3.3.5 Q Set Development 128
3.3.5.1 Development of the Initial Q Set 128
3.3.5.2 Initial Q Set 129
3.3.5.3 Focus Group Discussion 131
3.3.5.3.1 Premise 131
3.3.5.3.2 Focus Group Design 131
3.3.5.3.3 Discussion Process 134
3.3.5.3.4 Interpretation and Amended Q Set 135
3.3.6 Q Set Finalization 137
3.3.6.1 Omitted Statements 137
3.3.6.2 Finalized Q Set 140

3.3.7 Questionnaire Development 143
3.3.7.1 Pre-Sorting Questionnaire 143
3.3.7.2 Post-Sorting Questionnaire 144
3.3.8 Design of the Online Q Sort 144
3.3.9 Pre-Testing 146
3.4 Sampling 147
3.4.1 Sampling Rationale 147
3.4.2 Choice of Participants 148
3.4.3 Number of Participants 151
3.5 Recruitment 153
3.5.1 Final Numbers 156
3.5.1.1 Data Collected 156
3.5.1.2 Incomplete Submissions 156
3.5.2 Further steps 157
3.6 Strategy for Data Analysis 158
3.6.1 Correlation Type 158
3.6.2 Factor Extraction 158
3.6.3 Factor Rotation 159
Chapter 4: Data Analysis 161
4.1 Process of Data Analysis 162
4.1.1 Factor Extraction 162
4.1.2 Factor Retention 162
4.1.3 Factor Rotation 163
4.1.4 Factor Interpretation 163
4.1.5 Translation of Questionnaire Answers 164
4.2 Statistical Analysis 166
4.2.1 Factor Arrays 166
4.2.2 Factor Descriptions 169
4.2.2.1 Factor 1 170
4.2.2.1.1 Composite Q Sort 170
4.2.2.1.2 Description 171

4.2.2.1.3 Negatively loading participants 173
4.2.2.2 Factor 2 176
4.2.2.2.1 Composite Q Sort 176
4.2.2.2.2 Description 177
4.2.2.3 Factor 3 180
4.2.2.3.1 Composite Q Sort 180
4.2.2.3.2 Description 181
4.2.2.4 Factor 4a 184
4.2.2.4.1 Composite Q Sort 184
4.2.2.4.2 Description 185
4.2.2.5 Factor 4b 188
4.2.2.5.1 Composite Q Sort 188
4.2.2.5.2 Description 189
4.2.2.6 Factor 5 192
4.2.2.6.1 Composite Q Sort 192
4.2.2.6.2 Description 193
4.2.2.6.3 Negatively loading participants 196
4.3 Methodological Limitations 200

Chapter 5: Findings & Discussion 201
5.1 From Factors to Viewpoints 202
5.2 Identified Viewpoints 203
5.2.1 Viewpoint 1: Professionalism, Loyalty & Work-Life Balance. 203
5.2.2 Viewpoint 2: Independence & Career Growth 210
5.2.3 Viewpoint 3: Reward & Work-Life Balance 212
5.2.4 Viewpoint 4: Career & Material Quality of Life 216
5.2.5 Viewpoint 5: Communication & Empathy 219
5.2.6 Viewpoint 6: Career & Active Contribution 223
5.2.7 Viewpoint 7: Comfort & Predictability 226
5.2.8 Viewpoint 8: Stability & Empathy 230
5.2.9 Eight Distinct Viewpoints 232
5.3 Inducements Equally Valued by Employees 234

5.4 Contested Inducements 242

Chapter 6: Conclusion 249

6.1 Introduction 250

6.2 Eight Archetypes of Hotel Employee 251

6.2.1 Alex (V 1) 252

6.2.2 Bianca (V 2) 254

6.2.3 Clemens (V 3) 255

6.2.4 Diana (V 4) 257

6.2.5 Elias (V 5) 259

6.2.6 Franzi (V 6) 261

6.2.7 Giulio (V 7) 263

6.2.8 Hannah (V 8) 264

6.3 Viewpoints and Psychological Contracts 266

6.3.1 Psychological Contract Types 266

6.3.2 Psychological Contract Clusters 274

6.3.3 What the models reveal 283

6.4 Fulfilment of Research Aim 286

6.5 Contribution 287

6.5.1 Contribution to Knowledge 287

6.5.2 Contribution to Practice 292

6.5.2.1 Practical Implementation 296

6.6 Limitations and Future Research 300

6.6.1 Limitations 300

6.6.2 Future Research 300

6.7 Final Reflections 302

References 304

Appendices 412

7.1 Appendix: Literature Review 413

7.1.1 Location of Psychological Contract Literature 413

7.1.2 Methods Used to Survey Psychological Contracts 415

7.2 Appendix: Methodology 419
7.2.1 Ethical Approval 419
7.2.2 Iterations of the Q Set 420
7.2.3 Pre-Sorting Questionnaire 434
7.2.4 Recommended and actual P Sets in Q Methodology 435
7.2.5 Participation Invitations 437
7.2.6 Screenshots of Online Q Study 439
7.2.7 Screening Questionnaire 454
7.2.8 Timeline of Q Sort Submissions 456
7.3 Appendix: Data Analysis 457
7.3.1 Unrotated Factors 457
7.3.2 Factor 1 459
7.3.3 Factor 2 462
7.3.4 Factor 3 465
7.3.5 Factor 4a 469
7.3.6 Factor 4b 472
7.3.7 Factor 5 475
7.3.8 Affiliation of all Participants by Viewpoint 478
7.4 Appendix: Findings 480
7.4.1 Sample AI prompt for archetype images 480
7.5 Appendix: Presentations and Papers 484
7.5.1 PGR Conference, Worcester, June 2023 484
7.5.2 IJHRD publication, December 2024 490
7.5.3 PC Small Group, April 2025 498
7.5.4 UFHRD Conference, June 2025 508
7.5.5 German Institute for Tourism Studies, June 2025 523

Abstract

The hotel industry in Northern Germany faces labour shortages and high turnover, making employee retention a central management challenge. This study examines the structure and content of hotel employees' psychological contracts in this context, with a focus on expected employer inducements. It identifies distinct types of psychological contracts, commonly held expectations, and divergent priorities within the workforce.

Using Q Methodology, 34 employees from a diverse range of hotels in Northern Germany ranked the employer inducements they valued most and least highly, resulting in eight distinct viewpoints. These were mapped onto Rousseau's (2000) psychological contract continuum and the psychological contract cluster theory of Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003). The viewpoints ranged from strongly relational orientations emphasising loyalty, stability, and supportive leadership to balanced contracts prioritising internal and external growth. No transactional contracts were identified. One viewpoint reflected a mistrustful transitional state. All psychological contract clusters were represented, highlighting the diversity of expectations within the workforce and the need for differentiated management practices.

The study provides a highly context-specific insight into the psychological contracts of hotel employees in Northern Germany. A context-specific list of employer inducements was developed through systematic synthesis and refined by a focus group. The list was subsequently utilized as the Q Set for the main study. The findings of the Q study challenge assumptions about the linear development of psychological contracts from transactional to relational over time, showing that such patterns cannot be applied indiscriminately in this context. By applying both psychological contract types and clusters, the study demonstrates the heterogeneity of employee expectations and identifies commonly valued inducements, particularly feeling valued, having the means to perform one's role, and opportunities for career development.

Future research should examine the prevalence of the identified viewpoints across the wider workforce and evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of management strategies derived from these findings. Practitioners benefit from a practical and operationalizable set of employee archetypes developed from the viewpoints, as well as direct implications for tailored career development, job design, and recruitment strategies aimed at improving person-organisation fit.

Acknowledgements

> This is for the ones who stood their ground
> It's for Tommy and Gina who never backed down
> Tomorrow's getting harder, make no mistake
> Luck ain't enough, you've got to make your own breaks
>
> - Bon Jovi

I've been told that on the day I was born, the very first thing my grandmother did was to look at my fingers and declare: "He will be a professor someday." My mother swears it's true, and that it made her furious at the time. Three and a half decades later, these fingers have been in many places they probably shouldn't, but they have finally been busy doing something huge and meaningful. I can't claim to have done it alone, however.

I would like to first and foremost express my gratitude to Professors **Lynn** Nichol and **Robin** Bell, my supervisors. Their patience, generosity and support made the process easy, fun and interesting. Many others both at FHM Bielefeld and University of Worcester kept things running smoothly in the background - especially **Nichola** Armstrong, who was always available to render support, and the wizards at the library.

I drew enormous strength from my peer group: **Cohort 6** has given me support and advice, but most importantly much laughter. **Annika** Baumgart, **Nina** Haase, **Annika** Hesse, **Liza** Kirchberg, **Werner** Podkowik and **Anke** Trischler are among the very few people who have ever heard me sing karaoke; instead of disowning me, they stood next to me and sang along. That is not just a metaphor – this and many other adventures we had together, their friendship, are inseparable from the academic work we did and remain truly treasured memories.

A special thanks to Dr. **Annica** Lau – who is an academic mentor, eager supplier of literature, supportive co-author, and preventor of procrastination. Despite a habit of sending way too long voice messages on Sunday mornings, she has become a dear friend as well.

I am grateful to my wife **Jing**, who, in many late-night instances, encountered a ghoulish figure blasting speed metal on noise-cancelling headphones, hunched over an old keyboard, aggressively snarling at her whenever she entered the home office to share snacks or provide a hug.

Not being able to be there for her as much as I should have is the greatest sacrifice I – and she! – made for this project.

I would also like to thank the hoteliers, friends and coworkers who supported my research with so much energy, my friends who kept encouraging me, and my superiors who gave me the space and energy reserves to be able to work on this project. Finally, I thank the hard-working colleagues in the hotels who volunteered their time and often very personal insights as participants of this study. I hope my humble contribution helps improve conditions in our beautiful and exciting industry.

This work is dedicated to my late father, who gave us the gift of growing up in a house full of books; and to my mother, who always has my back no matter what mad pipe dreams I follow. This one came true, now let's see if grandma was right.

Dissemination of DBA Work

Publications

December 2024: Peer-reviewed publication:

> Rebehn, C., Nichol, L. and Bell, R. (2024) 'Northern German hotel employees' expectations of employer inducements: Development of a context-specific Q-set', *International Journal of Human Resource Development: Practice, Policy and Research*, 8(2), pp. 66–82. Available at: https://doi.org/10.2478/ijhrd-2024-0012.

Academic Conferences

June 2025: University Forum of Human Resource Development Annual Conference, Belfast (Appendix 7.5.4).

> *"Working Paper: Advocating relational HRD in academia and practice: The Psychological Contract in Germany"*
>
> Shortlisted for Alan Moon Memorial Prize as best paper in the Practitioner Research and Education Stream

April 2025: Psychological Contract Small Group Conference, Detroit (Appendix 7.5.3).

> *"Germany, the Psychological Contract is Calling: A long Pathway to Sustainable HRM"*

JUNE 2024: University Forum of Human Resource Development Annual Conference, Lisbon.

"Working paper – Extracting the components of Psychological Contracts of Hotel employees in Northern Germany"

List of Tables

Table 1: Relevant research from various locations 12
Table 2: Rousseau's (1990) contractual continuum 31
Table 3: Clusters of PC (own work, after Janssens, Sels and Van den Brande, 2003)..... 36
Table 4: Key terms in the process of a Q Study (Watts and Stenner, 2012) 124
Table 5: Topics in job adverts..... 130
Table 6: Finalized Q Set 141
Table 7: Factor arrays..... 167
Table 8: Assignment of factors to viewpoint denominators..... 202
Table 9: Key priorities of each viewpoint..... 233
Table 10: Statements with the highest average ranking across factors 235
Table 11: Statements with the lowest average ranking across factors 236
Table 12: Average ranking of statements across all factors 239
Table 13: Complete factor array with calculated variances 243
Table 14: Mapping the viewpoints to psychological contract types 272
Table 15: Mapping the viewpoints to psychological contract clusters 282
Table 16: Viewpoints with PC Type and Cluster 284
Table 17: Implementation schedule for commonly most prioritized inducements..... 297
Table 18: Locations of relevant PC literature 413
Table 19: Locations of relevant PC studies in Hotels..... 414
Table 20: Questionnaires used by previous researchers to survey the psychological contract (own work)..... 415
Table 21: Initially sourced Q Statements..... 420
Table 22: Q Set amended after focus group discussion..... 427
Table 23: Statements omitted from the final Q Set 432
Table 24: Recommended number of participants in Q Studies (own work) 435

Table 25: Sample sizes of different Q Studies (own work) 436
Table 26: Characteristics of unrotated factors 457
Table 27: Number of significant factor loadings depending on cutoff criteria for significance 458
Table 28: Questionnaire responses of flagged participants for factor 1 459
Table 29: Distinguishing statements for factor 1 461
Table 30: Crib Sheet for factor 1 461
Table 31: Questionnaire responses of flagged participants for factor 2 462
Table 32: Distinguishing statements for factor 2 464
Table 33: Crib Sheet for factor 2 464
Table 34: Questionnaire responses of flagged participants for factor 3 465
Table 35: Distinguishing statements for factor 3 468
Table 36: Crib Sheet for factor 3 468
Table 37: Questionnaire responses of flagged participants for factor 4a 469
Table 38: Distinguishing statements for factor 4a 471
Table 39: Crib Sheet for factor 4a 471
Table 40: Questionnaire responses of flagged participants for factor 4b 472
Table 41: Distinguishing statements for factor 4b 474
Table 42: Crib Sheet for factor 4b 474
Table 43: Questionnaire responses of flagged participants for factor 5 475
Table 44: Distinguishing statements for factor 5 477
Table 45: Crib Sheet for factor 5 477
Table 46: Affiliation of all participants by viewpoint..... 478

List of Figures

Figure 1: Four-dimensional PC model (Rousseau 2000)..... 33
Figure 2: Elements of PC according to (own work, based on Lambert 2011) 35
Figure 3: The six clusters of PC visualized (Lau, 2022; based on Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande, 2003; Raeder, 2009)..... 37
Figure 4: Dimensions of affective well-being (Warr 1992)..... 97
Figure 5: Process of the Q Study (own work, adapted from Damio, 2016; Paige and Morin, 2016)..... 125
Figure 6: Composite Q Sort for factor 1 170
Figure 7: Composite Q Sort for factor 2 176
Figure 8: Composite Q Sort for factor 3 180
Figure 9: Composite Q Sort for factor 4a 184
Figure 10: Composite Q Sort for factor 4b 188
Figure 11: Composite Q Sort for factor 5 192
Figure 12: Avatar for "Alex" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description) 252
Figure 13: Avatar for "Bianca" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)..... 254
Figure 14: Avatar for "Clemens" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)..... 255
Figure 15: Avatar for "Diana" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)..... 257
Figure 16: Avatar for "Elias" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description) 259
Figure 17: Avatar for "Franzi" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)..... 261
Figure 18: Avatar for "Giulio" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)..... 263
Figure 19: Avatar for "Hannah" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)..... 264

Figure 20: Psychological Contract Types by Age and Tenure (own work) 272
Figure 21: Archetypes superimposed on corresponding PC clusters (adapted from Lau 2022)..... 282
Figure 22: Ages of participants associated with viewpoints (own work) 288
Figure 23: Scree plot of unrotated factors 458

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

The economy in Northern Germany relies heavily on tourism (von Berg, 2019; Jessen-Thiesen, Schrader and Stehn, 2022). Within the diverse region, especially in rural areas, the hospitality landscape is dominated by small and family-owned hotels (Maack *et al.*, 2013). Perceived quality of lodging has been declining (dwif consulting, 2024). Hotels being primarily service businesses, it is imperative that they retain a well-trained and highly motivated workforce across the entire industry and region (Hwang *et al.*, 2014; Karatepe, Rezapouraghdam and Hassannia, 2020; Salama *et al.*, 2022). Demographic and structural changes have increased workforce diversity and shifted employee needs (Körner and Klemm, 2006; Maack *et al.*, 2013). Attracting and retaining talent in the hotel industry has become an important and complex challenge (von Freyberg, Zeugfang and Schmidt, 2019; Sauer, Garnitz and von Maltzan, 2022). In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, job satisfaction was in decline and the industry suffered significant loss of qualified labour (Dube, Nhamo and Chikodzi, 2021; Jansen and Risius, 2022). As of 2025, job satisfaction was improving again, but the need for comprehensive improvements to the working relationship remains (DI Tourismusforschung, 2025). This highlights the importance of understanding employees' needs and the expectations that employers are tasked with fulfilling in an industry sector where stable and positive employment relationships are essential for service quality and business outcomes (Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2018).

1.2 Challenges

1.2.1 Productivity

Increases in living expenses and subsequently wages drive up the cost of labour and create pressure to increase productivity: the existing workforce needs to generate more revenue, or the work needs to be streamlined to enable a smaller team to uphold quality levels and revenue generation. In the services industry, job satisfaction and motivation play a role in the quality of services rendered and organizational outcomes like productivity. Motivating employees is typically done with the goal of increasing their work efficiency – increasing the willingness of the employee to utilize their skills in a targeted action (Brandstätter and Schnelle, 2007). The permanently high turnover rates in the hospitality sector harm productivity in the industry and cause hotels' financial performance to fall behind its potential.

Recently, academics have considered the benefits of using technology to support hospitality work, including the use of robots in food service or artificial intelligence (Limna, 2023; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2024; Enes, 2024), which promise to improve productivity, and a research agenda around its benefits for the industry is being established (Jabeen, Al Zaidi and Al Dhaheri, 2022; Knani, Echchakoui and Ladhari, 2022; Law *et al.*, 2024). Interestingly, however, there are indications that AI adoption can increase burnout and turnover intention in hotel employees as they perceived psychological contract breach regarding promises of job security

(Salama *et al.*, 2025). This may hinder the positive effects of utilizing this technology to increase labour productivity.

1.2.2 Labour shortage

The shortage of qualified labour is considered a major challenge for the German hotel industry (Kalus, 2021; Top Hotels, 2021; NDR, 2022a, 2022b; Ulzer, 2022). According to Bodanowitz (2022), sick days owed to psychological illnesses increased significantly in Germany by 2022. It can be assumed that the exhaustive psychological stress that hotel employees are under contributes to high numbers of employees, although statistically accounted for, being unable to work and increasing the shortage of *available* labour, even as the numerical workforce strength has rebounded (Graefe, 2024). This is a potential threat to the regional economy since, inferring from Karatepe, Rezapouraghdam and Hassannia (2020), good service performance is paramount to keeping a destination attractive to tourists. The hospitality workforce is diverse (Madera, Dawson and Neal, 2013), often employing foreign nationals and diverse backgrounds. In 2012, the lodging industry in Germany employed 13% foreign nationals, nearly twice the average of all sectors (Maack *et al.*, 2013). The problem persists even though in 2023, there were once again more than 1.1 million people employed in the hospitality sector nationwide (Graefe, 2024). A closer look at the statistics however shows that staffing levels in hotels proper had not recovered. The number of employees does not capture the total contracted hours, the positions filled and types of

businesses that employ more; it also does not recognize absenteeism and sick leave levels, which have increased significantly. Additionally, since the pandemic, the industry has had to rely much more heavily on untrained labour than prior (Lüdecke, Seibert and Wiethölter, 2023).

The restrictions placed on the tourism industry during the Covid-19 pandemic have caused many tourism employees to move to other industries: the sector lost by far more permanent employees than any other industry (Jansen and Risius, 2022). In the aftermath, more than ever, labour shortage, alongside high turnover, is an action priority for practitioners (Salama *et al.*, 2022; Hilmes, Keller and Wolcke, 2024). It has already caused economic damage as businesses have had to reduce their service portfolio (dpa, 2022), opening times and food menus to counter the lack of staff. In 2021 in Switzerland, the hotel and restaurant sector lost on average 4% in revenues due to labour shortage. As hospitality has very small profit margins, this constitutes a major setback and a de-facto complete loss of profit for average businesses (Müggler, Liechti and Schärrer, 2022). In Northern Germany, guest satisfaction has been in steady decline since the pandemic (dwif Consulting, 2022, 2024). Besides the actual lack of qualified employees to fill positions, high turnover rates among the workforce impede on productivity and incur additional cost for hiring and training (Dogru *et al.*, 2023). Although the lack of qualified labour has at times been politically unnoticed due to faulty indicators (Müggler, Liechti and Schärrer, 2022), and became widely visible only

after the Covid-19 pandemic, practitioners and scholars have long been aware of the challenge of staff retention (Enz, 2009). The pressure to improve retention is real and has been sufficiently recognized. Yet, Dogru *et al.* (2023) accused the industry of having *"adopted an attitude of resignation."*

1.2.3 Leadership

Literature suggests that poor leadership and outdated management behaviour are still widespread in the hospitality industry. Employees identify bad managers as those with poor personal skills, insufficient professional qualifications, and unethical behaviour (Hight, Gajjar and Okumus, 2019). Physical, mental, and sexual abuse are reportedly common and culturally normalised as management tools, while apprentices receive inadequate guidance (Krüger and Guhlemann, 2018). This causes dissatisfaction with management, harms employee wellbeing and business profitability (Poulston, 2009). Shortcomings in workplace communication, destructive leadership, and poor task management skills on the part of managers fuel negative emotions and threaten employee retention (Yang, Wang and Yang, 2020). Additionally, limited supervisor feedback heightens work stress (Salama *et al.*, 2022). Fair and respectful performance appraisal processes can however enhance satisfaction and strengthen employees' psychological contracts (Ayoun *et al.*, 2022) while lack of either organizational or supervisor support leads to psychological contract breach and reduced work engagement (Shi and Gordon, 2020).

Despite longstanding calls to improve employee engagement and fulfil staff needs to create an attractive value proposition (Shi and Gordon, 2020), systemic change remains limited in North Germany.

1.2.4 Staff retention

The conditions and challenges described in this section compound to the challenge of staff retention. As stress and discomfort increase during ongoing labour shortage, it becomes harder for employers to retain their qualified employees. The need for increased retention has been widely recognized in several sources (Lu and Lu, 2020; dwif Consulting, 2022; Salama *et al.*, 2022; Dogru *et al.*, 2023; Hilmes, Keller and Wolcke, 2024; Park and Hai, 2024). It has long been recognized as a pathway for organizations towards an improved competitive position (Manolopoulos *et al.*, 2022) and a *"critical managerial issue"* (Park and Min, 2020). Hospitality employees are disproportionally inclined to leave their jobs due to challenges of work-life balance, depression, exhaustion and burnout, which constitutes a threat to the industry (Park and Min, 2020; Yan *et al.*, 2021). The Economist (2022) cites stress and psychological exhaustion as the primary factors for workers leaving the industry, dissatisfaction with working conditions being higher in service roles than other industries.

In this study, therefore, staff retention is considered the central managerial problem. By exploring the content of employees' psychological contracts, it is designed to provide practitioners with the necessary underlying knowledge to develop strategies and tools for improved staff retention.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

The researcher personally experienced the consequences of unsolved labour shortage, especially so as many colleagues left during the Covid-19 pandemic. This experience inspired the present study to help improve management practices and human resource strategies in the local hotel industry.

The psychological contract was chosen as the underlying theory for this study as it promises, when explored using a suitable research methodology, to provide both researchers and practitioners with insights into the nature of the concrete expectations that employees have of their workplace and employer and the prioritization of these expectations against one another. Exploring differences in psychological contracts was viewed by Lub *et al.* (2012) as an invaluable step towards developing suitable management styles in the hospitality industry. Practice shows that despite employers at times offering everything legally and economically possible to their employees, they still find themselves unable to retain their talents.

The following research aim has thus been formulated and the subsequent research questions developed.

Aim: To generate an understanding of the structure of the psychological contracts of hotel employees in Northern Germany, including the different viewpoints present and factors correlating with individuals' alignment to these viewpoints.

The research will answer the following questions:

Q1: What shared viewpoints exist among hotel employees in Northern Germany about the employer inducements expected in their psychological contract?

Q2: Are any inducements equally valued by employees across different viewpoints?

Q3: Which inducements are valued differently across viewpoints?

1.4 Knowledge Gap

1.4.1 Context-Specific PC Research

Several psychological contract researchers have acknowledged the limited generalizability of their research conducted in a specific local context (Abdalla *et al.*, 2021; Jung, Yoon and Aldieri, 2021; Kang *et al.*, 2021; Saleem *et al.*, 2021; Wu, Lin and Wang, 2021), while works like that of Park (2013) have themselves focussed on the differences in psychological contracts based on geography. Kraak *et al.* (2024) made a compelling case for context-specific psychological contract research. Kutaula, Gillani and Budhwar (2020) had established that employment relationships and psychological contracts are heavily dependent on cultural and national contextual factors.

While the psychological contract is a well-researched concept globally, it has thus far received relatively little attention in Germany. This was explicitly noted by Daser (2009), and the concept has been introduced in handbooks for practitioners (e.g. Kels, 2018, 2022; Raeder, 2019; Preusser and Müller, 2025), yet systematic empirical research and attention in education has remained insufficient. The body of academic work in Germany remains mostly focused on quantitative research and regarding the inquest into results rather than underlying mechanisms. Most academic publications on the psychological contract are still restricted to introductory or overview chapters (Raeder, 2007, 2019; Kels, 2022; Behrens, 2023). Some researchers have engaged with the consequences of

psychological contracts, for example on health (Rigotti, 2010; Reimann and Guzy, 2017) and well-being (Zacher and Rudolph, 2021) as well as work-family conflict (Reimann, Pausch and Diewald, 2017) or with psychological contract breaches (Rigotti, 2009; Schuster *et al.*, 2022). Other publications have researched factors impacting on psychological contracts (Raeder and Grote, 2004). Several consider the role of psychological contracts in changing environments (Hauff, 2007; Kraus and Raeder, 2008; Daser, 2009; Raeder, 2023). While several articles have been published on how practitioners can manage psychological contracts (Kels, 2022; Behrens, 2023; Solga, 2023), Festing and Schäfer (2014) developed a conceptual framework for utilizing the psychological contract in talent management and retention. Yet, the most used textbooks for human resource management (Jung, 2017; Scholz and Scholz, 2019; Stock-Homburg and Groß, 2019; Berthel and Becker, 2022; Holtbrügge, 2022) make no mention of psychological contracts. Most importantly, an exploration of the contents of psychological contracts in Germany has not been conducted.

Hotels as workplaces face specific challenges which require application of psychological contract knowledge by leaders and managers. Despite an early call from the neighbouring Netherlands for hospitality managers to develop an understanding of their employees' different psychological contracts to develop suitable management styles (Lub *et al.*, 2012), no such research could be identified to have been conducted in Germany.

Woodrow and Guest (2020) concluded that organizations ought to understand the expectations (promised contributions) of their employees and prioritize their delivery to create dependable psychological contracts. For hotel managers, understanding the psychological contract of their employees is a crucial task in retaining them and maintaining business profitability (Hui, 2021). Kraak *et al.* (2024) emphasized that academic research of the psychological contract increasingly ought to aim at solving specific problems in a regional, or sector-related context. They urged academia to improve the relationship with local stakeholders and have a meaningful impact on communities while wider-context approaches would incur the risk of organizations implementing solutions which may not be suitable for the local context. Considering this call to action, this study engages with the local community from the bottom up in exploring the psychological contract in a narrowly defined context to maximize the utility of the recommended actions developed from the findings.

1.4.2 Research on Employee Retention in the Hotel Industry

Ahmed Bin Donkor, Adda and Kweku Baidoo (2021) found that psychological contracts played an important role in the decision to stay with or leave an employer. The issue of turnover in the hospitality industry has been approached in several regional contexts, exemplary studies that informed the research proposal are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Relevant research from various locations

Region	Research undertaken
Austria	Nigg (2020)
China	Wu, Lin and Wang (2021)
Germany	Guhlemann and Best (2021); Guhlemann and Krüger (2018); Krüger and Guhlemann (2018)
Ghana	Ampofo (2021); Ampofo *et al.* (2022)
India	Agarwal (2021); Karani *et al.* (2021)
Ireland	Smith (2021)
Kenya	Kuria, Alice and Wanderi (2012)
Pakistan	Saleem *et al.* (2021)
Serbia	Demirović Bajrami *et al.* (2021)
South Korea	Jung, Yoon and Aldieri (2021); Kang *et al.* (2021); Park (2013)
USA	Park (2013)
Zanzibar	Abdalla *et al.* (2021)

In Germany, Kerstin Guhlemann has researched labour shortage in the hospitality sector in several publications: Krüger and Guhlemann (2018) attempt to synthesize a comprehensive description of working conditions, which they describe as very heterogenous. In Guhlemann and Krüger (2018), narrative interviews were used to generate and analyse working biographies to trace hospitality workers' careers and identify circumstances that cause a departure from the industry. Guhlemann and Best (2021) take this further by evaluating the possibilities of ageing with a hospitality career. None of these works specifically take the psychological contract perspective. A comprehensive description of the different viewpoints present regarding psychological contract in the hotel industry will complement these works by allowing the creation of management tools for improved understanding of employees' needs and priorities and for subsequent effective management of their career paths.

1.5 Studying Psychological Contracts of Hotel Employees

This chapter has highlighted the importance of exploring the psychological contracts of hotel employees in Northern Germany. Both the national and industry context prove to be differentiated by unique characteristics and challenges. Labour shortage is threatening economic development and is only expected to grow in the coming decades.

Due to the uniqueness of the context, developing specialized HRM and HRD strategies is warranted. Despite the strategic importance of human resource management for the hotel industry (von Freyberg, Zeugfang and Schmidt, 2019), the psychological contract has been only insufficiently recognized and utilized as a lens for understanding and tool for managing employees and improving staff retention.

Three research questions are formulated under the aim of generating an understanding for the content and structure of psychological contracts within the workforce of Northern German hotels. The findings inform practical recommendations towards improved employee retention, and further research.

The following chapter explores existing literature on the psychological contract and other concepts related to the identified challenge and intended contribution to inform research design and interpretation of findings.

1.6 Positionality Statement

In line with Heron's (1996) insistence that values guide all human action, a view supported by many other researchers (e.g. Allen-Meares, 1995; Mackieson, Shlonsky and Connolly, 2019), and that researchers ought to provide a statement of the values as they relate to the topic studied, a brief summary of the researcher's personal values and motivations shall provide the reader of this study with an understanding of its direction and focus. This is particularly important as the findings may contradict traditional beliefs and behaviours of employers while adopting a singular perspective (that of employees) on a broad issue with multiple stakeholders. The present study reflects the researcher's personal beliefs about which aspect of the hotel industry is most urgently to be addressed, choosing a sample of participants from only one stakeholder group with likely mostly convergent beliefs and viewpoints.

> *The researcher has over a decade of experience working in hospitality operations, and subsequently worked with hotel owners and managers as a consultant. Over this period, he frequently observed high levels of employee dissatisfaction and turnover, including in himself, which was often linked to unmet promises, limited recognition, and management practices ostensibly prioritizing business imperatives over employee well-being. These experiences fostered the perspective that employees are frequently*

undervalued and seen as resources rather than regarded as individuals requiring tailored support and individual recognition.

This background informs the researcher's focus on frontline employees, whose values and expectations he seeks to foreground in this study. The positionality adopted is thus shaped by professional experiences at operational and middle-management levels, suggesting a bias toward the perspectives of frontline staff and limited engagement with managerial, administrative and entrepreneurial viewpoints. Future research into the psychological contracts of middle and senior managers would complement this study and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of human resource and leadership strategies in the industry.

The values that framed this project and informed its aim are thus rooted in the researcher's personal experience gathered in a variety of contexts within the hospitality industry. This study, while developing actionable recommendations for managers and strategists, is conducted from the perspective of the employees and seeks, first and foremost, to aid in improving their immediate situation. Desirable organizational outcomes are secondary.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Outline

This narrative literature review introduces and explores key concepts which were identified from reviewing the context and background:

- **Psychological contracts**, the subjective beliefs about the terms of an exchange relationship, are introduced in section 2.2 and form the primary theoretical framework for this research project.
- **Labour shortage** is the underlying problem faced by practitioners. Section 2.4 reviews hotel employees' reasons for leaving and staying in the industry or with their employer.
- **Job satisfaction** is considered an antecedent for low turnover. Section 2.5 reviews literature about the theory.
- **Generational differences** in values regarding work and their effects on employee perceptions are reviewed in section 2.6 to establish an understanding of possible differences in how work is being perceived and evaluated.
- **Core elements** of employment exchanges in hotels such as remuneration, job security, career advancement opportunities and person-job fit are reviewed in section 2.7 as they influence the expectations and priorities of employees.
- **Well-being** of employees as a complimentary concept to job satisfaction and turnover is being discussed in section 2.8.
- **Work-life balance** has been a prominent topic in relation to well-being and job satisfaction. Its influence and role in hotel employment is reviewed in section 2.9.
- **Stress** is a major factor in hotel work. It takes on a unique role in this environment, literature about which is being reviewed in section 2.10.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the role psychological contracts play in the interplay of these concepts and contextual factors.

2.2 The Psychological Contract

The term **"psychological contract"** refers to the informal, subjective understanding of the exchange relationship between two parties – most commonly the concept is being used in the research of employee-employer relationships.

> The term *psychological contract* refers to an individual's beliefs regarding the terms and conditions of a reciprocal exchange agreement between that focal person and another party.
>
> - Rousseau (1989)

The research project focused on these perceptions as held by employees of hotel businesses in Northern Germany, the individual employee being the *focal person* and their employer – this being the organization rather than a person – the *other party*.

This section reviews key debates in psychological contract research and their implications for the research design. It considers how and where psychological contracts have been studied, highlighting the gap in relation to German hotels. The discussion then links psychological contract theory to working conditions and challenges in the hotel industry, before examining its role within this context and its relevance to established workplace characteristics.

2.2.1 Origins and Trajectory of Psychological Contract Research

The employment relationship has long been framed as an exchange. Originally, the employee was considered a passive party in the transaction as they were merely selling their labour (Simon, 1951). Later, the concept of social exchange theory (Blau, 2017) began considering the agency of the employee and the relational aspects of the employment relationship. Different concepts like perceived organizational support or leader-member exchange were developed; psychological contracts define the terms of the exchange relationship (Dulac *et al.*, 2008).

A watershed in the understanding of psychological contracts was when Rousseau (1989) defined psychological contracts to be defined by *promises* causing *obligations*, rather than *expectations*. The impact of this shift led Conway and Briner (2009) to differentiate between the *"pre-Rousseau period"* and "*Rousseau period"* of psychological contract research. A surge of research activity followed examining psychological contract breach and violation, reflecting the changing nature of work (in North America) during this period (Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Robinson and Morrison, 1995; Rousseau, 1995; Freese and Schalk, 1996; Robinson, 1996; Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, 2000). Psychological contract research has branched out ever further. More recently, research has been examining its role in the interplay of other concepts; research exists on the role of psychological contracts in job satisfaction,

commitment, and turnover (Rayton and Yalabik, 2014; Li and Chen, 2018; Ampofo, 2021; Ayoun *et al.*, 2022), health and well-being (Reimann and Guzy, 2017; Karani *et al.*, 2021) or work-life balance (Kaya and Karatepe, 2020). Most recently, scholars have turned their attention to the influence of context on psychological contracts and emphasized context-specific research (Kutaula, Gillani and Budhwar, 2020; Kraak *et al.*, 2024).

2.2.2 Formation and Function of Psychological Contracts

The psychological contract of employees begins to form during the hiring process (Karatepe, Rezapouraghdam and Hassannia, 2020). Psychological contracts provide an orientation for employees to adjust their behaviours according to their employer's fulfilment or non-fulfilment of expectations (Conway and Briner, 2006; Reimann and Guzy, 2017; Estreder *et al.*, 2021). They help employees gauge predictability and control of their work environment as well as uncertainty regarding their employment conditions. Shore and Tetrick (1994) argued that psychological contracts arise even where formalized contracts or collective bargaining agreements exist and supplement these to reduce uncertainty for the employee. They are also a self-monitoring tool guiding employees to serve organizational goals even without supervision, as the employee expects an eventual reward for working towards organizational goals. Lastly, the authors argued, the psychological contract gives the employee the feeling of being in control of their destiny by controlling their level of contribution. The

underlying theme is the reduction of uncertainty left behind by the shortcomings of formal contracts which are unable to remove all ambiguity, and implied contracts based on observable patterns of action (Rousseau, 1989).

Mehta *et al.* (2022) positioned the psychological contract at the intersection of social exchange theory, organizational support theory and social information processing theory, arguing that multi-lens approach improves the understanding of the elements and layers of the psychological contract.

In 2005, Denise Rousseau suggested a model for incorporating psychological contracts into working arrangements and formalized agreements. This model, the *"I-Deal"*, suggests that instead of standardized contracts and collectively bargained agreements, individuals could voluntarily negotiate terms of their employment freely in accordance with their and their employer's psychological contracts. The idea is a deviation from equal work arrangements for all and towards highly individual conditions. These conditions are negotiated between the employee and employer purely based on their needs and preferences. This contradicts prevailing culture in Germany, where collective agreements and legal frameworks have a large influence on work (Giardini, Kabst and Müller-Camen, 2005). It has also been found that the negotiation of *I-Deals* can elicit negative reactions from coworkers as perceived fairness may be impacted (Van

Waeyenberg *et al.*, 2022). Lee, Hong and Rupp (2023) all this a *"justice paradox"* as *I-Deals* include both elements of fairness and unfairness.

While *I-Deals* have a positive effect on work engagement (Sumaneeva, Karadas and Avci, 2021), in many hotel roles, *I-Deals* are naturally further limited by predetermined conditions such as required availability for shifts, behavioural standards and guest needs. Negotiation of *I-Deals* is easier for managers, who may nonetheless need to make a compelling case in the negotiation (Sun and Wang, 2024). At present, a widespread use of *I-Deals* in the Northern German hotel industry is not discernible. Rather, collective bargaining agreements continue to be strengthened (NGG, 2024; Landesregierung Schleswig-Holstein, 2025). The *"justice paradox"* shows that implementation is a difficult balancing act for supervisors while the organizational circumstantial requirements greatly limit the possible flexibility, and the negative effects of widespread use of *I-Deals* may outweigh the benefits.

2.2.3 Parties to the Psychological Contract

Debate persists on whether psychological contracts represent agreements between two or more parties (Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018) or whether they are individual constructs. The nature of an individual psychological contract is not always evident to the individuals living it (Persson and Wasieleski, 2015; Chan, 2020), making it harder to describe.

2.2.3.1 Advocates of a Unilateral Approach

Rousseau's work (Rousseau, 1989, 1990, 1995; Rousseau and McLean Parks, 1993; Robinson and Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998; Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018) laid the foundation for a school of thought that focuses on the belief that psychological contracts, unlike explicit contracts, are held by a single individual, and that this sets them apart from the latter.

Herriot, Manning and Kidd (1997) deducted that each party may hold different perceptions of what the obligations are, and that, following Kotter's (1973) argument that organizations could not hold perceptions, the psychological contract was a matter of the employee alone. This aligns with the belief of other researchers (Rousseau and McLean Parks, 1993; Shore and Tetrick, 1994) that different parties of the exchange may hold different psychological contracts given the multiple sources of information influencing it (Levinson *et al.*, 1962). The notion that agents of an organization, like managers, can hold psychological contracts of their own about the relationship with the (subordinate) employee, was incorporated by Herriot, Manning and Kidd (1997) into their framework and acknowledged by Raeder (2007). Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou (2018) appreciated that early attempts at operationalizing mutual relationships were fraught with difficulty as organizations are represented by numerous such agents. Employees' perceptions of the exchange relationship with their supervisor however strongly influence their perceptions about

the exchange relationship with the organization (Wayne, Shore and Liden, 1997; Irai, Arrowsmith and Junaid, 2025). Shore and Tetrick (1994) agreed that different parties may hold different psychological contracts but nonetheless believed that the psychological contract is an agreement both the employee and the organization chose to engage in, and both are accountable for its fulfilment. However, the organization's agreement may only be implied, thus causing the *employee* to create the psychological contract.

Freese and Schalk (2008) criticized that the unilateral view limits the assessment to an intra-personal view and neglects the interpersonal aspects of interaction and social constructionism. Yet they argued that assessment of a psychological contract ought to preferably be done adopting a unilateral approach since the psychological contract of the organization, if it exists at all, is held by a variety of agents and thus a bilateral approach would have to assume unity on the organizational side of the contract. More recent authors have furthered this argument by conceptualizing psychological contracts in multilateral employment relationships common in the contemporary collaborative and gig economy (Knapp, Diehl and Dougan, 2019; Tekleab *et al.*, 2019; Sherman and Morley, 2020) or by proposing to, in the light of eroded hierarchies and flexibilization of employment relationships, do away with the concept of the psychological contract altogether and replacing it, for instance, with the concept of the *"Social Contract at Work"* (Korczynski, 2023).

2.2.3.2 Advocates of a Bilateral Approach

Others prefer a bilateral view capturing the contributions of both parties (Sherman and Morley, 2020). Rousseau herself (2004) agreed that mutuality is the *"gold standard"* but almost impossible to achieve as the parties would always hold differing perceptions about the fulfilment of the agreement, with parties continuously rating their own level of fulfilment higher than the opposing party does. This is supported by the findings by Tekleab and Taylor (2003).

The psychological contract, according to Herriot, Manning and Kidd (1997), consists of

> "… the perceptions of mutual obligations to each other held by the two parties in the employment relationship, the organization and the employee. Such perceptions may be the result of formal contracts, or they may be implied by the expectations which each holds of the other and which are communicated in a multitude of subtle or not so subtle ways."

They thus echoed Schein (1970), who had defined the psychological contract as a variety of expectations of person and organization towards another. Advocates of the bilateral approach consider the agents of an organization to be part of the agreement. ten Brink (2004) noted that supervisors play an important role in the fulfilment and breach of psychological contracts. One study that incorporated this notion is that by Chen,

Tsui and Zhong (2008). Freese and Schalk (2008) argue that a bilateral approach is useful to assess differences in perspective among employees and supervisors. Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000) stated that viewing the relationship from both perspectives gives full insight into the mutuality of obligations.

Raeder (2007) however consistently sided with Schein (1970) and contested Rousseau's (1989) definition, arguing that a psychological contract viewed as one existing between two parties more closely resembled the legal definition of a contract. The issue of congruence, meaning identical and explicit statements of intent to enter the contract, may be contestable in the realm of the psychological contract, which is characterized by its *implicit* nature. A distinction has thus to be made between a legal contract and the psychological contract. The suitability of the term *contract* may thus be debatable in principle, an issue that was raised by Guest (1998). No alternative name for the concept has evolved, either in German or English, and so it continues to stand awkwardly next to the clear definition of the legal term *contract*. However, Raeder (2007) argued that over time, the psychological contracts of both sides increasingly converged.

Raeder and Grote (2004) cited Manning (1992) defining the psychological contract as *"… the achieved state when there has been a matching of what the individual will give with what the organisation expects to receive, and what the organisation will give relative to what the individual expects to receive."* This implies that it, much like a legal contract, is only

constituted when agreement is achieved, and only contains the agreed upon contributions and expectations of both parties and neglects the very nature of the psychological contract as Rousseau (1989) had perceived it. Freese and Schalk (2008) argued similarly that *"a psychological contract is literally psychological. That is to say, it is by definition an individual perception."*

2.2.3.3 Summary

Two schools of thought continue to exist: the first, prevalent in the United States following Rousseau and the idea that psychological contracts are implicit and unilaterally built on expectations; and secondly the one advocated by some European researchers (Manning, 1992; Raeder and Grote, 2004) following the bilateral understanding of Schein (1970). While the former allows for the integration of subjective perceptions and elements which had not been agreed on into the psychological contract, the latter argues that seeing it only through the lens of the employee neglects the interactive element of the employment relationship and the reciprocal nature of exchanges. Nonetheless, the boundary between both schools of thought is fluid. Rousseau (1995) stated that only obligations are to be considered part of the psychological contract which have been explicitly promised, acknowledging organisational agents as parties to the contract but excluding them from analysis (Rousseau, 1989). Likewise, Raeder and Grote (2004, p. 143) explained that, especially in smaller companies, explicit promises of obligations are widely absent, but organizations can

nonetheless offer contributions of their own which then constitute obligations in the mind of the employee. Sherman and Morley (2020) noted a general convergence on Rousseau's definition of the psychological contract in recent years.

2.2.3.4 The Approach Taken

In a research project, it must therefore be decided whether the psychological contract is to be viewed as a mental model in the eye of the individual, meaning the network of obligations, contributions and expectations an individual subjectively perceives; or as an agreed upon basis for an exchange relationship between two parties.

While the argument for seeing the entire organizational context of the psychological contract (Raeder and Grote, 2004; Raeder, 2007) is acknowledged, the purpose of this study is to explore the psychological contract from the perspective of the employee. This has several reasons:

First, in the current labour market, employees hold the bargaining power and employers are forced into competition for the available professionals; furthermore, employee retention and lifelong employment are becoming increasingly important. It is therefore crucial for employers to understand the perspective of their employees and which obligations they place on their organizations and supervisors.

Second, the symptoms of labour shortage and low job satisfaction indicate clearly that within the local hotel industry, convergence of the parties'

psychological contracts is very low and thus the reciprocal understanding minimal. This may be in part owed to generational or cultural differences in the highly diverse workplace, but also the high degree of work flexibility - Raeder and Grote (2004) showed that the higher the degree of work flexibility, the lesser psychological contracts of managers and employees converged. Focussing on the exchange aspect would likely guide the research towards the surface-level symptom of psychological contract breaches and their results, rather than exploring the underlying reasons and illuminating pathways towards better fulfilment of employees' concepts of contribution and obligation, thus *prevent* psychological contract breach.

Third, as academic research in the German and Central European context has focused on the term *contract* and aligned understanding of psychological contract closely with the narrow legal definition of contracts; the subjective aspect has not been sufficiently explored in the relevant context, and important implicit and subjective aspects of the employees' thought models may remain undiscovered.

Fourth, as hotel employees exhibit a high degree of mobility, they will experience a variety of organisations, leadership styles, and working conditions throughout their lifetime (Guhlemann and Krüger, 2018; Guhlemann and Best, 2021). Therefore, they will form expectations a priori, which may not be considered part of the psychological contract according to strict definitions (Rousseau, 1995) but nonetheless influence their

assessment of conditions and contributions. Exploring the varieties of these experience-formed individual understandings of the employment relationship would be helpful for employers.

2.2.4 Types and Elements of Psychological Contracts

What distinguishes a psychological contract from a formal contract is the element of variability, their tendency to change as reaction to any number of external or internal changes (Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2018). The terminology is however inconsistent, with no commonly agreed upon distinction between the terms *expectation*, *obligation* and *promise* having been made, which has drawn criticism and made it difficult for contemporary researchers to distinguish between definitions of the psychological contract (Hansen, 2019).

2.2.4.1 Dimensions and Types of PC

Psychological contracts may in principle be relational or transactional in nature, as opposite ends to a continuum (see Table 2): MacNeil (1985) having perceived this divide, Rousseau (1990) categorized a transactional contract as one involving working overtime and taking on new responsibilities, for which employees expect high performance-related pay, training, and professional growth in return. Transactional contracts are considered those of shorter duration, or newer employee relationship focussing on economic transactions. Relational contracts, on the contrary, are understood to develop only after a prolonged exchange of service for job security, and mutual loyalty. They have a wider range of influences and

ends, are pervasive and, contrary to transactional contracts, dynamic. Transactional psychological contracts are mostly restricted to what has been explicitly agreed, i.e., in the employment contract. Once a relational contract evolves, expectations and contributions grow beyond the explicit scope. It has been established that organizations need employees who go above and beyond their contractual obligations, called extra-role behaviour or organizational citizenship behaviour (Morrison, 1994).

Table 2: Rousseau's (1990) contractual continuum

Contract Type	Transactional	Relational
Focus	Economic, extrinsic	Non-economic, socio-emotional, intrinsic
Time frame	Close-ended, specific	Open-ended, indefinite
Stability	Static	Dynamic
Scope	Narrow	Pervasive
Tangibility	Public, observable	Subjective, understood

[Reproduction of textual content only, visual form is author's creation]

In an employment relationship, an employee may be situated anywhere on this continuum depending on a variety of factors, and their psychological contract may contain relational and transactional elements at the same time. The dynamism that characterizes psychological contracts means that employees may move back and forth between these poles, although the consensus is that with longer existence of the psychological contract, it will develop a more relational nature.

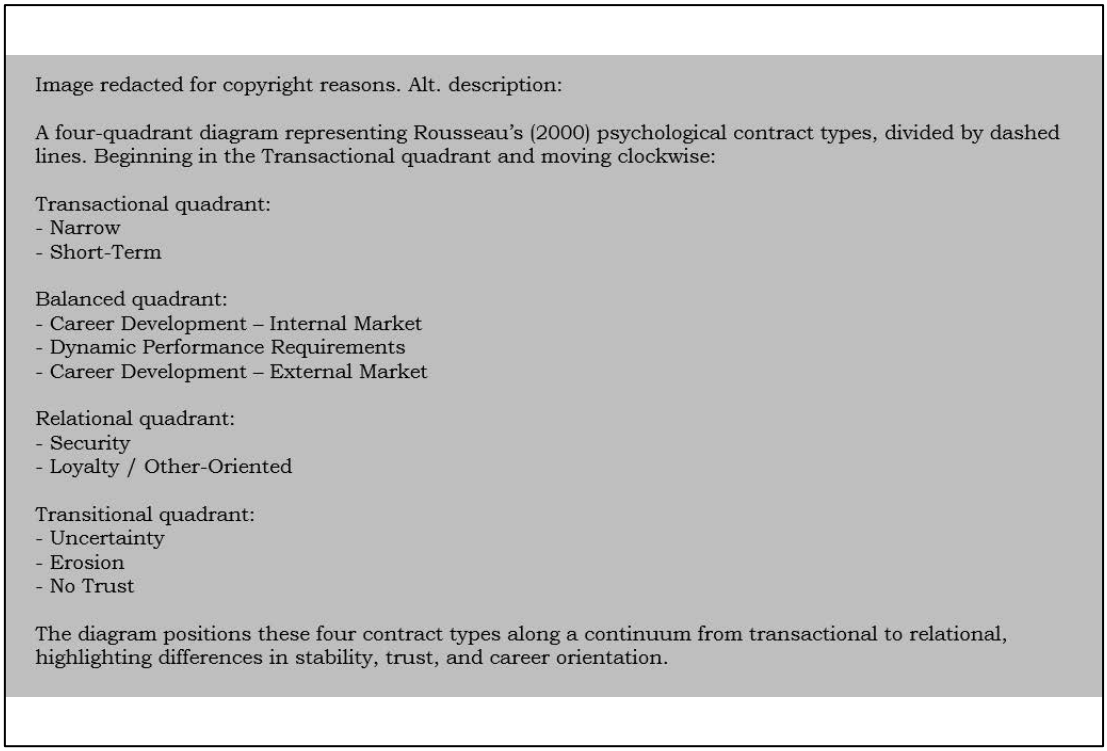
While scholars continue to follow this framework, the distinction between two poles of a continuum has been criticized as oversimplifying the structure of psychological contracts; Coyle-Shapiro and Parzefall (2008)

argued that different interactions may be classified at different positions on the continuum. Following Rogozińska-Pawełczyk (2018), Chan (2020) noted that individuals can hold mixed psychological contracts, containing both transactional and relational elements, and that local culture plays a role in the weighting of the two. Rousseau herself (2000) developed a more detailed depiction of the continuum (Figure 1): Derived from the transactional-relational continuum (MacNeil, 1985; Rousseau and Wade-Benzoni, 1994; Rousseau, 1995), this model allows for a greater distinction between contract types (Rousseau, 2000), clearly defines the "balanced psychological contract" between the extremes and adds the transitional state that a psychological contract may be in. It places types and sub-types into relation with one another. It also departs from the one-dimensional continuum idea and instead theorizes that psychological contracts may be positioned on a four-dimensional plane, suggesting that contracts may develop in multiple possible directions. Moreover, Rogozińska-Pawełczyk (2018) showed that the lower the rank an employee holds, the more likely they are to hold a transactional contract, while employers tended to increasingly install relational contracts. This is likely of importance in examining the psychological contracts of employees at different levels in their organizations as fulfilment strategies would have to differ.

Psychological contracts also change over time, as circumstances evolve or the employment relationship continues, amassing positive or negative

influences on the employee's psychological contract. Specifically, continued breaches alter the employees' psychological contract over time (Freese and Schalk, 1996; Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi, 2020).

Figure 1: Four-dimensional PC model (Rousseau 2000)



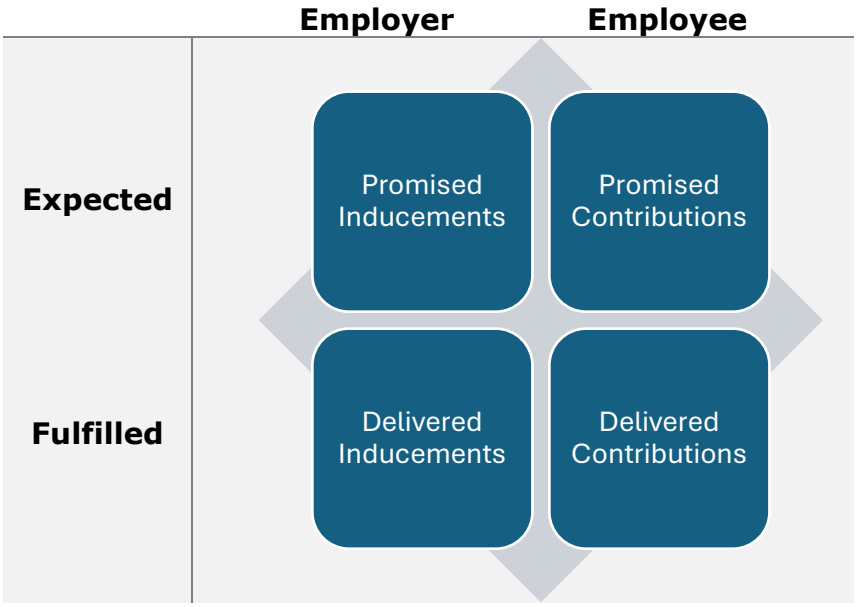
Along this continuum, it has been shown that psychological contract type affects how supervisors mentor their subordinates, which in turn affects performance (Shih, Lin and Lee, 2024). The definitions provided by Rousseau (2000), particularly for the newly introduced dimensions, are not very elaborate and have not been significantly expanded on by subsequent literature on the topic - Ntalianis and Dyer (2021) noted that balanced psychological contracts had received little attention but do not engage in an in-depth definition, focusing instead on the influence of personality traits on balanced contracts. Likewise, Chaudhry, Coyle-Shapiro

and Wayne (2011) were concerned with influences on psychological contracts.

According to Lambert (2011), a psychological contract consists of four elements: *promised inducements*, *delivered inducements*, *promised contributions*, and *delivered contributions*. These can be arranged as shown in Figure 2. This figure illustrates the theory that promises are equally made by both sides of the exchange relationship, and both parties are obliged to deliver on those promises.

Scholars have argued that the sequence is not parallel, but that contributions are delivered after an assessment of promised and delivered inducements (Robinson and Morrison, 1995; Kraak *et al.*, 2024). However, Lambert (2011) argued for a simultaneous assessment of inducements and contributions, and for generating an understanding of how employees evaluate their psychological contract in its entirety.

Figure 2: Elements of PC according to (own work, based on Lambert 2011)



Raeder (2007) elaborated on the importance of the influence of fairness on the alignment of the psychological contract, arguing that fairness (*"Gerechtigkeit"*) was not usually considered an element of the psychological contract, though researched as a mediator in the seriousness of breaches. Overall organizational fairness, or adherence to the (implied) rules or fair interaction is considered a crucial element in motivation, organizational commitment and loyalty (Raeder and Grote, 2004), was found to improve the alignment of the psychological contract and soften the negative effects of breaches and violations (Robinson and Morrison, 2000; Kickul, Lester and Finkl, 2002; Raeder, 2007).

Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003) conceived a dynamic model with six different clusters of psychological contracts, accommodating the understanding that they may rank differently on the various conceived

dimensions and change in different ways for individuals. They proposed measuring the psychological contract along six dimensions: *tangibility*, *scope*, *stability*, *time frame*, *exchange symmetry*, and *contract level* , adding to the four-dimensional model rooted in contract theory (Rousseau, 2000) the concepts of *exchange symmetry* (hierarchy and inequality), and *contract level* – individually regulated vs. collectively regulated contracts; this directly relates to the issue of *I-Deals* and collective bargaining agreements (see section 2.2.2) – which were developed from multi-national studies of the psychological contract (Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande, 2003; Sels, Janssens and Van Den Brande, 2004). The dimensions were operationalized in terms of employee and employer obligations and measured on Likert scales. By measuring the respectively perceived intensity of each party's obligations, six 'clusters' of psychological contracts were developed (Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande, 2003), which are illustrated in Table 3.

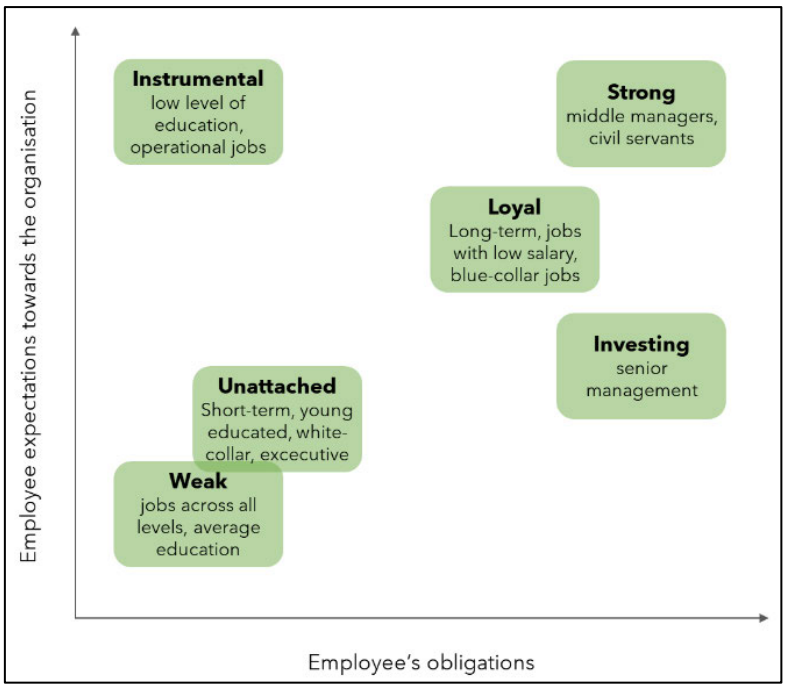
Table 3: Clusters of PC (own work, after Janssens, Sels and Van den Brande, 2003)

Psychological Contract	Expectations from Employer	Obligations towards Employer
Instrumental	High	Low
Weak	Low	Low
Loyal	Moderate	High
Strong	High	High
Unattached	Low	Low
Investing	Moderate	High

Figure 3, composed by Lau (2022), illustrates how the six clusters stand in relation to each other and which types of employees would typically be expected to hold these contracts. Based on the demographic data

collected for participants in each cluster, the authors generated assumptions on which types of employee are likely to hold which type of psychological contract. Based on the findings by Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003), it can be assumed that the psychological contracts of hotel employees will fall into the *instrumental*, *unattached*, or *weak* clusters; longer-term employees might hold contracts best classified as *loyal*.

Figure 3: The six clusters of PC visualized (Lau, 2022; based on Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande, 2003; Raeder, 2009)



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Coyle-Shapiro *et al.* (2019) pointed out that contemporary psychological contracts may also include a component of ideological currency (Thompson and Bunderson, 2003), whereby employees expect their organization to provide the context for the employee to contribute to a specific ideological cause. The authors claimed that research about ideological components in the psychological contract was still in its infancy but would likely

be of growing importance for future research in the psychological contract. This is supported by the findings of Goh and Baum (2021), who found that *Gen Z* employees were motivated to work in quarantine hotels due to the societal respect this work summoned, but also the idea of making the world safer through their work. Coyle-Shapiro *et al.* (2019) also called for greater attention to be paid on the issue of employee health in the context of psychological contracts and the fulfilment of psychological needs. The role of context is also considered to be of interest for future researchers (Johns, 2017; Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019).

2.2.4.2 Breaches and Violations

Psychological contract breach occurs when employees perceive that the organization has failed to deliver on promised obligations. Such breaches may arise from organizational conditions, contextual changes, or individual factors shaped by personality or past experiences (Rousseau, 1990; Herriot, Manning and Kidd, 1997). Research suggests that employees consciously evaluate their contributions against received inducements to determine fulfilment or breach (Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019) When a psychological contract breach is accompanied by an intense emotional reaction, scholars consider a *violation of the psychological contract* to have occurred (Morrison and Robinson, 1997; Robinson and Morrison, 2000).

Breaching relational contracts incurs more severe consequences than transactional ones; undermining willingness to engage in organizational citizenship and extra-role behaviour (Moorman, 1991; Herriot, Manning

and Kidd, 1997). Consequences typically include reduced performance, lower motivation, diminished commitment, and increased turnover intention (Rousseau, 1995; Chen, Tsui and Zhong, 2008; Sheehan *et al.*, 2019).

However, supportive organizational contexts and high-quality leader–member exchange can mitigate emotional reactions and preserve trust despite breaches (Dulac *et al.*, 2008). More recently, breach has been framed as a dynamic process, suggesting that fostering strong social exchange relationships and organizational support may limit its negative impact on productivity, service quality, and employee well-being (Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019).

Meanwhile, Kraak, Griep and Altman (2024) found, as they claim for the very first time, evidence of widespread destructive behaviour by employers in the hospitality industry, where employers actively and purposefully worked towards a violation of psychological contracts as a means of forcing employees to resign.

2.2.4.3 Implicitness

Freese and Schalk (1996) noted that the expectations employees had towards the exchange relationship were often vague and revealed only once they turned out to not have been fulfilled. This may be the reason why most literature is concerned with psychological contract breach, as the issue becomes visible when the symptom has occurred. Herriot, Manning and Kidd (1997) showed that managers and employees were in danger of

holding different psychological contracts even where some congruence was initially found.

2.2.4.4 Expectations

Expectations are formed through interaction with the organization, observing others, and human resource practices (Rousseau and Greller, 1994; Freese and Schalk, 1996). Psychological contract scholars continue to debate whether psychological contracts consist of expectations (Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018). Rousseau (1990) pre-emptively warned of confusing expectations with obligations. Not all expectations form obligations, which are constituted through promises, and one that does not, will not be part of the psychological contract. Rousseau and McLean Parks (1993) argued that while *"all contracts are expectations, but not all expectations are contracts."* It is worth noting that in the process of research design, the term *"expectations of hotel employees"* features prominently, when a Rousseau-style definition of the psychological contract would have to disregard the employees' expectations and focus entirely on *obligations*. At the same time, Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou (2018) acknowledged the debate on whether expectations are part of psychological contracts while Hansen and Griep (2016) acknowledged the role of expectations as a source of information. Although the variety of terminologies may mislead the reader subscribing to Rousseau's definitions, this study takes the perspective of employees and the inducements they *expect their employers to oblige themselves to provide*. As

shown in the next chapter, the inducements in question are derived from explicit *promises* that employers have made (Rebehn, Nichol and Bell, 2024), recognising that such expectations are formed based on prior experiences or benchmarking of exchange relationships through peers.

2.2.5 Psychological Contract Literature

> "From time to time, the psychological contract content has changed. Many scholars … have highlighted the need for examining the psychological contract contents in order to form a satisfactory understanding about the employment relationships."
>
> - Mehta *et al.* (2022)

This section explores existing psychological contract literature with regards to its respective location and cultural background. Literature with a Western cultural background still dominates, potentially eclipsing the individualities of other contexts (Kutaula, Gillani and Budhwar, 2020; Kraak *et al.*, 2024).

2.2.5.1 Location of Studies on the Psychological Contract

Research on the psychological contract is bountiful and has, in the recent years alone, grown exponentially. However, the concept is not of interest in all locations equally as Table 18 (Appendix 7.1.1) shows. Hotel employees have been of interest for psychological contract researchers in recent years as well. Table 19 lists their respective locations. It is evident that

the concept has been receiving attention around the world, yet not everywhere in the same intensity. Contrary to the studies on psychological contracts overall (Table 18), research on psychological contracts of hotel employees is underrepresented in Europe.

According to Kutaula, Gillani and Budhwar (2020) the contextual factors are thus far underrepresented in research, which has instead traditionally adopted what the authors call *"Western-based research"* and widely disregarded local cultural aspects. Mehta *et al.* (2022) also criticized that most of the psychological contract literature and research had been done in *"the West"*. Similarly, Kraak *et al.* (2024) noted that most literature on the psychological contract had been confined to *"WEIRD"* (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Democratic) societies. Nonetheless, the psychological contract has been researched plentifully in other contexts (see Appendix 7.1.1). These studies follow the conventional definitions and perspectives, however, and may not do sufficient justice to their respective societies and cultures. The current study was conducted in Germany. Hence, the philosophies underlying most of the impactful psychological contract research will be well applicable, while special aspects of the context must be considered.

However, within the in no way homogenous *"Western"* context, differences in psychological contracts can be determined; for example, Feierabend, Pfrombeck and Schärrer (2019) managed to establish noticeable differences between natives and foreigners in Switzerland, suggesting

that cultural heritage, besides the local context, plays a role in the creation of the psychological contract. Kraak *et al.* (2024) called for more research to be done giving voice to underrepresented groups, as most research was concerned with white-collar employees. Raeder (2007) criticized that most literature on the psychological contract up to that point had been conducted in the USA among MBA students, while in Europe, more research had been done in organizational contexts. However, she noted that very few qualitative studies had been conducted and if so, usually in interview form. This does not appear to have changed significantly in the years since.

In one of the few cases of multinational research on psychological contracts, Chan (2020) noted a difference between her Australian and Malaysian subjects, finding that the Malaysian participants of the study held a more relational contract, while their Australian counterparts held a more transactional one. This was due to a higher level of managerialism in the subjects' jobs than it was the case in Malaysia. This stood in contrast to findings on the nature of psychological contracts according to the power distance of the local culture (Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2018). In any case, this example shows that local and contextual factors, including the way jobs and working relationships in comparable jobs are designed, likely define the nature of the psychological contract.

2.2.5.2 Cross-Cultural Applicability

While Hui *et al.* (2004) found that the general categories of psychological contracts (relational, balanced, and transactional) can be found across cultures, many researchers acknowledged that collecting data from a single region or culturally homogenous community did not allow for generalization of the structure, importance and contents of the psychological contract (Abdalla *et al.*, 2021; Jung, Yoon and Aldieri, 2021; Kang *et al.*, 2021; Saleem *et al.*, 2021; Wu, Lin and Wang, 2021), and called for more research to be done in other environments. Therefore, this study focuses on a region and industry for which no specific knowledge regarding the psychological contract has yet been generated.

As an example for subtle differences in context that influence the psychological contract, Henselek (1999) defines *"management"* (an Anglicism imported into the German language) and *leadership* (*"Führung"*) as synonymous. This shows that to Germans, the concepts are overlapping while English-speakers would differentiate between them.

As several authors (Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019; Kutaula, Gillani and Budhwar, 2020; Abdalla *et al.*, 2021; Saleem *et al.*, 2021; Wu, Lin and Wang, 2021; Kraak *et al.*, 2024) pointed out, context and culture affect the nature of psychological contracts and the severity of reaction to and effects of breach. Rogozińska-Pawełczyk (2018) argued that power distance influenced whether the psychological contract is more relational or transactional, which Chan (2020) incorporated in her summary of the

role collectivism, flexibility and interaction in the establishment of the psychological contract. In general, individuals with a collectivist nature (from a collectivist culture) were found to hold more relational contracts than those with individualistic natures.

Sels, Janssens and Van Den Brande (2004, p. 468) listed key elements of psychological contracts in different countries and expressed the striking differences between even neighbouring and seemingly culturally similar countries like The Netherlands, Belgium, and France; as well differences between countries that are historically, economically and linguistically closely related (United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand). Coyle-Shapiro *et al.* (2019) cited several studies proving that culture plays a significant role in how employees react to psychological contract breach. All this underlines the importance for context-specific psychological contract research and application.

2.2.6 Criticism of the Psychological Contract

Despite its popularity, the psychological contract has been subject to criticism. Cullinane and Dundon (2006) criticized it as *"ideologically biased"* and designed for a *"managerialist interpretation"* of employment. ten Brink (2004) argued that the concept may be too narrow to capture how employees evaluate exchange relationships, pointing to equity theory (Adams, 1965), which suggests that fulfilment and breach are judged relative to peers. This view echoes findings on individual differences in sensitivity to unfair treatment (Kickul and Lester, 2001). Some studies at the turn

of the millennium suggested that peer comparisons mattered little, and that fulfilment was more strongly related to the absolute level of what employees received, regardless of obligations or expectations (e.g., ten Brink, 2004, p. 20). Such results cast doubt on the explanatory power of the psychological contract, implying that "more is more." ten Brink (2004) nonetheless acknowledged the methodological difficulty of capturing these comparison processes and proposed the "state of the psychological contract" as a content-focused framework of employee perceptions. This extension, however, still neglects the subjective value and meaning employees attach to organizational offerings. As such, while critiques highlight limitations in scope and measurability, the concept remains a useful foundation for examining job satisfaction, engagement, task design, and leadership (Rousseau, 1989; Raeder and Grote, 2004; Lambert, 2011). Fundamental criticism of the psychological contract appears to have all but died down in the past 20 years. A notable exception is the paper by Korczynski (2023), which claims an over-involvement of psychologists in researching employment (the domain of sociologists) and that the psychological contract exemplified this. Likewise, Zhang *et al.* (2023) proved that the influence of psychology on HRM literature had increased in previous years, but also that psychology had successfully integrated with other disciplines at the same time. Other researchers have added to the debate, Akar and Yörük (2024) summarizing that a focus on individual psychological contracts abstracted them from power structures and denying the importance of other factors and parties to the exchange

relationship. This shows that researchers are and must continue to be aware of the pitfalls of viewing employment through too narrow a lens. While the discipline of psychology can provide valuable insights into organizational research and practice, psychological contract research should therefore integrate with a holistic and practical view of employment. While certain scholars criticize psychological contract research giving too much voice to employees and implying that the overwhelming power of employers in creating the terms of the working environment is not properly recognized (Akar and Yörük, 2024), most publications fall short of operationalizing the findings of psychological contract research for decision makers in organizations. Practicable recommendations taking into account the holistic nature of work and workplaces are scarce. This research project aims to address this need by conducting practitioner-based research into individual psychological contracts and developing actionable contributions for line supervisors, strategists and human resource managers.

2.2.7 Measuring the Psychological Contract

To research the prerequisites, effects and importance of the psychological contract, it becomes an essential task to assess what the psychological contract for the specified person or group *is*. Most research has been verbalizing the role psychological contracts play in other, more tangible contexts like job satisfaction (Rayton and Yalabik, 2014; Ampofo, 2021; Anyaoku, 2022), turnover intention (Blomme, van Rheede and Tromp, 2010;

Bhatnagar, 2014; Sheehan *et al.*, 2019; Abdalla *et al.*, 2021; Saleem *et al.*, 2021; Manolopoulos *et al.*, 2022), or organizational citizenship behaviour (Robinson and Morrison, 1995; Turnley *et al.*, 2003; Ahmad and Zafar, 2018; Griep and Vantilborgh, 2018; Gardner, Pierce and Peng, 2020). Samson and Swink (2023) made extensive use of psychological contract theory to explain the behaviours of stakeholders in their case study.

Historically, much attention has been paid to psychological contract breaches, their effects and influence (Robinson and Morrison, 2000; Suazo and Mai, 2005; Restubog, Bordia and Tang, 2006; Chen, Tsui and Zhong, 2008; Dulac *et al.*, 2008; Bal, Chiaburu and Jansen, 2010; Lee, Chaudhry and Tekleab, 2014; Rayton and Yalabik, 2014; Cassar and Buttigieg, 2015; Reimann and Guzy, 2017; Griep and Vantilborgh, 2018; Li and Chen, 2018; Karatepe, Rezapouraghdam and Hassannia, 2020; Abdalla *et al.*, 2021; Ampofo, 2021; Wu, Lin and Wang, 2021; Ampofo *et al.*, 2022). Rousseau (2000, 2008) developed an inventory checklist for the psychological contract. As most empiric research on the topic is engaged with finding how the psychological contract influences other aspects of the working relationship, most researchers utilize the terms *measuring* or *assessing* the psychological contract, without closely describing its immediate contents or exploring its structure. Even qualitative researchers (e.g. Herriot, Manning and Kidd 1997) attempt to deduct categories for description or contextualization.

It is therefore questionable whether the psychological contract in this context should be spoken of as being measured, despite most researchers who have engaged with it having done just that. However, the term has been used somewhat loosely, for instance by Freese and Schalk (2008) who owe an explanation for what exactly they mean by *"measuring"* the psychological contract. Purvis and Cropley (2003) conducted an *"exploration"* of expectations.

By the late 1990s, a growing demand for order in the exploding field of psychological contract research can be observed. Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1998) conducted an inventory of previous research and devised a framework on which subsequent conceptualizations of psychological contract research have been built. They made a distinction between the mostly qualitative methodology, using interviews, which was used to describe psychological contracts by the earlier researchers of the phenomenon, and the activities of the *"Rousseau era"* researchers which employed primarily quantitative methods. By 1998, according to the authors, there were almost as many ways of assessing the psychological contract as there were studies, meaning that each researcher devised their individual method of generating a description. Sia (2013) summarized some of the different measurement scales which had been developed. One of the most frequently adopted basic scales is that of Robinson and Morrison (2000). Their measures and items are, to varying extent, still used in present studies (Karatepe, Rezapouraghdam and Hassannia, 2020; Kaya

and Karatepe, 2020; Ampofo *et al.*, 2022; Schuster *et al.*, 2022). Simultaneously, Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000) developed a list of nine items of employer obligations which were later utilised by Shi and Gordon (2020).

Qualitative research has been considered useful for inductive approaches describing unique contributions in narrow contexts in detail. In contrast, deductive research frameworks lend themselves to quantitative methodologies. Nonetheless, it has been suggested to supplement standardized testing methods with qualitative assessments to capture emergent elements of the psychological contract (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998; Sia, 2013). Sherman and Morley (2020) proposed the use of Repertory Grid Technique to capture the contents of psychological contracts as had previously been employed by Purvis and Cropley (2003).

Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1998) laid the commonly accepted groundwork for structured assessment of psychological contracts. They propose categorizing methods of psychological contract assessment in three groups: *Content-oriented*, *feature-oriented* and *evaluation-oriented* research. These differ in analytical focus: *content-oriented* research classifies and compares contractual terms, often using qualitative interviews or quantitative scales, while *feature-oriented* work examines the implicit-explicit nature of contract communication, and *evaluation-oriented* assessments quantify perceived fulfilment or violation, though the latter's measurement scales remain contested (Lambert, 2011). Overall, content- and

evaluation-based measures are more established despite limitations in capturing the contract holistically, whereas feature-oriented research remains comparatively underdeveloped.

Freese and Schalk (2008) continued the work of conceptualization and, at another time of heightened interest in psychological contracts, provided a list of criteria for good assessment questionnaires or category-lists. They made decisions on the usefulness of the individual approaches they survey and gave clear recommendations on which scales to use (and for which purposes), and which are deemed not useful.

They conceded that it is difficult to develop a standardised measure for the content of psychological contracts, which is why many researchers had decided instead to describe features rather than content, and subsequently used feature-oriented measures and findings to compare psychological contracts across settings (compare Chan 2020). They propose that any measure of the psychological contract must:

- Be theory-based or inductively developed from previous sources.
- Assess mutual promises and obligations. Questions must capture expectations, not satisfaction with inducements.
- Be tested for the appropriateness of the measurement items for the specific sample.
- Consist of several items. Global evaluations are derived from, or supported by, item-level measurements.
- Ensure the importance of every item in it, especially in evaluation-oriented approaches.

- Distinguish between psychological contract breach, violation and fulfilment. These phenomena should not be measured on the same scale.

Freese and Schalk (2008) concluded that there may never be one standardized and fully accepted psychological contract questionnaire, due to the individual requirements of research approaches and questions and very distinctive forms the psychological contract takes.

Consequently, most researchers have developed their individual measurement scales depending on the context and focus of the research. Table 20 summarizes questionnaires designed by previous researchers, considering the setting where their research was conducted, and grouping them into the categories proposed by Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1998).

2.2.8 Psychological Contract Breaches and Fulfilment

2.2.8.1 The Effect of PC Breach on Hotel Employees

It is consensus that breaches and violations of psychological contracts ultimately lead to turnover (Azeem *et al.*, 2020). Estreder *et al.* (2021) demonstrated the interrelationship between organizational injustice and psychological contract balance, showing that reduced justice causes employees to scale down their contributions. Psychological contract breach and supervisor mistreatment can even cause employees to actively sabotage their service (Park and Kim, 2019). Additionally, it has been established that hotel employees' turnover intention and intention to remain

in the organization were directly affected by psychological contract breaches, an effect that was stronger for employees with permanent contracts and weaker with temporary workers (Karatepe, Rezapouraghdam and Hassannia, 2020; Manolopoulos *et al.*, 2022). Mazumdar *et al.* (2022) stated that *"[b]reach of psychological contract affects many work attitudes including job satisfaction, commitment, organizational identity, organizational trust, civic virtue in the job and perceived quality of leader member exchange"* and *"influences behavioral outcomes including intention to look for other jobs, intentional negligence of in-role job duties and responsibilities and willingness to engage in extra-role job behaviors, job performance, absenteeism etc."* Lu and Lu (2025) demonstrated that for hotel employees in Taiwan, psychological contract breach resulted in low identification with the organization.

The negative effects of psychological contract breach on desired attitudes and behaviours in employees are therefore best not ignored.

The primary reason for employee turnover intention, according to Hwang *et al.* (2014), is unfair treatment. Raeder and Grote (2004) showed that low convergence of psychological contracts had a negative impact on perceived fairness. Robbins, Ford and Tetrick (2012) presented an argument about whether psychological contract breach represents a form of disruptive injustice. They argued that while the nature of a transactional psychological contract is outcome-oriented and its breach thus may represent an injustice, which is per definition the perceived unfairness of an

outcome, a psychological contract in general is far broader and its breach has far greater implications for employees' mental and physical health. The authors were able to show that perceived injustice, including psychological contract breach, contribute negatively to employee health indicators and subsequently absence from work. Estreder *et al.* (2021) showed that psychological contract violation is a crucial element in the employment exchange relationship that human resource practitioners must consider.

Relating the results of Guhlemann and Best (2021) about hospitality employees becoming disenchanted after finding leadership failure in several workplaces to the findings of Robinson and Morrison (2000) that employees were more likely to perceive psychological contract breach if they had experienced it in former workplaces, it is safe to say that every bad leader and workplace pushes an employee closer to quitting subsequent jobs, ever shortening their fuse. Given the high mobility and comparatively frequent turnover of hotel employees, this helps explain the increased labour drain during the pandemic (Jansen and Risius, 2022). The results presented by Robinson and Morrison (2000) help explain the sudden explosion of the phenomenon further: according to their study, psychological contract breach was more likely to occur when an employee's organization was performing poorly. This was the case for nearly every hotel during Covid-19. The often superficial onboarding of hotel employees may even be in relation to yet another cause for breaches according to the

study cited above: participants who had not received a formal socialization process and only little interaction with agents of the organization prior to employment were also found more likely to experience psychological contract breach. In summary, this means that *several* factors uncovered in this now almost two-decade old study come to bear in the case of low job satisfaction, high turnover, and failure in retention and hiring of hotel employees in Northern Germany.

Psychological contract breach has been identified as a psychological stressor (Robbins, Ford and Tetrick, 2012; Reimann and Guzy, 2017), has been found to be a condition for employee burnout and to be negatively associated with employee well-being (Reimann and Guzy, 2017). Raeder (2007) stated that psychological contract breach can negatively affect job motivation and organizational citizenship behaviour. In further validation of this hypothesis, Blomme, van Rheede and Tromp (2010) found that highly educated hotel employees (hotel school graduates) had very high expectations towards their job content and exhibited turnover intention even at the slightest breach.

2.2.8.2 Needs Fulfilment and Psychological Contract Fulfilment

While most literature deals with psychological contract breaches, considerably less literature exists on fulfilment of psychological contracts. It is debated whether fulfilment and breach are opposite poles, independently evaluated dimensions, or whether fulfilment is the mid-point between breach and over-fulfilment (Lambert, 2011). Lambert outlines three

models for assessing psychological contract fulfilment: The Discrepancy Model evaluates only the fulfilment of promises, the Equity Model compares employee inputs and outputs to a standard including peer treatment and organizational promises (Morrison and Robinson, 1997), while the Needs Model focuses on the extent to which employment satisfies individual needs. Her findings indicate that the Needs Model best captures the impact of fulfilment on job satisfaction, as delivered inducements affect employees more than mere promises. The study showed that the Discrepancy and Equity models employed in previous theoretical literature on the psychological contract were less close to reality as they disregarded the fact that people enter employment to obtain resources they otherwise couldn't (Simon, 1951) and the satisfaction of physical needs, most easily exemplified by the obtainment of currency for necessary purchases, is a critical element of employment motivation.

Considering the hospitality industry, where precarious working situations abound, this could indicate that need fulfilment has an even greater influence on how psychological contract fulfilment affects job satisfaction than in the average population. Lambert (2011) contradicts previous scholars and concludes that fulfilling psychological contracts by grabbing low-hanging fruit (making and keeping promises at low levels) does not by itself generate goodwill, and multiple factors and dimensions need to be considered. Needs, she shows, matter more than promises, and by understanding how inducements and contributions contributed to

employees' needs fulfilment, managers would be able to better align the employment terms with organizational goals.

A less researched aspect is psychological contract over-fulfilment. Bavik and Kim (2020) showed that when an employer exceeds their obligations towards the employee, they will be rewarded with gratitude, particularly in low-ranking employees. To ensure fulfilment, organizational support is a crucial antecedent: Bahadır *et al.* (2024) showed that the relational psychological contract is a crucial intermediary between organizational support and employee satisfaction. In the relationships between buyer and supplier, Esslinger *et al.* (2019) showed that over-fulfilment leads to goodwill on the other side and strengthens the relationship, which however is quickly damaged if the favour is later "cashed in." Whether this is fully applicable to employment relationships is untested, but it indicates that over-fulfilment should not be treated as a condition on which similar over-fulfilment can later be asked from the other party.

2.2.8.3 Challenges

However, not all unfulfilled expectations automatically constitute a psychological contract breach. These only occur when the employee perceives an obligation to which they had held their employer to be unfulfilled - Rousseau (1990) gave the example of a new hire expecting their job to be interesting, only to realize later that it was indeed boring. In this case, she argues, an obligation was not broken as the employee did not demand the employer to make the work interesting per se. This may be

different when employers promise interesting work as part of the job advertisement. Rebehn, Nichol and Bell (2024) found that employers in the hotel industry in Northern Germany frequently make explicit or implicit promises of this kind in job advertisements.

One challenge is that contributions and inducements may not be measured on commensurate scales (Lambert, 2011): for instance, pay (an inducement) will be measured in currency, while work (the corresponding contribution) may be measured in time (like currency, an objective dimension), output, quality or energy exerted. It becomes clear then why, even as knowledge work and flexible working arrangements are on the rise, explicit employment contracts still relate currency to hours.

2.2.8.4 The Effect of PC Fulfilment on Hotel Employees

Unlike psychological contract breaches and violations, the effect of psychological contract fulfilment has received relatively little attention despite frequent calls from researchers (e.g. Ahmad and Zafar 2018; Noble-Nkrumah, Anyigba and Mensah 2022). This is despite psychological contract fulfilment being an *"antecedent to job satisfaction"* (Bandyopadhyay and Srivastava, 2022), which was supported by Bahadır *et al.* (2024), and thus likely the key to employee retention. According to Gardner, Pierce and Peng (2020), fulfilling relational contract obligations must be seen as a significant investment in employees, who reciprocate by investing themselves into their world. Siu, Tsang and Wong (1997) list *"loyalty to employees (company treats them with respect and trust)"* as one of the three

primary motivators. This is directly to be understood as fulfilment of a relational psychological contract. According to Noble-Nkrumah, Anyigba and Mensah (2022), psychological contract fulfilment is positively related to organizational citizenship behaviour; Mehta *et al.* (2022) were able to confirm various previous findings (De Cuyper and De Witte, 2006; Bhatnagar, 2014; Cassar and Buttigieg, 2015; Ahmad and Zafar, 2018; Shi and Gordon, 2020) that fulfilment of the psychological contract positively affected performance, life-satisfaction, and well-being. Hammouri *et al.* (2022) showed that psychological contract fulfilment positively influenced employee satisfaction and productivity, while negatively influencing employee turnover.

Meanwhile, a contract can still be considered fulfilled when not all the contract's terms are kept and is not considered the opposite of violation; perceived organizational support has been suggested as a measure of contract fulfilment (Rousseau and Tijoriwala, 1998).

With increased quality of the psychological contract, the expectations of employee and organization (or agent thereof) increasingly converge (Tekleab and Taylor, 2003; Raeder, 2007) which ultimately improves the productivity and career advancement of the employee (Dabos and Rousseau, 2004). Verbalization of the psychological contract can speed up this process and improve the quality of cooperation. The willingness to verbalize the contract increases when employees meet with their supervisor on a regular basis - a crucial element of effective leadership - and when

an integrated human resource management system is in place that ensures optimal flow of information between the employee and employer, but also depends on the flexibility of the employment and the power distance in the local culture (Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2018).

Mehta *et al.* (2024) showed that psychological contract fulfilment was directly related to hotel employees' intention to stay in the hotel industry in the post-Covid era. This finding, one of the first studies conducted on hotel employees' psychological contracts after the pandemic, further highlights the importance of knowing and understanding the psychological contract to improve employee retention.

What psychological contract fulfilment can probably not guarantee, however, is improved in-role employee performance (Restubog, Bordia and Tang, 2006; Noble-Nkrumah, Anyigba and Mensah, 2022), although Turnley *et al.* (2003) came to a different conclusion. It is possible that a too strong focus on employee (and business) performance in both practice and research has caused this relative blind spot in our knowledge and contributed to the insufficient understanding of employee retention.

Zhao, Xu and Wang (2024) meanwhile found that psychological contract fulfilment had a detrimental effect on ethical behaviour, furthering moral disengagement. The study showed that greenwashing behaviours increased for hotel workers with fulfilled psychological contracts. This uncovers the dark side of loyalty and does so in the context of hospitality

workers. The authors found that the immoral behaviour can be lowered significantly by nurturing an ethical working environment.

2.2.9 The Impact of Covid-19 on PC

Herriot, Manning and Kidd (1997) attribute the rise of interest in the psychological contract in the early 1990s to a human resource management crisis brought about by systemic changes in the work environment, for which psychological contract theory provided a convenient explanation: when the circumstances under which a psychological contract has been negotiated change, it triggers a re-evaluation of the contract (Chaudhry, Coyle-Shapiro and Wayne, 2011). In short, *"change alters the contract"* (Morrison, 1994). Bellou (2007) showed that employees who experienced a merger or acquisition replaced their existing psychological contract with a new one due to uncertainty and unilateral change to the circumstances.

Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020) showed that even while Covid-19 was unfolding, only a minority of professionals surveyed expected things to go back to the status quo ante. This indicates that, along with the acceptance of permanent change, the expectations and contributions were altered as well. Butterick and Charlwood, (2021) uncovered uncertainty among HRM practitioners and academics about which strategies to employ to accommodate to the changed landscape in the wake of the pandemic.

The disruptions and developments caused by the Covid-19 pandemic have affected the psychological contract in the wake of changed

perceptions of work, health, and productivity. Job security has moved to the centre of attention for employees (Jansen and Risius, 2022; Mehta *et al.*, 2022), while employers are concerned with work schedules (including increased focus on resilience), data protection, and workers' commitment and how to manage them (Mehta *et al.*, 2022; Khor and Tan, 2023). Changes like the increase of working-from-home arrangements have altered the way work is conducted for many, and the conditions that apply (Deloitte, 2020; Mehta *et al.*, 2022). This inevitably causes adjustments in the psychological contract.

Covid-19 has caused hotel employees to re-evaluate their career choices (Liu-Lastres, Huang and Bao, 2023) and many to leave for other professions (Jansen and Risius, 2022). Liu-Lastres, Huang and Bao (2023) showed that "survivors" who stayed in hospitality were better adapted to the circumstances and exhibited personality traits that others didn't as well as a continued positive attitude towards working in the industry. It follows that researching the "survivors" who remained employed after Covid-19 would yield a smaller breadth of psychological contracts as individuals with particular traits or needs would have left in disproportionally high numbers, leaving a slightly more homogenous group behind.

2.3 The Psychological Contract Applied

2.3.1 Influence of Contextual Factors

Due to many factors like globalization, digitalization and demographic change, conditions in the labour market have changed. Horgan (2021) summarizes the macro-economic changes also described by Minssen (2019) as a shift away from secure, stable (often boring) work and towards *"good work"* which is described as well-paid, secure, and fulfilling with opportunities for development and flexibility to balance family and professional duties. Horgan (2021) demands the element of control over one's daily work conditions to be included in this official definition. At the same time, the gig economy has seen an increase in precarious work (Griep *et al.*, 2023), especially in the hospitality sector and the accommodation industry (Maack *et al.*, 2013).

Carsten *et al.* (2021) describe *"New Work"* as follows:

> *"The rational meritocracy of the industrial age with overtime hours, competition and mandatory presence time has not proven to be sustainable. With the Covid-crisis as a catalyst, New Work models are quickly being adapted throughout. The digitalization drive which was made necessary in the crisis promotes new work structures which are characterized by work-life-blending, collaboration and remote work. Corporate structures are*

> *becoming more agile and adaptive, while employees see themselves as problem-solvers for societal issues." (translated)*

The latter aspect points towards the evolution of the psychological contract of employees.

In Germany, paradigms of employment have been evolving; Minssen (2019) gives an overview of research regarding the flexibilization of work from a German perspective, adding to international research which found an *"overall shift towards prioritizing short-term performance metrics and giving preference to other stakeholder interests and profits over the well-being of employees"* (Kraak et al., 2024, citing Dundon and Rafferty, 2018; Marchington 2015).

Employees increasingly demand flexible work times (BaUA, 2016; Jürgens, Hoffmann and Schildmann, 2017). However, the option of accruing overtime in *"time banks"* is hardly utilized to support their own biographical planning (Wotschack, Hildebrandt and Scheier, 2008); employees' interests must be subordinate to business interests (Eberling *et al.*, 2004), which means that opportunities arising from flexibility are not actually used to improve employees' lives. Desire for greater flexibilization is found in the hotel industry as well, specifically among younger employees (Cabaraban and Borbon, 2021; Jung, Yoon and Aldieri, 2021) – however, researchers calling for workplace flexibility do not provide guidance for practitioners on how to unify this interest with rigid scheduling needs and round-the-clock operations.

For young employees, meaning and positive impact of their work take top priority, but work-life balance is a central topic of conversation and central demand in the quest for greater well-being.

These aspects are found to directly or indirectly relate to the psychological contract. Breach or fulfilment influence well-being, stress, and the working relationship. The psychological contract can therefore be considered a central theoretical link between the underlying problems, the context, and the symptoms, lending itself to answering the question why employees are so unhappy and leave the hotel industry – or must leave the hotel industry when they find their work to be irreconcilable with the rest of their life. As such, it is an ideal perspective to take when trying to understand how hotels in Northern Germany can improve their staff retention.

2.3.2 The Role of Psychological Contracts

Raeder and Grote (2004) argued that HRM was tasked with supplementing formal work contracts with activities to fulfil psychological contracts, like promises of incentives which are not formalized in the work contract.

Rogozińska-Pawełczyk (2018) stated that *"if the purpose of social life in the organisation is balance between performance and good relations understood as employees' openness in testing the contents of their psychological contract, the organisation is better adapted to cope with changes in its business environment."* This means that organizations benefit from verbalization and expression of psychological contracts as it helps

maintain a balanced, positive social network between members. However, the author explains, this readiness to verbalize the contract depends greatly on the nature of it.

Sheehan *et al.* (2019) found a relationship between intention to leave one's profession and psychological contract fulfilment, stressing the importance of creating *"interesting job content"* allowing employees to utilize their skills and capacities. Several studies in the early 2000s (Suazo and Mai, 2005; Restubog, Bordia and Tang, 2006; Chen, Tsui and Zhong, 2008; Bal, Chiaburu and Jansen, 2010; Lee, Chaudhry and Tekleab, 2014) established the relationship between psychological contract fulfilment or breach and desired work outcomes.

Anyaoku (2022) found that hotel employees with a highly relational psychological contract experienced higher job satisfaction; conversely, a high transactional contract was found to correlate with lower job satisfaction. Psychological contracts were also found to be a powerful tool in retention of employees experiencing high levels of emotional labour (Zhang, Deeprasert and Jiang, 2024).

Saleem *et al.* (2021) showed that employees who fit into their role and organization exhibit less turnover intention as they consider the fit a valuable resource which they proactively take action to protect by fostering relevant relationships. This points to an importance of relational aspects of the employment relationship and supports the theory of psychological contracts evolving from transactional to relational over time.

2.4 Labour Shortage

2.4.1 Reasons for Turnover of Hotel Employees

According to Fuller and Kerr (2022), Covid-19 caused hotel employees, who were especially affected by burnout, uncertainty, and stress, to reconsider the importance of work in their overall lives, leading to the *"Great Resignation"*, alternatively a *"reshuffling"* or *"The Great Upgrade"* where employees moved on to more attractive positions rather than leaving the labour market altogether. The authors however conceded that the underlying reasons for the labour shortage in the sector had been constantly worsening prior to the pandemic.

An additional counterargument to the *"Great Resignation"* theory is the knowledge generated by Kraak, Griep and Altman (2024): they found that expatriate employees in menial hospitality jobs, even when faced with employer behaviour actively disrupting the psychological contract, preferred to engage in neglect or counterproductive behaviour rather than resigning. Considering the theory of needs fulfilment superseding promises (Lambert, 2011), this shows that hospitality employees may be willing to overlook poor conditions as long as they find their needs fulfilled. Provided that working conditions were anything but good even before Covid-19, it may indicate that hotel employers today fail to meet employees' needs, either because conditions have worsened, other employment options have become available that fulfil these needs better, or that needs have changed.

Dogru *et al.* (2023) found that turnover rates in the hospitality sector are directly related to overall turnover rates, but the market was much more volatile, causing more pronounced oscillations. Relating this knowledge to the theory of Fuller and Kerr (2022), it can be concluded that the fatal drain in hospitality workers was indeed a symptom of the overall *"Great Upgrade"* or *"reshuffling"*.

The goal of employers must be to retain at least the core staff of valuable, experienced, trained and motivated professionals in the industry. The greatest loss is when a valuable professional turns their back on the industry completely (Josan *et al.*, 2024). Empirically established reasons for fluctuation and withdrawal from the industry include workload, working conditions and increasing demands to the flexibility of employees (Maack *et al.*, 2013); Wen *et al.* (2020) identified burnout as a culprit. This requires attention to the design of the workplace, the conditions of the employment relationship, job design and leadership practice, which were discussed in the Introduction chapter. As younger generations, who constitute an increasing share of the working population, see work as part of a holistic approach to life, they are unwilling to make disproportional sacrifices. According to Sonntag (2007b), work impedes on personal life motives and sacrificing too many of those without proportional reward makes a job unattractive. This means that hotel employees leave because the working conditions require disproportionate sacrifices, not only to health and personal time, but also to certain values. Viewed

through the psychological contract lens, this translates to unmet obligations. A difference in values between generations may in part explain the downturn in hospitality employment.

Michael and Fotiadis (2022) investigated reasons for turnover, which they found to be both organization-related and individual and suggest strategies for smoother hospitality careers. Meanwhile, Le *et al.* (2023) showed that turnover can be reduced by fostering the employees' pride in their jobs, while Davras and Manap Davras (2024) found that the sense of calling on the job was beneficial in reducing turnover.

2.4.2 Reasons for Hotel Employees to Remain

Poulston (2009) demonstrated that the same factors which cause employees to resign are also factors working against employee retention. While an understanding of the reasons for employees leaving is crucial when tackling the issue of retention altogether, this study was designed to understand what would make them stay. This section explores literature related to that question.

Sonntag (2007b) defined work as an *"existence-defining and sense-giving life expression of humans"* (translated) which constitutes an interaction between a person and their environment that mutually shapes and changes both parties. Sense-making and defining one's life through their work and career are central elements; through their work the individual obtains knowledge and experience shaping them for the rest of their lives. This demonstrates the importance that work has for us as individuals

and may partially explain the reason individuals assess the working conditions and the exchange relationship more critically today than in previous times.

A 2019 survey among decision makers in companies in Germany, Austria and Switzerland about what, in their opinion, were the most effective measures of employee retention (Carsten *et al.*, 2021), yielded the following results:

- Good corporate culture (54% agreed)
- Market-appropriate pay (46%)
- Flexible work times (43%)
- Interesting Tasks (43%)
- Job Security (38%)
- Measures to allow balancing work and personal life (33%)
- Good career prospects (33%)
- Corporate Benefits (27%)
- Mobile Work (home office, remote work) (22%)
- Personnel development (21%)
- Employer's reputation (17%)
- Differentiated leadership behaviour (15%)
- Measures for health promotion (14%)

Revisiting Fuller and Kerr (2022), who concluded that many employers had responded to the trend by providing more attractive inducements to their employees; Kraak *et al.* (2024) related this phenomenon to changing psychological contracts and different treatment thereof by employers.

This allows the conclusion that providing employers with knowledge about the inducements their employees value, which is what this study does, can greatly benefit efforts in retention.

Siu, Tsang and Wong (1997) showed that fulfilment of psychological contracts was a motivator for hotel employees, though pay was much more motivating. The study is nearly three decades old and was conducted in Hong Kong; its applicability to the context of Northern Germany should not be assumed. More recent studies have confirmed that pay is a consistently important factor, though supervisory support and career opportunities, job autonomy and job security also had a positive influence on job satisfaction (Madera, Dawson and Neal, 2013).

Much more recently, Choi, Fang and Khatter (2022) identified five central motivators for hotel employees in Australia to stay with the industry in the post-pandemic time. These were:

- Financial Benefits
- Teamwork
- Training
- Career opportunities to grow
- Recognition

For the Indian knowledge workers surveyed by Bhatnagar (2014), rewards and recognition, along with the psychological contract, were strong

mediators between perceived supervisor support, innovation and turnover intention.

Michael and Fotiadis (2022) suggested, besides the creation of a good work environment, the development of transfer opportunities, talent planning and exit strategies to retain hotel employees. Zhang, Deeprasert and Jiang (2024) recommended fostering stable emotional connections to enhance employees' sense of attachment. Psychological contracts, they showed, negatively impact turnover intention and directly affect staff retention.

Overall, the literature on the actual factors influencing people to stay in their hospitality jobs or careers – rather than just treating the decision as the opposite of turnover intention – is scarce. An optimistic perspective, directly exploring the intention to not turnover instead of the intention not to turnover may however yield slightly different results.

2.5 Job satisfaction

The relationships between job satisfaction and organizational outcomes like productivity have been well established (Judge, Zhang and Glerum, 2020; Navajas-Romero, Díaz-Carrión and Casas-Rosal, 2020); an at least indirect positive effect on financial performance has been suggested as well (Chi and Gursoy, 2009; Khan, Zhang and Salik, 2020). Low job satisfaction affects customer-oriented behaviour and has a clear negative impact on a hotel's organizational performance (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002; Nerdinger, 2007). Khan, Khan and Bodla (2021) showed that when high performers quit, it has far-reaching negative effects on the hotel's reputation.

Job satisfaction is defined as *"a pleasurable emotional state that results from an individual appraisal of one's job or job experience or how content an employee is with their job experience"* (Locke, 1969; Waight and Madera, 2011). Meanwhile, some researchers maintain that job satisfaction cannot be explained by elements of the work itself, but also through the individual frame of reference, the background and living situation of the employee (Schulte, 2005). This suggests that there is no "one size fits all" approach to elevating job satisfaction, and individual needs or preferences must be considered.

Job satisfaction is strongly linked to commitment and loyalty (Felfe and Six, 2006) as well as turnover intention (Koo *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2020; Bandyopadhyay and Srivastava, 2022). In hotels, stress, working

environment and pay cause low job satisfaction resulting in high turnover rates. Previous research has established shortcomings regarding working hours, compensation, career opportunities and training as common reasons for turnover intention, which is defined as *"the individual's willingness to [withdraw] from an organization"* (Memon, Salleh and Baharom, 2015, cited by Saleem *et al.*, 2021).

The link between low job satisfaction and high turnover has long been established (Grawitch, Gottschalk and Munz, 2006; DiPietro and Condly, 2007). Raeder and Grote (2004) showed that loyalty was highly valued by employees throughout all investigated companies. It may be argued that the mass layoffs and low job security during Covid-19 have had an impact on employees' perception of employer loyalty, and a new assessment of the situation is due.

According to Schulte (2005), job satisfaction is influenced by personal and situational factors. The former includes psychological needs (e.g. growth, belonging, power), professional values (e.g. freedom- or career-orientation, fairness), and traits such as self-efficacy, neuroticism and extraversion; further by the contents of work (task variety, task identity, autonomy, role ambiguity etc.), the working conditions (working times, pay, growth opportunities, colleagues, leadership, the size of the organisation etc.), and aspects outside of work, like family conflicts.

Anyaoku (2022) showed that for hotel employees, strong relational contracts directly led to higher job satisfaction and in turn lower turnover

intention. Bandyopadhyay and Srivastava (2022) and Zhang *et al.* (2025), conducting research in very different contexts (manufacturing in India and pharmacists in China), reached the same conclusion. The present study therefore adopts the premise that job satisfaction affects staff retention, while being affected by psychological contract fulfilment.

2.6 Generational Differences in Values regarding Work

Whether different generations of employees require tailored management approaches has interested scholars for at least a decade (Ma, Hu and Gocłowska, 2016; Kicheva, 2017; Mahmoud *et al.*, 2021; Lee *et al.*, 2022).

Generational differences influence what employees expect from employers (Sachse *et al.*, 2025), values being shared among individuals growing up at the same time (Ryder, 1985). *Generation Y* believes that companies should focus on quality of products, creation of employment opportunities, and improvement of the lives of employees as well as society in general were the most valued goals (Deloitte, 2020). *Generation Z* values security and achievement along universalism and benevolence – values which hospitality businesses can cater to in various ways across product design, workplace design and corporate culture (Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya and Solnet, 2021).

Growing evidence suggests that differences previously attributed to generations may instead reflect life stage, age, or career phase, and values change over time (Schröder, 2024). Lub *et al.* (2016) found that the effect of psychological contract fulfilment on the work attitudes of employees differed by generation, but the underlying priorities like work atmosphere, development, and autonomy, largely remained consistent.

Törn-Laapio and Ekonen (2021) examined different understandings of the meaning of work between tourism and hospitality employees of different generations. *Gen Z* (aged under 20) saw work as a means to either income or career development. For *Gen Y* (aged 21-39), work provided structure and support for other life domains; they prioritized balancing work and personal life. For older cohorts, work was as an increasingly central part of life, and the social connections it provided became increasingly important. Similarly, Stiglbauer, Penz and Batinic (2022) found that older cohorts valued structure, younger ones career and flexibility. Values on basic needs and organizational development were consistent. Ravid, Costanza and Romero (2024) found similar differences but highlight how miniscule they are.

Attracting the youngest generation, career entrants, is a key challenge to the industry. Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya and Solnet (2021) suggest strategies for hospitality companies to become attractive to members of *Gen Z*. Ali *et al.* (2023) found they were generally willing to work alongside service robots. Goh and Baum (2021) showed that *Gen Z* employees can be motivated to work for ideological reasons, even as they tend to shy away from the poor working conditions and requirement for emotional labour in hospitality careers. To attract this young generation, the creation of *meaningful work* is crucial, through positivity, significance and purpose, and human fulfilment (Klaffke, 2021; You *et al.*, 2021).

Lub *et al.* (2012) compared psychological contracts of Dutch hotel employees between generations *X* and *Y*, finding that both generations placed similar importance on work atmosphere, salary and task description, but while *Gen Y* emphasized development opportunities, variation and responsibility, their older colleagues placed more importance on work-life-balance, security and autonomy. Dimitriou and Blum (2015) found that Greek *Gen Y* employees needed more work-life balance than their (older) managers would be aware of, which could be understood to contradict Lub *et al.* (2012), who found that *Gen X* actually valued work-life balance more than *Gen Y*. This difference can be attributed to cultural and methodological differences. Prioritizing of work-life balance more than older peers was later attributed to *Gen Z* by Törn-Laapio and Ekonen (2021). Jung, Jung and Yoon (2023) compared the effects of workaholism across the three prevalent generations *X*, *Y* and *Z*, finding that *Gen Z* differed from the others as the negative relationship with workaholism was much stronger. This suggests that differences in underlying values in the cohorts influence the structure of their psychological contracts.

Jung *et al.* (2021) and Dimitriou and Blum (2015) call for research into generational differences of expectations in hospitality contexts elsewhere.

Some studies have found that psychological contracts do not differ significantly across generations (Magni and Manzoni, 2020; Egerová, Komárková and Kutlák, 2021). Indeed, some of the values attributed to generations *X* and *Y* by Lub *et al.* (2012) are also attributed to *Gen Z*.

Muskat and Reitsamer (2020) found that Millennials' job satisfaction was positively influenced by *"physical safety, payment, appreciation of one's work within the organization, having a right to say in decisions affecting one's work area, realization of one's potential and promotion prospects…"* These priorities widely overlap among the generations. Taken together, the psychological contract appears to be stable and distinct for different generations; at the same time, it is influenced by life stage.

Literature remains inconclusive about whether specific viewpoints of psychological contracts can be attributed to different generations. It suggests that different age groups in the hotel sector may differ in needs and expectations shaped by life stage, relationships, and personal plans. Generations differ slightly in the results of psychological contract breach (Lu and Lu, 2025). It remains unclear whether these differences in psychological contracts can be attributed to generation or other demographic factors. Generational differences appear far less pronounced than may be expected, and other factors may be at least equally important. While differences in views on the psychological contract can be expected, their causes cannot be assumed.

2.7 Core Elements of Employment Relationships

2.7.1 Remuneration

Low pay is considered a problem in the hotel industry (Schulten and Specht, 2022). Research shows that remunerations remains important to hotel employees (Siu, Tsang and Wong, 1997; Muskat and Reitsamer, 2020; Carsten *et al.*, 2021). Salama *et al.* (2022) mentioned low remuneration as a driver of upset and exhaustion, which in turn leads to turnover intention. In Herzberg's (1959) two-factor theory of motivation, it is considered a *"hygiene"* factor.

While Blomme, van Rheede and Tromp (2010) showed that salary and promotion opportunities were key in retention of highly educated hotel employees, Bandyopadhyay and Srivastava (2022) suggested that managers need to pay much more attention to relational than transactional elements of the psychological contract. Choi, Fang and Khatter (2022) found that pay played more the role of a satisfier than a hygiene factor; at least in quarantine hotels during the pandemic, where work was very much driven by calling and sense-making, and that *"the inner need for reliable financial benefits directly ignites the feelings of satisfaction in the quarantine hotel work environment."*

Herok, Himmelreicher and Spahn (2019) identified unequal compensation as negatively influencing employee loyalty. This proved to be a

particular challenge when the minimum wage was introduced in Germany in 2015, causing remuneration hierarchies to be levelled and line staff at times receiving the same salary as their supervisors, whose motivation in turn deteriorated. A decade later, these hierarchies have evolved again but there are signs that they are still under pressure: for instance, in Schleswig-Holstein, the 2024 collective bargaining negotiations resulted in an increase of salaries across all nine tiers by the same amount in Euros (NGG, 2024) – effectively a much greater percentage increase in the lower tiers. The reward for climbing in the hierarchy thus remains limited, standing against the wish and need of hotel employees for career development. The question thus is whether career development alone can serve as a sufficient reward and satisfier.

In the hotel business perhaps more than in most sectors, the salary is supplemented by other transactional benefits like staff meals, holiday discounts or laundry of work clothes, all of which directly translate to savings in daily living expenses. Among researchers of hospitality turnover and labour shortage, pay is a constant among the findings and explanations: Dogru *et al.* (2023) concluded that those industries which experience far lower turnover fluctuation than hospitality were those characterized by much higher wage levels (Dogru *et al.*, 2019). They did however argue that due to diminishing sensitivity, every additional dollar paid to an employee had a smaller effect on job satisfaction than the previous

one and highlighted the need to improve other dimensions of the working relationship, particularly work-life balance.

There is evidence that the value of pay is perceived very differently across the generations in the workforce. Schulte (2005) showed that older employees generally exhibited a higher job satisfaction because they were less extrinsically oriented and not prioritizing pay as highly as younger colleagues.

2.7.2 Job Security

Besides pay, job security is a major inducement that employers can deliver. Security is a priority for *Generation Z* (Sakdiyakorn, Golubovskaya and Solnet, 2021). Furthermore, Jansen and Risius (2022) hypothesized that job security has become a much larger priority after the pandemic, causing jobseekers to choose jobs and professions perceived as stable and secure; the crisis of the tourism industry having branded professions in this sector as unstable. The authors also found that tourism employees who had, at least temporarily, moved to other professions were reluctant to return after finding that the working conditions elsewhere were more favourable.

Due to the low level of training and immersion required to perform front line jobs in the hotel sector, employees are under stress as they are aware of how easily they could be replaced: job security was the most prominent topic in interviews conducted by Herok, Himmelreicher and Spahn (2019). The authors cite one interview where a supervisor feared being replaced

by seasonal foreign help (p. 155) and decided to obtain additional qualifications in his free time, causing him to be overworked and eventually leave his employer. Herok, Himmelreicher and Spahn (2019) utilized interviews originally conducted for earlier work exploring the fears and insecurities of hospitality workers after the introduction of minimum wage. As the problem of labour shortage has increased since the interviews were conducted and analysed, it is unclear whether job security has the same priority and the same effect on work stress as the findings indicate. It also remains to be seen whether the economic rebound has softened the bad reputation of hospitality workplaces regarding job security.

Interestingly, Muskat and Reitsamer (2020) found high levels of job security to have a *negative* effect on job satisfaction – though only for men – which stands in contrast previous research results implying that low job security caused low satisfaction. The authors explained this phenomenon with a higher degree of flexibility among Millennial men, who *"positively embrace speed, change and view ambiguities of workplace contracts as opportunities and thus adopting expectations and values accordingly."* The hospitality career, they implied, is one for flexible adventurists to thrive and find happiness. They explained the fact that women did not experience changes in job satisfaction in relation to job security with social role theory, that women were more focussed on their roles outside of work and did not in general share the drive for change that their male counterparts exhibited.

In conclusion, the literature provides insufficient information on the perceived job security of hotel jobs in Germany to allow for the formation of a clear picture. Inferring from the literature reviewed so far, high turnover rates and a lack of employees rather show that who wants to work in a German hotel, can, and does not need to fear being replaced. This suggests that a closer look at what role job security plays in employees' psychological contracts is warranted and can help understand job satisfaction and turnover intention better, especially considering the findings by Muskat and Reitsamer (2020).

2.7.3 Career Advancement

According to Siu, Tsang and Wong (1997), career advancement was the foremost motivational factor for the employees they surveyed; McGinley *et al.* (2014) arrived at similar findings. Dogru *et al.* (2023) found that by comparison, the hospitality sector was less rewarding of skill levels and training than other industries which experience lower turnover, suggesting that individuals with career development needs will (eventually) pursue more rewarding careers.

Employees of younger generations increasingly request a road map and guidance for their career to navigate the complexities of modern life and working relationships (Mihelič *et al.*, 2021), which is in line with the findings discussed above that younger generations placed increased emphasis on career development and security – a career plan can provide both, and has in other contexts been found to increase job satisfaction:

Calinaud, Kokkranikal and Gebbels (2021) found this effect in female hospitality managers in the United Kingdom. Yet, the practice of developing, implementing and maintaining personal development plans (PDP) is not common in the German hotel industry. This may be because the high turnover rate and frequent employer changes may make this even more complicated. German hospitality employees share the sentiment that by age 35, one ought to have reached a leadership role or leave active duty in hospitality, causing a steep decline in employment of persons above this age (Guhlemann and Krüger, 2018; Schlote-Sautter, Herter-Eschweiler and Keller, 2018; Guhlemann and Best, 2021). Some leave the industry because of lack of opportunities for further development after a certain point, and more attractive opportunities in other economic sectors (Guhlemann and Best, 2021), which appears to confirm the theory developed above based on the findings by Dogru *et al.* (2023). Seeking more healthy or stable employment instead of aggressive career growth results in a (perceived) downgrade of status, often pay, and hierarchy – such downgrades and demotions may however also be a result of ageism (Guhlemann and Krüger, 2018).

Guhlemann and Best (2021) reported that hospitality businesses suffer from their self-created youth culture where ageism and discrimination are inherent and widespread; *"old age"* meanwhile generally considered to be beginning in the mid-30s. This was even reported for managerial staff, but most evident in non-supervisory employees who experienced

disrespect for their experience and knowledge; being moved to other, less prestigious areas of work like canteens is perceived as a demotion, regardless of position and pay, and causes turnover intention. The authors referenced the needs framework by Grube (2009) and concluded that employees' need for stability and predictability increases with age and progression in working life, and that the hospitality industry is relatively ill-suited for the needs and career development of older employees.

German employers in the hospitality sector are rarely engaged in training and advancement of their employees (Maack *et al.*, 2013). It must be considered that personnel development actions must be founded not only on the employee's demand for growth but also on the needs of the organization, meaning that organizations must analyse in what way and to what extent they should develop their employees to enable them to fulfil organizational goals (Sonntag, 2007a). This likely poses a challenge for small independent businesses (SME) which may not be able to offer aspirational employees a long-time career prospect in their own companies and would be required to organize themselves in a large network to emulate the opportunities of a large company or hotel chain.

Indeed, this appears to be another problem which did not come upon the industry as a surprise: Bharwani and Butt (2012) called the challenges in employee attraction and retention a mere symptom of the problem and claim that the lack of discernible and attainable career paths for young employees was the root cause. They called on practitioners to focus their

attention on work-life balance, training and development, and career progression. Meanwhile, there is some evidence that old problems still permeate the hospitality sector, as Mooney, Ryan and Harris (2017) showed that age and gender played a crucial role in career growth in hospitality employees in New Zealand.

Several factors suggest the inference that career progression is an important issue for hotel employees: while physically and mentally demanding working conditions force older employees out or up to management or administrative posts, low entry-level pay makes it impossible to settle 'at the bottom' of the hierarchy for an entire working life. Craving for change and advancement is a central characteristic for at least a part of the workforce (Muskat and Reitsamer, 2020). It can be expected that considerations of career advancement is an important part of employees' psychological contracts. Differences in aspirations that, e.g. Muskat and Reitsamer (2020) have identified, suggest that these considerations are likely different between groups of employees.

2.7.4 Person-Job Fit

Whether a person feels satisfied with their job also depends on how well they are suited for it (Tahir Iqbal, Latif and Naseer, 2012; Peng and Mao, 2015). Schuler (2007) explained that vocational aptitude theory related personal traits, skills and knowledge of an individual to their job's tasks and requirements, while output measures grouped as *"job/career success"* exceed the realm of productive output and include job satisfaction, health

and personal growth or perceived success. Memon, Salleh and Baharom (2015) developed a model of the influences of person-job fit and person-organization fit on employee engagement and turnover intention, demonstrating that the concepts are linked causally. Park and Hai (2024) revealed the importance of person-organization and person-job fit for the hotel industry: both values were found to positively influence organizational commitment, and the researchers recommended practitioners to actively promote organizational commitment through the management of affective experiences, improve employees' fit perceptions and their sense of calling. Calling to mind the findings by Muskat and Reitsamer (2020), it is evident that different predispositions or life goals and lifestyles also influence the suitability of a hospitality career and the differentiated suitability of different career designs within the industry.

The individual suitability of a person for their job is measured by cognitive skills (*"general"* cognitive skills like intelligence or creativity, and *"special"* cognitive skills such as subject-related and general knowledge) and personality skills – most prominently measured by extraversion, neuroticism or emotional stability, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness for experiences. (Schaper, 2007). While the validity of some of these – extraversion, openness, and agreeableness – were found to be more highly reliant on the specific task, conscientiousness and neuroticism are considered generalizable dimensions for measuring job performance (Barrick, Mount and Judge, 2001). Genetics and social processes

form very similar predispositions among humans, but also considerable differences (Schaper, 2007). Organizational psychologists have determined that individuals and their work environment reciprocally influence each other and have been researching this relationship and the respective correlation of personality traits and work aspects. Consequently, these linkages are of importance in hiring and personnel development strategies as well as an individual's career choice (Nerdinger, 2007; Schaper, 2007). This is supported by the findings of Stock and Hoyer (2005) that an employee's attitude towards customer orientation influenced their customer-oriented behaviour and subsequently customer satisfaction. Susskind, Kacmar and Borchgrevink (2003) had shown that peer support and supervisor support also impacted customer service orientation in an employee.

Looking at the effect of person-job fit on service orientation however once again directs the attention towards work outcomes and favourable results. But person-job fit also has clear advantages for the individual employee. Viewed through the lens of personality traits, Schaper (2007) concluded that it had a measurable influence on employee health and cautioned the use of academic knowledge in creating workplace health strategies. Saleem *et al.* (2021) concluded that the hospitality industry, through its high levels of customer contact, low pay, limited career advancement opportunities, and the resulting depletion of emotional resources, presented an emotionally challenging work environment that required high levels of

emotional resilience. Hence, their research dealt with the person-job fit under the framework of the psychological contract, showing that psychological contract violations disturbed the positive effects that good person-job fit and person-organization fit have on turnover intention. They argued that employees with good person-environment fit were interested in fostering the benefits they enjoy at their work, thus staying in their jobs. Psychological contract violations deprived them of the sense of embeddedness and caused a reduction in commitment as well as a higher turnover intention.

Jang and George (2012) showed that polychronic work requirements actually benefitted job satisfaction in the hotel employees surveyed and explained this with person-job fit theory: individuals with naturally employ polychronic time use behaviours were better suited to work in the hotel industry and thus more prominently found therein. A similar inference can be made from the results of Manoharan *et al.* (2021), who demonstrated that culturally and linguistically diverse hotel employees were optimistic about their long-term career prospects even at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. This was due to their individual-level psychological resources such as adaptability, resilience, and self-efficacy. Adaptability allowed hotel workers to remain optimistic about charting a successful career path even in the face of the pandemic. The authors suggested that practitioners place emphasis on these resources when hiring but also urged continuous training and employee development in times of crisis.

The hospitality industry is among the ones with the lowest share of employees aged 55 and above (Guhlemann and Best, 2021). Few spend their entire working lives in the hospitality industry but rather move elsewhere to flee poor working conditions and low pay (Maack *et al.*, 2013) – or, phrased differently: they move on to jobs and careers better suited for them at later stages in their working lives. However, the older employees get, the less likely they are to leave their organization (Blomme, van Rheede and Tromp, 2010), which may be called a *"weeding out"* process whereby the employees that do stick around after a specific threshold age are much more reliable. Yet, Maack *et al.* (2013) stated that older employees were unable to physically endure the working conditions until reaching retirement age. With demographic change posing considerable challenges, businesses are tasked with creating opportunities for continued work for older employees while developing sustainable Human Resource Management strategies (van Dam, van Vuuren and Kemps, 2017; Kraak *et al.*, 2024). Hwang, Sean Hyun and Park (2013) devised a system of distinction for the occurrence of work stress in different departments and demographic situations, which shows the different ways employees are affected by their work in the hotel in reference to their specific demographic situation. It uses categories of stress very similar to the ones identified later from the survey results in Hwang *et al.* (2014). For instance, their results clearly show how the nature of work stress shifts as front-line employees (in their case, Housekeeping and Food & Beverage personnel) age: stressors labelled *"suffers from conflict with job*

responsibility" and *"suffers from organizational conflict"* decreased significantly between the age groups 30-39 and 40+ (the latter reporting almost no impact from organizational conflict). In contrast, the older employees in these departments reported to be suffering much more from *"problems related to home life"* and *"company's work and pay"* than their younger counterparts. Problems related to work and pay include factors like *"too much work"* and *"too long working hours,"* which become a stronger burden on older individuals and indicate that employers take insufficient measures to adjust workload to changing needs. Both occurrences of stress – home life and workload – replicated findings by Fraser *et al.* (2009). This indicates that the person-job fit in the physically and mentally demanding, yet worse paid, jobs changes noticeably with age, and shows that a move to other departments or higher levels of hierarchy are necessary to alleviate older employees' work stress. Meanwhile, the stress experienced by younger employees – relating to conflict within the organization and job responsibility – could be solvable through capable and effective management. It is here that the consequences of the weakness of hospitality leadership personnel – the work by Hight, Gajjar and Okumus (2019), Krüger and Guhlemann (2018) and Yang, Wang and Yang (2020) has been discussed – are evident.

Similarly striking discrepancies were found by Hwang, Hyun and Park (2013) in the difference between single and married men – the former exhibiting more stress from organizational conflict and company work

and pay, the latter far higher levels of stress from conflicts with home life and with job responsibility – and female employees according to the length of their employment (job responsibilities and conflicts with home life increasing with tenure, organizational conflicts and stress from work and pay decreasing). Ko (2020) found that married employees faced much greater levels of stress, particularly from role conflict, than their unmarried colleagues.

These differences in stressors and person-job fit must be seen in relation to the respective circumstances the employees live under and the roles they assume in life. It becomes clear that managers and employees should regularly assess the person-job fit considering the individuals' life stage and develop career paths or work arrangements mirroring the changed needs to reduce stress and turnover. This should take into consideration the relative severity of the work stressors as they were identified by Hwang *et al.* (2014): problems related to task and pay ranking above problems related to the home and conflict with job responsibility. Strategies should thus target the groups most affected by the work stressors that have the most influence on turnover intention, in this case older employees in front-line jobs and single men, though the reasons for their increased stress levels are very different.

In further considering older employees, Sonntag and Stegmaier (2007) argued that age does not necessarily decrease a person's ability to fulfil their job. Schulte (2005) summarizes that no general decrease of

productivity with age can be seen, except in physically demanding jobs, and deficiencies can more often than not be offset by experience. Likewise, different trends were determined and summarized by Sonntag and Stegmaier (2007) which influence the development of older employees:

- Fluid intelligence and working memory capacity decrease with age, though mnemonic and learning techniques can be employed to compensate for these losses (Kruse and Rudinger, 1997)
- Older employees exhibit less motivation for participation in training and development activities and have little expectation to be able to utilize training contents to improve their daily work (Colquitt, Lepine and Noe, 2000; Maurer, Weiss and Barbeite, 2003)
- Sonntag and Stegmaier (2007) note that sources of work motivation change with age, and cite Kanfer and Ackerman's (2004) results that older employees were motivated by making a positive impact on their peers, being able to utilize their knowledge and experience, and sharing them with younger colleagues.

Supporting older employees thus is founded on the pillars of creating a suitable work environment, reduction of age discrimination, and creation of age-appropriate training and development measures (Sonntag and Stegmaier, 2007).

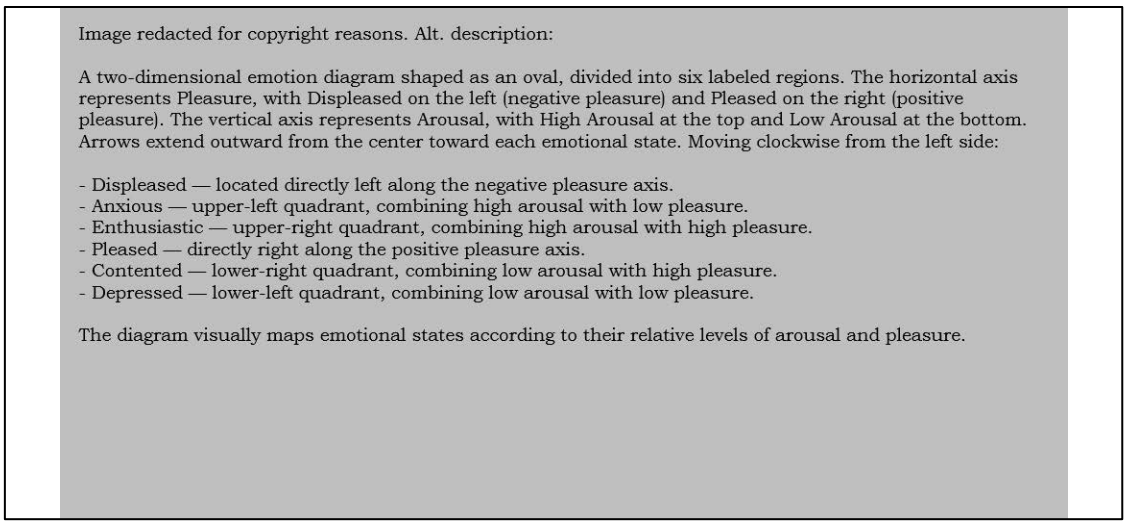
Overall, person-job fit appears to be a central concept in understanding hotel employees' job satisfaction and turnover intention, indirectly also their productivity. The research design therefore anticipates a differentiated outcome where staff retention is unlikely to be improved by uniform measures, but by understanding the needs, abilities and availability of different demographic groups within the workforce.

2.8 Employee Well-Being

In this section, the theoretical pillars of the concept of well-being are presented and related to the experienced realities of work in hotels, demonstrating that the mechanics discussed in the previous sections have a direct effect on the well-being and health of employees.

Employee well-being has received increased attention in the wake of Covid-19. The concept of well-being is a multidimensional construct (Mehta *et al.*, 2022). Definitions vary but centre around the concept of having one's needs and wants satisfied, good physical as well as mental health, and feeling authentic and meaningful (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978; Grawitch, Gottschalk and Munz, 2006; Sonnentag, 2015; Mehta *et al.*, 2022). Figure 4 shows the axes for measuring affective well-being in organizations as proposed by Warr (1992) and used by Schulte (2005) in analysing job satisfaction in older employees, extending the model of job satisfaction by recognizing the role of emotions and merging both into the concept of employee well-being.

Figure 4: Dimensions of affective well-being (Warr 1992)



When Guhlemann and Krüger (2018) traced different types of career biographies in the hospitality industry, they noticed that in almost all cases, a point is reached where an employee is physically unable to keep up with the demands of the working conditions. They then react by seeking more appropriate jobs which do not further deteriorate health, which typically results in a demotion or a complete exit from the industry.

Grawitch, Gottschalk and Munz (2006, p. 133) define the elements of employee well-being to be *physical health*, *mental health*, *stress*, *motivation*, *commitment*, *job satisfaction*, *morale*, and *climate*. They directly relate it to dimensions of organizational improvements like *competitive advantage*, *performance*, *turnover*, *cost savings*, *product quality*, and *customer satisfaction*, which result directly from healthy organizations (p. 134). Their proposed model suggests healthy workplace practices such as work-life balance, employee growth and development, health and safety procedures, recognition, and employee involvement, which

influence both the well-being of employees and the desired organizational improvements. This is supported by various research findings (Poulston, 2009).

Several of these practices are lacking in the hotel working environment: Budhiraja, Varkkey and McKenna (2022) identified discrepancies in the fields of work-life balance and employee growth and development. Recognition has been identified as a need of most hospitality employees (Maroudas, Kyriakidou and Vacharis, 2008; Nohria, Groysberg and Lee, 2008; Younies and Al-Tawil, 2021). Especially employees on the lowest hierarchical levels tend to feel a lack of recognition (Kensbock *et al.*, 2013).

Poulston (2009) synthesized that poor job motivation and disapproval of management may result from the various factors negatively influencing front line hotel employees' work.

Van Der Vaart, Linde and Cockeran (2013) linked employee well-being to psychological contracts, showing that fulfilment of the latter positively influenced employee well-being and simultaneously concluding that enhancement of individual well-being should be a key retention strategy.

2.9 Work-Life Balance

Another major influence on employee well-being is work-life balance (Gulzar, Ayub and Abbas, 2021). It is also a constant topic of public debate in Germany, especially since the youngest generation (*Z*) is frequently accused of lacking work ethic and instead demanding work-life-balance without having earned it through hard work (Schmollack, 2022; Smit and Rebhan, 2023; Bemelmann and Groß, 2024). An example of this is the analysis by Leppich (2023) for a regional public broadcasting service. According to those interviewed by her, the allegations of excessive demand for work-life balance by young people are more rooted in jealously by older cohorts, who did not have the benefit of growing into a labour shortage and thus had fewer opportunities. The young people, meanwhile, prioritized their well-being over doing work, rather being without a job than unhappy with one. However, as with psychological contracts, the differences between age groups were miniscule. A survey among university students meanwhile revealed that the stereotype about their generation may indeed be false as they care less about work-life-balance than the quality of the workplace (Poggensee, 2024). Research backs this up: *Millennials* and *Gen Z* value flexibility in their working times (Waworuntu, Kainde and Mandagi, 2022) but do not prioritize work-life balance over other aspects when choosing employment (Lassleben and Hofmann, 2023).

Haar, Harris and Myers (2024) found similar dynamics as had Törn-Laapio and Ekonen (2021), showing that work-life balance is an important well-being factor for older workers as well although this importance appears to decrease slightly with age.

ten Brink (2004) showed that employers offering work-life balance was negatively related to extra effort on the job. However, Haar and Brougham (2022) demonstrated that work-life balance benefits organizational outcomes, including turnover intention. The concept of work-life balance also appears to be universally important across cultures and age groups (Haar *et al.*, 2014; Haar, Harris and Myers, 2024). Some differences appear to exist in the subjective perception of who deserves priority in work-life-balance, whereby women with children are considered more deserving of having work-life balance made possible for them (Filippi *et al.*, 2024). Lassleben and Hofmann (2023) showed that traditional gender assumptions are still very much present when it comes to expectations and priorities about work design.

Budhiraja, Varkkey and McKenna (2022) interviewed front desk employees of Indian luxury hotels on issues of work-life balance. They found that employees had to make critical life decisions, such as when to get married, in accordance with the demands of their job – the long and inconsistent hours as well as the requirement to be constantly available. Other issues highlighted were long commutes taking up time and reducing available time with the family. In response to that, many hotels had

offered free or discounted holiday packages, which interview participants generally expected as part of their psychological contracts (p. 1248). Furthermore, employees wished for support in furthering their education as part of their career planning, hoping to achieve better work-life balance this way.

These findings support the theory that has been a recurring theme in this literature review: the industry loses employees in distinct phases of their biography; whenever personal responsibilities or needs collide with work, employees are tasked with choosing one or the other. This is evident even as early as the phase of creating committed partnerships, when employees choose to leave the hospitality industry to be able to spend time with their significant others (Guhlemann and Best, 2021). Employees attempting to reduce their working hours in the phase of family-building and early childcare report serious losses of reputation (Guhlemann and Krüger, 2018). This concurs with theories of career-building where different age brackets are considered to have different goals - exploration, growth, and then maintaining achieved levels of success (Schulte 2005, p. 40). McGinley *et al.* (2014) demonstrated that young managers in the hospitality sector were leaving their career paths due to work-life-balance conflicts, and Krüger and Guhlemann (2018) showed that scheduling needs significantly impacted work-life balance and job satisfaction. Ahmad, Omar and Azim (2012) established that autonomy to schedule work in accordance with family needs improved organizational commitment

and that this issue was subject to a strong psychological contract since legal circumstances (at least in their location of research, Malaysia) were often insufficient.

Relating the theory of work-life balance to the psychological contract, it appears that it plays a beneficial role here as well: Kaya and Karatepe (2020) showed that work-life balance can soften the negative effects of psychological contract breach and thus alleviate some of the negative outcomes of such breaches, including turnover.

In Germany, the legal framework exists to adjust working times in accordance with personal needs (Bundesministerium der Justiz, 2022), as it is acknowledged that inability to make such adjustments can reduce well-being and negatively impact employee health (Bell, Otterbach and Sousa-Poza, 2012; Seifert *et al.*, 2016). In the hospitality industry however, employees are often expected to be contactable and available to work at the employer's request, causing tremendous stress (Maack *et al.*, 2013).

Given the specific characteristics and challenges of the hospitality sector, the concept of work-life balance can be expected to feature very prominently, especially where hiring younger employees is concerned, and particularly when it comes to making the career attractive to new entrants. But the literature shows that the need for this balance permeates all age groups, despite the 'life' part taking different shapes like childcare.

2.10 Work Stress

Stress is defined as *"an individual's physical or psychological response to unusual situations"* and regarded as a part of life but is commonly strongly linked to work (Hwang *et al.*, 2014). While considered an evolutionary advantage, continuous stress can lead to deterioration of physical and mental health, lower productivity, and aggressive behaviour (Litzcke and Schuh, 2007; O'Connor, Thayer and Vedhara, 2021). According to Vester (2003), negative long-term effects of stress are exacerbated when an individual has too few or too short recovery phases – as routinely happens in shift work (Kecklund and Axelsson, 2016). Stress is a major contributor to work-related health problems (Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2022) and regarded as one of the largest workplace health perils (Salama *et al.*, 2022). It also negatively affects employees' well-being and association with their work, leading to greater turnover intention (Duraisingam, Pidd and Roche, 2009; Hwang *et al.*, 2014; Wong *et al.*, 2021; Salama *et al.*, 2022). O'Neill and Davis (2011) and Prasetio *et al.* (2019) directly linked work stress to turnover intention.

Working in the hotel industry is highly stressful due to long and anti-social working hours, excessive workloads, and the challenges of constant customer interaction (Li, Wong and Kim, 2017; Karatepe *et al.*, 2018; Ko, 2020; Khliefat *et al.*, 2021; Ma, Ren and Zhao, 2021). Other elements of hospitality labour that lead to researchers branding the environment as demanding and stressful are time pressure, job insecurity, and safety

hazards (Shi, Gordon and Adler, 2022). Customer-orientation is a primary source for work stress as front-line employees act in a field of tension between conflicting expectations and demands of customers, supervisors and their organization, causing dissonance (de Ruyter, Wetzels and Feinberg, 2001; O'Neill and Davis, 2011). Stressed employees are likely to deliver worse service (Ko, 2020); this identifies stress as another source of poorer business results.

In contrast, stress has been regarded as a positive and motivational occurrence if experienced in moderate levels (Brymer, Perrewe and Johns, 1991) and only becomes toxic if it exceeds certain levels (Brymer, 1982). Cavanaugh *et al.* (2000) categorized types and sources of stress into positive *"challenge stressors"* and negative *"hindrance stressors"*. This theory may however not be fully applicable to the hotel environment; findings are inconsistent (Karatepe *et al.*, 2014; Min, Kim and Lee, 2015; Babakus, Yavas and Karatepe, 2017; Olugbade and Karatepe, 2019; Wong *et al.*, 2021). Shi, Gordon and Adler (2022) argued that challenge factors may achieve negative results more often than in other industries and showed that both hindrance and challenge stressors were negatively related to job satisfaction. The effects of stressors on employees may thus be highly individual and related to the level of person-job fit. Generally however, stress has a negative effect on psychological contracts (Zhou, Luo and Chen, 2025).

Two causes of stress common in the hotel working environment are role ambiguity and emotional labour. Role ambiguity exists when an employee has insufficient information to carry out their job role adequately or when it is unclear how their performance is evaluated (de Ruyter, Wetzels and Feinberg, 2001; Igbaria and Shayo, 2003), or generally when they are unsure what their job includes and requires (Ko, 2020). Morrison (1994) showed that large discrepancies tend to exist amongst employees and between employees and supervisors on their understanding of what their job requirements are. Role ambiguity and role conflict (the incompatibility of different roles held by the same person) are significant predictors of work stress (Ryan *et al.*, 2015; Ko, 2020), including for hotel employees (Üngüren and Arslan, 2021). Employees under role stress do not resign immediately but do so when prolonged stress leads to burnout (Wen *et al.*, 2020). This indicates that role clarity may be an important factor that employees look out for. Effective leadership can reduce this ambiguity (Valenzi, 1978; Skogstad *et al.*, 2014).

Interacting with customers requires high levels of emotional labour – the effort of regulating feelings and expressions to align with an organization's display rules and goals (Grandey, 2000; Lee and Madera, 2019; Ma, Ren and Zhao, 2021), thus dissonating one's own emotional state from the displayed one. This includes outright faking emotions (Gursoy, Boylu and Avci, 2011), which is especially stressful and negatively affects job satisfaction (Gursoy, Boylu and Avci, 2011; Lee and Madera, 2019; Shi,

Gordon and Adler, 2022). Emotional labour quickly exhausts employees' emotional resources (Hu, Hu and King, 2017; Li, Wong and Kim, 2017) and affects personal well-being (Riforgiate, Howes and Simmons, 2022). Green (2023) outlined the exhaustive emotional labour female bartenders are forced to exert, and the impact thereof. Research suggests that a depletion of an employee's resources triggers behaviours to protect resources in a different domain (Halbesleben, Harvey and Bolino, 2009; Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019). In hotels, emotional labour is directly related to turnover intention (Zhang, Deeprasert and Jiang, 2024). Customer misbehaviour has a significant impact on employees' emotional resources and is likely to spill over and impact employees' well-being and interpersonal relationships in non-work-related contexts (Hwang *et al.*, 2014; Hu, Hu and King, 2017; Yang, Lu and Huang, 2020). These findings on hotel employees contrast those of Hart (1999), whose research was conducted on police officers, suggesting that emotional labour takes a different form and is dealt with differently depending on the context. Moreover, Robbins, Ford and Tetrick (2012) confirmed that interpersonal injustice significantly impacted employees' health outcomes. Disrespectful treatment by guests can thus be considered a further stressor for employees and impact their job and life satisfaction, leading, as a last resort of self-protection, to turnover.

However, customer contact can also be a powerful source of positive emotions when gratitude is expressed and pleasant interactions leave the

employee emotionally enriched (Yang, Wang and Yang, 2020). This makes a verdict on the benefit of customer interaction impossible. Whether the effect is positive or negative depends on each individual interaction and the prevailing circumstances. Customer interaction is also to be expected when entering the hospitality workforce, who will have certain expectations of the emotional labour they are required to exert, and their readiness to do so. Nonetheless, emotional labour is a central cause of stress and employers are advised to limit its occurrence as well as finding individuals with favourable personal predispositions. Emotional intelligence has been identified as an important personal resource to moderate the negative effects of emotional labour (Lei and Kuok, 2025).

Where emotional labour occurs, emotional resilience, *"the ability of an individual to cope with adversities and bounce back from failures"* (Pahwa and Khan, 2022), becomes an important trait to cope with the stress incurred. Pahwa and Khan (2022) listed twelve antecedents of emotional resilience. Among them are purposefulness and meaning, which can be linked back to traits and expectations discussed before, demonstrating the necessity for employers to create meaningful work; emotional regulation through management of emotions (which requires the ability and space to do so); and supportive social networks, which are difficult to maintain for hospitality workers outside of work on account of the irregular working hours. Several points on the list relate to personal traits and

behaviours, however, which in turn demonstrates the necessity to maximize person-job fit.

Saleem *et al.* (2021) stated that working conditions in the hospitality industry depleted emotional resources and required high levels of emotional resilience; Xu *et al.* (2018) had shown that certain personal antecedents increased emotional exhaustion, but that it could be eased through strategies like positive work reflection. Yang, Lu and Huang (2020) showed that resilience had a mediating effect on the negative effects from customer mistreatment on daily well-being in non-work time. Thus, Khliefat *et al.* (2021) recommended hotel managers to actively promote well-being and psychological health among their employees to counter the intense stress of the work environment and increase resilience. Zhang, Deeprasert and Jiang (2024) confirmed that employees with higher job satisfaction had to exert less emotional labour and were psychologically healthier, arguing that maintaining a supportive work environment and providing opportunities for emotional hygiene helped in alleviating the negative impact of emotional labour for hotel workers.

The literature demonstrates that emotional resilience is a trait and skill, which can to some extent be supported by employers. At the very least, employers should avoid negatively impacting their employees' resilience. In practice, this can be done by being supportive and creating meaningful work. For the present study, this means that it should be investigated whether employees expect their employers to provide these inducements.

2.11 Psychological Contracts in the Hotel Industry

The literature review shows that the psychological contract is already frequently considered as a mediator in the causal relationships preceding employee turnover. While different schools of thought prevail on the psychological contract, particularly regarding the parties to it and the role of expectations in their formation, it has been frequently utilized to explain phenomena in hotel employees. The importance of context-related research has been stressed by Kraak *et al.* (2024). The context of German hotels still lacks coverage (see 2.2.5.1).

The literature review additionally covered the concepts of job satisfaction (2.5), demographics (2.6), well-being (2.8), work-life balance (2.9) and stress (2.10) as they relate to working in hotels and how they influence the psychological contract or are influenced by it. Section 2.7 explores the role of select inducements in hotel employees' psychological contracts.

The literature review revealed the importance of psychological contracts for hotel employees and the value of their exploration and management for the development of better retention strategies.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Purpose

The review of existing literature has demonstrated that while research in the psychological contract is extensive, as is academic interest in the work performance and employment conditions of hotel employees around the world, no academic research exists on the psychological contracts of hotel employees in Germany. Likewise, the methodological breadth of psychological contract research is limited and may neglect certain aspects of the complex relationships which exist around and within the concept of psychological contracts. To provide a basis of knowledge to practitioners and further research, this thesis aims to uncover common and divergent views on the psychological contract of hotel employees in Northern Germany.

The research questions for this study are:

Q1: What shared viewpoints exist among hotel employees in Northern Germany about the employer inducements expected in their psychological contract?

Q2: Are any inducements equally valued by employees across different viewpoints?

Q3: Which inducements are valued differently across viewpoints?

3.2 Research Philosophy

3.2.1 Ontology

The psychological contract is by its very nature a construct of subjectivity, of beliefs and promises (Rousseau, 1989). Consequently, this study proceeded under the paradigm of a subjectivist ontology; the belief that *"social phenomena* [here: psychological contracts, the results of their fulfilment and breach] *are created from the perceptions* [here: the psychological contract proper] *and consequent actions* [performance, organizational citizenship behaviour, turnover] *of social actors* [here: the employees]*"* (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

3.2.2 Epistemology

This research project adopted a pragmatist epistemology. Epistemological considerations did not prescribe the nature and form of the study; the quest for the desired practical contribution to solving the identified problem did. This fits the definition of pragmatism by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019, p. 151): *"Researcher values drive the reflexive process of inquiry, which is initiated by doubt and a sense that something is wrong or out of place."* According to Elkjaer and Simpson (2011), pragmatism maintains that the meaning of events and actions can only be found in their anticipated consequences, whereas other philosophies created meaning retrospectively. The present research looked at meaning-making in precisely this way: asking participants to rank the importance of employer inducements tasks them with interpreting them in relation to the

anticipated conditions and terms of the employment relationship, their own future plans and possibly concerns of their health or economic welfare. Through this approach, the pragmatist epistemology served the subjectivist ontology while being shaped by researcher values in the pracademic axiology (see 3.2.3). At the same time, psychological contracts are informed by previous experience - Elkjaer and Simpson (2011) write that *"[p]ragmatism… theorizes the temporal continuity of present moments as both anchored in the past and thrusting into the future."* Exploring precisely this part of the psychological contract means researching subjective thinking that is mostly future-oriented. Though pragmatism is not without criticism in the philosophical community, it lends itself to the practice-oriented research of organization theory (Elkjaer and Simpson, 2011; Kelly and Cordeiro, 2020) to which the findings of this study are intended to contribute.

For very pragmatic reasons (see 3.3.2), it was decided to utilize Q Methodology for this research. This methodology, specifically the form of it conducted here, is rooted in social constructionism (Rost, 2021). Watts and Stenner (2012) explained how European-style Q Methodologists have very successfully utilized the method to identify *"social viewpoints and knowledge structures"* at a particular point in time, allowing for a systematic and holistic approach to their extraction. That, too, suited this study. As it was expressly driven by the research questions and the research

aim, however, and epistemology was a secondary consideration, the entire project must be understood as a pragmatist one.

3.2.3 Axiology

3.2.3.1 Insider and Outsider Research

An important distinction to make is whether the research is conducted by an insider or outsider researcher. However, a clear distinction between either one or the other of these poles is not always possible: Gair (2012) noted broad consensus in the literature over this divide being fluent rather than polar. An insider researcher, summarized Punch and Rogers (2022), is a part of the population they study and can access deep insider knowledge, utilizing their knowledge and experience to pick up on cues in internal communication that may remain hidden to the outsider researcher. Yet they might be subjected to insider bias; even if not, in research setting like the one we are confronted with in this project, an immediate member of the peer group and personally acquainted with some of the participants. At the same time Punch and Rogers (2022) argued that outsider researchers could interpret events and behaviours in a way that insiders would not.

Rosenberg and Tilley (2021) presented an example of what they call *"insider-outsider"* research under the premise that *"some people may have a wealth of shared knowledge with researched community members, they are nonetheless outsiders to many other experiences of those peoples, and that balance must form a part of the researcher's comprehension of their*

role", drawing on Hayfield and Huxley (2015). They noted that research conducted by researchers in this position yield "*in-dept, rich, and community-approved knowledge"*. The latter argument is probably the most valuable for the current research: while psychological contracts and subjective views on working conditions of hotel employees have been researched previously, no high-level research could be identified which had been conducted by researchers with personal experience of the environment able to relate to the researched group and communicate on eye-level. Voloder (2014) found that having shared experiences with the participants enabled them to develop relationships and gain trust. Rosenberg and Tilley (2021) further argued that researchers with a personal background in the researched field found a higher degree of accountability and were able to enhance data collected by mobilizing their own experience, more accurately describe the participants' lived experiences and generate *"actionable knowledge"* for the direct benefit of the subjects in question. Punch and Rogers (2022) reflected on their role as insider-outsider researchers and note that the position allowed them to review the research from differential positions, obtaining a more holistic picture than purely emic or etic research. Meanwhile, negotiating an insider-outsider perspective brings with it the challenge of maintaining objectivity (Rosenberg and Tilley, 2021): due to the personal familiarity with the subject and bias, information may be over- or underemphasized while certain issues might *"present an inflated perspective"* or omit information. Furthermore, rapport might be damaged by blurred boundaries between researchers and

the researched communities. Zou (2023) provided a detailed and contemporary discussion of the respective risks and opportunities of both the insider and outsider approach, acknowledging that acceptance for the blurred line between both poles and multi-role positionality of researchers is growing in the literature.

The research of Rosenberg and Tilley (2021) concerned transgender communities. Researching a professional environment of hotel employees is inherently less intimate and these ethical challenges did not present themselves in the same magnitude; nonetheless, an awareness of the personal experiences and opinions – which, after all, form the motivation for this research in the first place – is of critical importance. It was therefore in the researcher's interest to develop a methodology which helped in limiting bias and personal involvement. This is part of the strategy of *minimizing* one's insider status, one of the four strategies presented by Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2013); another being *utilizing* one's status to gain access and insight (leveraging the strengths of insider-outsider research discussed above). The remaining strategies are *maximizing* and *incorporating*: *maximizing* is congruent with autoethnography, while *incorporation* includes the researcher as one of the subjects. Since the researcher is no longer employed by a hotel, maximizing is impossible. However, in the first stage of the research described in this chapter and by Rebehn, Nichol and Bell (2024), *incorporation* was used in a limited capacity to enrich the group discussion. Rosenberg and Tilley (2021)

develop the concept of the *"insider-outsider research staircase:"* the present project would be located at the highest step in this staircase, research led by an insider-outsider researcher. Research at this level can, according to Rosenberg and Tilley (2021), provide nuance and complexity to discussions while harnessing all the mentioned strengths of this constellation. The authors attach even higher value to research conducted by teams with varied levels of *"insiderness"* – in the context of a doctoral thesis, which is a solo project, this strength can unfortunately not be played out.

3.2.3.2 Pracademic Research

Lau, Haist and Hewett (2025) highlighted the benefits of combining management and human resource research with practice or practical experience. By being actively involved in academia and management practice, *pracademics* generate knowledge that is founded in and useful for both domains. Lau, Haist and Hewett (2025, p. 5) listed strengths of pracademic roles like translating between both realms. The present study conducted such translation twice over: translating the thus far unexpressed psychological contracts of employees into theoretical knowledge and academic terms; and developing actionable strategies which then are communicated in ways and forms useful for employers in the industry, which are often not academically inclined or connected. Actors on either side of the continuum proposed by Lau, Haist and Hewett (2025) – the *impact-driven scholar* and the *reflective practitioner* – each do only one of these

steps and need to collaborate for mutually impactful research. Drawing from this strength, another activity listed by the authors is the production of knowledge through interaction between both domains. Equally, the dissemination of generated knowledge can be realized towards both domains of the continuum if the research identifies and acts as a pracademic. The present study utilized the strengths of the insider-outsider role to engage the opportunities brought about by pracademic research.

3.3 Research Design

A methodology was developed that effectively addressed the research questions, enabled accessible data collection from time-constrained participants, provided sufficiently rich data for analysis, and produced clear syntheses from subjective, often subconscious, perspectives. The methodology chosen was Q Methodology (Brown, 1980; Watts and Stenner, 2012), which due to its nature and function has the potential to fulfil all these goals.

3.3.1 Q Methodology

3.3.1.1 Overview of Q Methodology

The study utilized the design of *Q Methodology* as first conceived by William Stephenson in the 1930s and explained in detail by Watts and Stenner (2012). Due to its detail and result-oriented diction, their guidebook served as the primary guide for this study, and the methodology closely followed the tried-and-tested recommendations of the authors. Terminology and definitions were also loaned from Watts and Stenner (2012) to closely follow the standards set therein and reduce any possible ambiguity.

Scholars utilizing Q Methodology have followed different schools of thought. Giles (2013) contrasted the European (British) *"dialect"* of Q Methodology with the American one. Watts and Stenner are associated with the European school of using Q as a tool of critical psychology, who insist on seeing the individual holistically and, as Giles (2013) put it,

"prefer to see the Q-sort as a celebration of 'mess' rather than a tidy-up technique" and seek to find various, contradicting patterns of thought. In the *"American dialect"* meanwhile, Q Sorts are conducted as a confirmatory tool to other (R Methodological) methods, partially even conducted by observers of the actual individual in question, and do not grant the researched individual the level of empowerment to create meaning that the *"European dialect"* does. Considering this distinction, the research aim of this project required a *European-style* approach to Q Methodology.

Rost (2021) in essence echoed the explanations by Watts and Stenner (2012) and distinguished not two but three schools of Q Methodology: the first being the *single-case* application first envisioned by Stephenson which is constructivist in nature and focusses heavily on the subjectivity of interpretation. The other two being the *"British"* and *"Californian"* schools; the latter continuing the constructivist tradition and utilizing Q as *"an observer-rated, standardized assessment tool"* in human psychology. The British school takes a social constructionist approach, believing that people hold shared assumptions and interpretations of reality. A predetermined concourse is presented to participants sourced from a specific social group, and commonalities determined. This school of Q has been adapted in many fields beyond psychology, including the present project.

3.3.1.2 Use of Q Methodology in this Study

Q Methodology was selected for use in this study as it aligns closely with the pragmatist requirements (see 3.2.2), the subjectivist ontology and the intended contribution. This study focussed on the opinions and viewpoints of people, attempting to provide results which allow interpretation of differences based on a variety of circumstantial factors. The research design of Q Methodology lends itself to this purpose as it does not, as R Methodology does, compare *"bits of people"* (Watts and Stenner 2012) against identified factors, but does the opposite by placing the whole individual participants in focus – looking for patterns within individuals, rather than differences between them based on variables (Stephenson, 1936b; Giles, 2013). Müller and Kals (2004) argued that R Methodology leaves something to be desired as it does not consider the internal logic which participants use, although these are of particular interest when researching subjectivity. As Stephenson (1936) explained and Watts and Stenner (2012) elaborated in detail, R Methodology was better suited to general psychology than individual psychology. The research undertaken in this project, however, aimed to explore individual viewpoints on an issue without having them diminished by statistics, and grouping together people viewing the world similarly, for which Q is considered a suitable tool (Giles, 2013); Rousseau and McLean Parks (1993) and Rousseau and Schalk (2000) found that individuals employed on the same contract with identical terms and conditions as well as standardized employment conditions, e.g. on the same team, tended to develop shared or

uniform psychological contracts. Given that teams of hotel employees tend to be employed on identical terms and conditions, and these, due to the nature of the respective job, are similar across employers as partially bounded by collective bargaining agreements applicable across larger geographic regions, this aspect of investigating shared viewpoints becomes the tool of choice to develop an overview of shared psychological contracts.

> "The Q methodological data matrix duly contains relative and subjective evaluations made by a series of persons, each person's evaluations being treated as a single and gestalt entity for purposes of analysis. In other words, the items are treated as if they have been 'made homogeneous' with respect to any given individual."
>
> - Watts and Stenner (2007)

Addams (2000) argued for Q methodology as an operant and *"reconstructive"* technique, allowing subjects to *"speak for themselves"* by eliminating the forcing of external categories and enabling the free construction of an image of the participant's attitude in their individual context. Brown (2019) rather summarized that a Q sort demonstrated the internal structure and form of *"an interacting whole, or field, in which there are no independent variables and no dependent variables,"* influenced by all traits and circumstances defining the individual participant.

Provided the large share of our identity and time which work consumes, and the various previously discussed factors which influence the

expectations of and experiences at work, a holistic approach is deemed necessary to answer the research questions. The goal is to identify groups of psychological contracts within a given population, achieving a degree of generalizability by thus clustering viewpoints, or, as Müller and Kals (2004) call it, typology ("*Typenbildung*").

Generalizability is a further key strength of this research design compared to purely interpretivist ones. Q Methodology is not suitable for determining how prevalent a viewpoint is within the general population, but it does yield the variety of viewpoints which exist without discrimination by prevalence (Figueroa *et al.*, 2024). The goal of this study was deriving actionable recommendations for practitioners in general (rather than a single organization) from individual, subjective viewpoints. While generalizable results are more easily gained from positivist research using quantitative methods, Q excels at combining the strengths of quantitative and qualitative research by applying the tools of quantitative research while operating in the *"understanding tradition"* of qualitative research (Müller and Kals, 2004); Banks-VanAllen *et al.* (2023) stated that *"Q methodology focuses on subjective meanings and understandings from the person's own standpoint, that is, on subjectivity solely and as such."* The Methodology allowed the researcher to identify common attitudes and examine the differences with divergent respondents' views (Dennis and Goldberg, 1996; ten Klooster, Visser and de Jong, 2008), thus bringing together subjectivity and generalizability. In this paradox situation of

creating generalizable results from subjective data, a participant-centric approach (*"patient-centric"* in Alele and Malau-Aduli, 2023) is chosen to minimize interference in the participants' sense-making and interpretation of the questions presented. Danielson, Webler and Tuler (2009) considered it a key strength of Q Methodology that it allows the sort to be undertaken with minimal researcher interference.

3.3.2 Process

[Reproduction of textual content only, visual form is author's creation]

Table 4: Key terms in the process of a Q Study (Watts and Stenner, 2012)

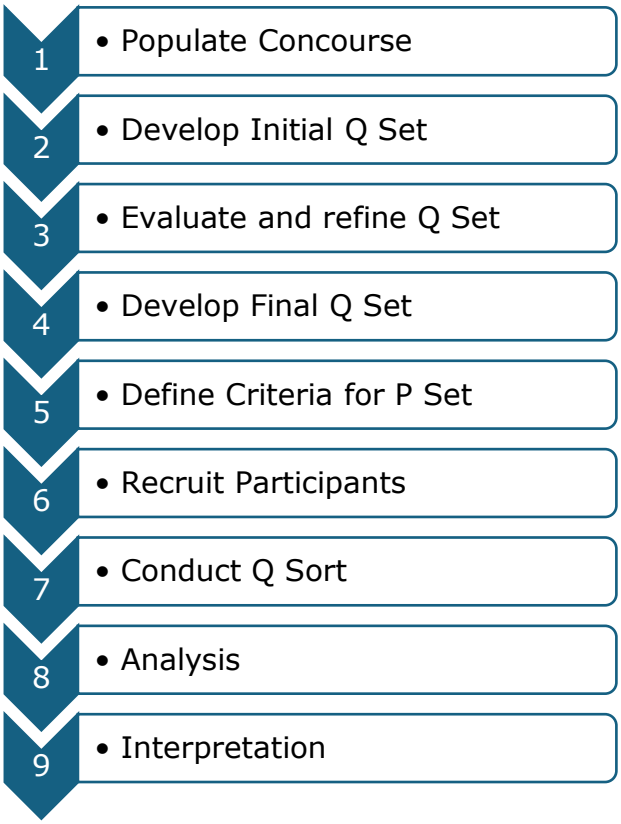
Term	Description
Concourse	Universe of statements for (and about) any situation/context
Q Set	Set of statements presented to participants
P Set	Set of participants for the study
Q Sort	Main activity where the participants sort the statements of the Q Set

The research was conducted in two phases; derived from the standard process of conducting a Q study after Damio (2016) and Paige and Morin (2016). The first phase concerned the exploration of the concourse, thereafter the construction and verification of the Q Set. The process of this phase yielded a robust Q Set for utilization in the second phase as well as preliminary findings on expected employer inducements (Rebehn, Nichol and Bell, 2024). The second phase consisted of the conduction and interpretation of the Q Sorts.

Figure 5 illustrates the steps taken in a Q study. Steps 1 and 2, the building of the concourse and subsequent development of the Q set (the collection of statements to be sorted by the participants) are described in the following sections.

The Q sorting (step 7) was done remotely via an online application designed for the purpose, which also included a standardized pre- and post-sorting interview.

Figure 5: Process of the Q Study (own work, adapted from Damio, 2016; Paige and Morin, 2016)



3.3.3 Software

The decision to conduct the Q Sorts online was made early in the process. In-person sorting was considered unfeasible on account of the geographical spread of the participants and their availability. The method of mailing physical cards described by Watts and Stenner (2012) was considered outdated, resource-intensive, and time-consuming for the participants.

Due to the nature of hotel employees' daily lives, maximizing convenience and accessibility was imperative to secure participation.

The platform of choice was *Q Method Software* (Lutfallah and Buchanan, 2019) for its complete functionality including analysis, cross-platform compatibility and cloud-based architecture. The software had recently been successfully utilized for peer-reviewed research by Reis *et al.* (2025). It was also found to be the most customizable on the market, including the labelling of buttons, to enable near-complete use of German language throughout the study. This further ensured accessibility and convenience for participants.

3.3.4 Concourse

3.3.4.1 Basic Considerations

The first step in developing a Q methodological study is the building of a concourse (Watts and Stenner, 2012; Damio, 2016). The nature of the concourse, explained Watts and Stenner (2012), changes for every study and is framed by the research question. In tandem with the importance of designing and conducting context-specific research (Kraak *et al.*, 2024), this necessitated the careful and intensive engagement with the concourse. Brown (2019) argued that subjective statements or views about a topic are unlimited and thus can never be exhaustively described, which further supports the argument for careful and rigorous Q Set creation.

Paige and Morin (2016) presented step-by-step instructions on the development of a Q Set: first being the population of the concourse capturing

"the breadth and depth of opinions on the topic of interest." The literature emphasizes that the concourse may be populated with opinions from a wide variety of sources (Brown, 1980; Paige and Morin, 2016). The researcher was able to draw on varied and extensive personal experience working in the hotel industry to generate an informal concourse of opinions. It was however preferred to add an additional empirical layer of input to the generation of the concourse and Q Set.

3.3.4.2 Concourse Exploration

As the research questions regarded employer inducements, it was deemed prudent to start the process by exploring the inducements promised by employers. Given the high employee fluctuation within the industry and preference of employers for experienced personnel, it was expected that the promised inducements catered to the common aspects of the psychological contracts held by experienced hotel employees.

The first step was surveying job adverts posted by various employers on the popular hospitality job search website *Hotelcareer* (*Hotelcareer*, 2023) in September 2023, filtering for location and job role. The search mask allowed to search for *"profession, key word or company"* and/or *"location/region"* with a specified radius.

Leaving the first form field blank and utilizing the *"location +20km"* filter, several locations along the coastlines of North and Baltic Sea, islands, and locations up to roughly 100 km inland were systematically searched. Job adverts were considered for inclusion if they were:

- Within the specified search area
- For a position at a hotel or other lodging business
- A frontline, i.e. guest-facing service role
- Roles up to the first level of management (head of operational department, i.e. restaurant manager or front desk manager)

After discarding duplicates, a total of 141 job adverts across a diverse range of locations, hotel types and positions were considered for concourse building. Where the positions were advertised by a large company or chain which provided a dedicated career website (including for franchise systems), these sites were taken into consideration as well. The information gathered was supplemented by academic literature and popular publications reviewing employee expectations regarding employer inducements (Table 21).

3.3.5 Q Set Development

3.3.5.1 Development of the Initial Q Set

Q Set development is considered a time-consuming effort, a "*craft*" (Curt, 1994) and "*more an art than science*" (Brown, 1980), while Watts and Stenner (2012) simultaneously reminded the reader of the importance of rigour and structure, and that creating the best possible Q set required "*great persistence and high levels of skill*". A Q set is required to be broadly

representative of the concourse and population, covering all the relevant ground within the conceptual space. A particular challenge for the present project was formulating statements covering all possible forms of opinion without bias or being *"value-laden"* (Watts and Stenner 2012).

Paige and Morin (2016) provided a step-by-step guide on Q Set construction. In the present case, it was possible to condense the evaluation steps three and four as an asynchronous focus group discussion with subject matter experts was conducted allowing for simultaneous discussion, refinement, and testing.

3.3.5.2 Initial Q Set

Table 21 (Appendix 7.2.2) shows the statements which were compiled from the primary sources described above. The information collected was analysed and grouped using NVivo version 12 (Lumivero, 2017), resulting in the identification of 20 nodes that are presented in Table 5. The most discussed topics were corporate (workplace) culture, aspects of the applicant's personality, job content, career development, and monetary benefits. These monetary benefits primarily included incentives such as night or weekend premiums, bonus systems, employer contributions to retirement funds or Christmas presents, less frequently profit sharing and bonus systems.

Table 5: Topics in job adverts

Node	Mentions
Corporate Culture	248
Personality	243
Job Content	189
Career Development	163
Monetary Benefits	137
Discounts (staff rates)	130
Workplace Description	112
Training & Development	109
Team Spirit	100
Mobility	94
Staff Meals	87
Health	78
Discounts (external partners)	74
Salary	73
Team Building	67
Staff Housing	62
Work-Life Integration	57
Uniforms	41
Vacation Leave	41
Feedback	31

Disregarding items explicitly specified in work contracts or collective bargaining agreements and thus not of immediate relevance for the implicit psychological contract, the individual and distinctly phrased promises, descriptions, and employer expectations were rephrased to align with the anticipated impact they would have on the forming of expectations in applicants for the jobs in question. The Q Set items took the shape of statements in the first-person form beginning with *"I…"* to encourage participants to consider them subjectively. Initially, 97 statements across 20 categories were developed, which were reduced to 49 statements in 13 categories by consolidating similar statements and eliminating obsolete or duplicate ones. Each statement was validated by comparing it with prior research findings. Table 21 lists the statements and their

foundation, i.e. from which nodes in the qualitative text assessment they were derived and which academic findings support their relevance for inclusion.

3.3.5.3 Focus Group Discussion

3.3.5.3.1 Premise

To address the limitations of the concourse design and in line with the suggested process of Q Set construction by Paige and Morin (2016), the initial Q Set was presented to a focus group of experts for discussion, evaluation, enrichment of the concourse and refinement. This focus group discussion, along with the concourse-building, is the subject of Rebehn, Nichol and Bell (2024).

3.3.5.3.2 Focus Group Design

The participants were purposefully sampled to represent different demographics and aspects of hospitality work. The group was presented with the individual Q statements, invited to share opinions on them and name expectations or employer inducements which they felt were underrepresented.

The group consisted of six members of which five were female. The average age of the participants was roughly forty years. Care was taken to include members at different stages in their careers and with diverse career paths. Relevant work experience included front desk (reception) work, including in managerial and directorial roles, food and beverage service and management, reservations both on-property and in central

reservation offices, and housekeeping departments. Three participants were born outside Germany, and most had worked in other countries before or after their employment in Germany. Two had children at different ages. In addition, the author participated in the discussion in his role as a former front line and managerial employee. Participants were fashioned with a participant information sheet outlining the premise and process of the research as well as all relevant information on data protection. Prior to participation in the group chat, participants gave their informed consent in writing, the key points of which were reiterated at the beginning of the discussion.

Due to the geographical dispersion and limited temporal availability of participants, the focus group discussion was conducted in a specifically created closed chat group on the messaging app *WhatsApp*. This medium and the form of asynchronous group discussions it makes possible have been gaining popularity among researchers in recent years:

Colom (2022) argued that asynchronous group discussions were more accommodating to participants' personal circumstances and schedules, bringing the research closer to their habitual spaces of communication and minimizing inconvenience. Moreover, the possibility for participants to take time and reflect on their responses has been found to positively influence outcomes (Williams *et al.*, 2012; Colom, 2022). At the same time, WhatsApp allows researchers to harness the strengths of both synchronous and asynchronous group discussions (Colom, 2022).

Skelton *et al.* (2018) found that participants generally preferred online discussions to traditional face-to-face groups. They acknowledged that online chats suffer from the lack of nonverbal signals but conclude that these did not make the internet a sub-par alternative. Neo *et al.* (2022) found that participants in *WhatsApp* group discussions were more comfortable sharing sensitive information and disagree with another, thus improving the quality of the results. They also acknowledged the use of vehicles such as emoji and images, which widely replicate (voluntary) nonverbal communication. Singer *et al.* (2020) found that younger participants felt very comfortable using *WhatsApp* to express their opinions and experiences on sensitive topics.

While Chen and Neo (2019) found that the quality of results generated by *WhatsApp* focus groups was good particularly in younger participants but quantity and richness of the conversation lacked behind offline discussion, Richard *et al.* (2021) tested whether conducting a focus group discussion online was detrimental to the quality of results, which they negated. They tasked offline and an online focus groups with developing sustainable practices for the hospitality industry. Both groups generated a significantly overlapping set of ideas and themes.

The technique of using online chats for qualitative data collection was discussed early in Germany: Erdogan (2001) discussed ethical issues of transnationality in matters of data protection legislation and concluded that online chats offer a very different communication structure from

face-to-face discussions, which were the norm at the time. The internet, data protection legislation, and communication habits have evolved heavily since 2001. More recent research (above) has shown that online group chats have become a more familiar method of communication and early concerns regarding the comparability of offline and online discussion results (which Erdogan confirmed in his early experiments) have widely dissipated.

3.3.5.3.3 Discussion Process

The experience using *WhatsApp* was mixed: participation levels were varying strongly as participants were unable to catch up reading and ceased replying, in one case due to a violent illness incapacitating a member for a certain time. Encouraging group members that had become inactive to participate proved difficult. Over the course of the discussion, a gradual loss of attention was noticeable, and as the duration of the chat dragged on longer than anticipated, from 20 March until 16 April 2024, the focus of interpretation of the statements more frequently diverted from *"is that something I expect?"* to *"is that something my employer does?"* The participants nonetheless provided extensive insight from their experience, discussed controversially, and arrived at consensus in all cases.

Over the course of the focus group discussion, the researcher presented the statements grouped by category, allowing for a compartmentalized discussion on the topic in question. Changes to the existing statements were proposed and made in real-time. The total number of statements

remained at 49. At the end of the group discussion, the messenger application's built-in poll function was utilized to determine a preliminary ranking of the inducements in question.

3.3.5.3.4 Interpretation and Amended Q Set

During the discussion, it was agreed that certain statements from the initial Q Set should be omitted, these being #1 *"I am provided access to leisure activities"* and #17 *"I am empowered to make extensive decisions."* All discussion participants agreed that these were of no relevance to their psychological contracts. One participant commented that: *"Statement 1 is often offered in hotels here. This is because the employees have little free time to do extra things. You often work 45 hours a week, 5 days a week and yet they talk about work-life balance. But it never seemed interesting to me."* Statement #17 meanwhile was considered irrelevant for front-line roles but important for higher positions. One participant clearly stated that this provision ought to be explicitly fixed and regulated in writing. They primarily connected this expectation to budget responsibility, which concerns department managers but not line staff.

Meanwhile, the participants wished for two new statements to be included, one being *"I receive support for taking care of my children"* in tandem with a rephrasing of statement #3 *"I receive support for reconciling work and family life"* to *"I receive support for reconciling work and personal life"* as those without children felt underrepresented in the original statement while all agreed that care work, especially for children, had different

connotations than other aspects of personal life and that childcare or time with family should not eclipse the importance of personal and general leisure time. In discussing this aspect, the group agreed that leisure time commitments or preferences were not taken seriously enough in comparison with care work. At the same time, participants felt that where commitments outside work did not include childcare, employers were more prone to expecting the employee to subjugate their needs to work commitments. This concerned especially scheduling, which ended up being considered the most pressing issue.

In the category of diversity, participants wished for another statement to be added as they felt the present one did not cover the entire reality of one's identity at work. One participant explained that they did not show their entire or *"true"* personality to colleagues at work and were perfectly comfortable with the fact that their professional responsibilities required them to play a specific role. It was therefore the unanimous wish that another statement was included which reads *"I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me."* This statement expresses the expectation that the professional role allowed for wide enough boundaries for the individual to interpret and embody it in a manner that minimizes the need for emotional labour.

Statement #36 was reworded as participants felt unsure what a *"modern"* management style would mean and whether it was uniformly considered better. The statement was thus changed to *"I am being managed with a*

suitable leadership style", allowing participants of the Q Sort to attach their own meaning of what they considered suitable for their personality, role, workload and location. The same rationale prompted a request to amend statement #48: instead of expecting necessarily *"modern"* training methods, participants agreed they expected suitable ones. Statement #41 was shortened from *"I can continue my career in different places in the world"* to *"I can continue my career in different places"* at the discretion of the researcher to improve legibility and allow for more interpretative freedom in the Q Sort, as employees may expect flexibility but not necessarily expect or desire international opportunities.

Based on the consensus in the discussion, the researcher compiled the amended Q Set. Table 22 (Appendix 7.2.2) displays it along with the votes they received in the final round of inquiry. Here, participants were presented with a poll form and asked to check each statement they personally considered part of their set of expectations in an employer. This non-representative ranking informed the omission of further statements and the numbering of those in the finalized Q Set.

3.3.6 Q Set Finalization

3.3.6.1 Omitted Statements

Nine statements received no votes in the final poll. They are summarized in Table 23. While support in leisure travel is a popular perk offered to hotel employees, the participants in the focus group did not expect it. As one group member explained, the destinations available had often been

disappointing and uninteresting. The employer assisting in financial security in the future (statement #5) was seen critical as well. This statement refers to specific optional retirement insurance policies or tax-free premiums to specific investment schemes. Since the choice of policy is the employers' alone, and employer participation is voluntary, the experts in the focus group concluded that the benefits were very limited as often a change of employer meant an end to premium payments and consequently very low payouts. Two participants also pointed out that if one were spending part of their working lives abroad, the premiums were not paid either, further reducing eventual payouts. Regarding statement #24, group members agreed that one would automatically seek out less physically demanding tasks with advancing age and did not expect their employers to pay attention to physical capacities – hence, they did not include it in their set of expectations. Celebrating together (#30), a commonly used shorthand for annual Christmas and summer parties, a benefit employers can provide based on tax legislation (Handelskammer Hamburg, no date), was considered unimportant to the group members. The nature of a hotel usually demands that some employees are required to stay on duty or at best work early shifts the following day; at the same time, participants were unimpressed with the prospect of celebrating with people they barely knew (in a large company) and preferred celebrating with select work mates in their leisure time. These statements were thus omitted from the final Q Set.

Determination (#15) was considered important by the discussion participants, who nonetheless mentioned that they had not experienced employers and supervisors valuing this trait. It was therefore not included in the set of expectations voted for and omitted from the final Q Set.

Statement #19 *"I enjoy creative freedom"* did not receive votes in the poll but was explicitly mentioned as an important inducement by three participants during the discussion. It was therefore included in the final Q Set.

Statements #26 and #27 concerned the provision of a healthy lifestyle by offering access to sports and health activities. Interestingly, neither received votes. No comments were made on these statements in the discussion either. The statements were omitted. Taking into consideration the results of the vote and discussion holistically, it could be hypothesized that employees prefer to organize their leisure activities by themselves and do not expect tangible support for these but are willing to invest their regular salaries in suitable activities; it follows that the salaries ought to be sufficiently high to allow this. Statement #40 concerns employer support for a quick career and must be read in conjunction with the related statements #39, #41-43 and #47, which all received support in the poll. While skill and career development are considered very important by the focus group participants (though one cynically stated that skills training typically did not extend beyond mandatory training units), advancing particularly fast did not appear to be important to the members of the

focus group. Rather, a solid and long-term career and especially individual support for one's career plans and development, were considered important. Statement #40 was thus omitted from the final Q Set.

3.3.6.2 Finalized Q Set

By reducing the overall number of statements to 41, the Q Set was not only representative of the actual concourse present among the focus group members, but also greatly improved the practicability of the Q Sort. With the target population in mind, it was pivotal to design a Q Sort which could be conducted in relatively short time and remain engaging throughout, to not lose the participants' interest. Hotel employees were expected to be stressed and rather disinterested in prolonged computer activities. As Watts and Stenner (2012) argue, a *"pressing need"* to make the sorting process less taxing can be a valid argument for a smaller Q Set. Nonetheless, at 41 statements the set remained at the lower bounds of the commonly accepted range (Curt, 1994; Watts and Stenner, 2012). Table 6 lists the final Q Set generated from the focus group discussion. In this version, the statements are sorted by the number of votes received in the poll, beginning with the most frequently voted for item and descending by perceived importance on one's psychological contract. The Q Set and its creation process were presented to academic audiences at two occasions, subsequently peer-reviewed and published by Rebehn, Nichol and Bell (2024).

Table 6: Finalized Q Set

#	Statement (original German)	Statement (English translation)
1	Ich habe planbare Arbeitszeiten	I have plannable working times
2	Ich werde dabei unterstützt, Arbeit und Privatleben unter einen Hut zu bringen	I receive support for reconciling work and personal life
3	Meine Zuverlässigkeit wird geschätzt	My reliability is valued
4	Meine Kritik wird dankbar angenommen	My criticism is received gratefully
5	Meine Fachkompetenz wird geschätzt	My professional expertise is valued
6	Ich bekomme Wertschätzung	I am being valued
7	Mein beruflicher Aufstieg wird individuell gefördert	My professional advancement is individually supported
8	Ich arbeite in einem professionellen Umfeld	I work in a professional environment
9	Ich darf mich bei der Arbeit von Empathie leiten lassen	I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy
10	Die Leidenschaft für meinen Beruf wird am Leben gehalten	My passion for my profession is being kept alive
11	Ich werde für das respektiert, was ich bin	I am respected for who I am
12	Ich kann meine Rolle so ausfüllen, wie es für mich passt	I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me
13	Ich kann aktiv an der Unternehmensentwicklung mitarbeiten	I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development
14	Ich bekomme angemessenes Feedback	I receive appropriate feedback
15	Ich kann jederzeit Feedback abgeben	I can provide feedback any time
16	Meine private Lebensplanung wird berücksichtigt	My personal life plan is being taken into account

#	Statement (original German)	Statement (English translation)
17	Ich werde nicht im Stich gelassen	I am not left hanging
18	Meine guten Leistungen werden belohnt	My good performance is rewarded
19	Ich arbeite in einem Unternehmen, das sich ständig weiterentwickelt	I work in a company which consistently evolves
20	Ich werde mit einem angemessenen Stil geführt	I am being managed with a suitable leadership style
21	Ich habe die Möglichkeit zu einer abwechslungsreichen Karriere	I have the opportunity to have a varied career
22	Ich habe hochwertige Arbeitsmittel zur Verfügung	I have high-quality tools at my disposal
23	Ich kann durch passende Weiterbildungsformate lernen	I get to learn through suitable training formats
24	Mir werden alle für meinen Job nötigen Kenntnisse vermittelt	I am being taught all skills necessary for my job
25	Meine finanziellen Bedürfnisse werden berücksichtigt	My financial needs are being taken into account
26	Ich bekomme Unterstützung beim Pendeln	I receive support for my commute to work
27	Meine Flexibilität wird geschätzt	My flexibility is valued
28	Unser Teamwork wird gefördert	Our team work is encouraged and supported
29	Ich werde gut verpflegt	I receive high-quality meals
30	Meine Treue wird geschätzt	My loyalty is valued
31	Ich werde wie ein Familienmitglied behandelt	I am treated like a family member
32	Ich kann meine Karriere an verschiedenen Orten fortsetzen	I can continue my career in different places
33	Ich habe eine langfristige Karriereperspektive	I have long-term career prospects
34	Ich arbeite mit hochwertigen Produkten	I get to work with high-quality products
35	Ich kann mich ständig beruflich weiterentwickeln	I can continuously develop myself professionally
36	Ich werde bei der Kinderbetreuung unterstützt	I receive support for taking care of my children
37	Ich bekomme Unterstützung dabei, komfortabel zu wohnen	I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay
38	Ich darf die Interessen der Gäste an erste Stelle stellen	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work
39	Ich werde am unternehmerischen Erfolg beteiligt	I get to participate in the business success
40	Ich arbeite in einem nachhaltigen Unternehmen	I work in a sustainable organization
41	Ich habe kreative Freiheit	I enjoy creative freedom

3.3.7 Questionnaire Development

3.3.7.1 Pre-Sorting Questionnaire

Watts and Stenner (2012) argued that the demographic information gathered prior to the Q sort is helpful in enriching the factor descriptions in the process of data interpretation and provide a helpful guide in how to do so. The pre-sorting questionnaire, completed by the participants immediately before beginning the Q sort, should yield relevant information for factor interpretation. Watts and Stenner (2012) strongly advocated allowing participants to self-categorize on demographic data. The pre-sorting questionnaire for this Q study was designed to yield basic demographic data about the participants and their workplaces, as well as information about how the working conditions and employment relationship are perceived by the participant. Further questions regarding their professional qualifications and career plans helped the researcher enrich the interpretation of data and identify types of psychological contracts related to different career profiles. The questions asked are listed in Appendix 7.2.3. All but one question asked for free-text answers to provide maximum freedom of expression and interpretation to participants. Answer length was limited to between 100 and 250 characters to encourage concise and precise answers. Question #13 used radio buttons with five possible answers – *corporate ownership*, *hotel chain*, *privately owned*, *institutionally owned*, and *'other'* – to avoid the question being misunderstood by participants to name the owner. Rather than a lengthy explanation of the question, radio buttons of the categories were introduced.

3.3.7.2 Post-Sorting Questionnaire

The software provided the opportunity for post-sorting questions. Two questions were asked:

1. You ranked two statements as “very important”. Why these two?
2. You also ranked two statements as “not important”. Why these two?

These questions helped further the understanding for the most extreme views held by the participants. Identifying pressing reasons for the highest classification helped put into perspective why some employees valued these inducements the most. Equally interesting was the reasoning for categorizing inducements as least important.

3.3.8 Design of the Online Q Sort

The software was configured to feature the following sections:

1. **Informed consent**. Based on the standardized ethical consent form provided by the University of Worcester (translated to German), with links to the participant information form and the software’s privacy statement. Informed consent was given by clicking on the button labelled *“I have understood everything and consent.”* Clicking the alternative button (*“I do not consent / I still have questions”*) guided the participant off the study page. Participation was thus technically impossible without giving informed consent. This procedure was approved by the university’s ethics panel.
2. **Guidance**. This page explained the study purpose and methodology to participants. A video tutorial for Q participants (Q-Methode Biogas in Bayern, 2020) was embedded at the top of

the page. Subsequently, the process was explained in a language designed to be engaging and informal.

3. **Pre-Sorting Questionnaire**.
4. **Page Break**. An intermediary page with a picture for comic relief
5. **Provisional Ranking**. On this page, the statements were displayed to the participants, who were given the chance to presort them into three categories in accordance with Watts and Stenner (2012, p. 83). Provisional ranking was not required to proceed.
6. **Page Break**. An intermediary page with a short recap of the sorting instructions
7. **Q Sort**. The statements were displayed in accordance with the provisional sorting. They were then to be dragged and dropped onto the sorting grid below.
8. **Pop-up**. Upon clicking *"Submit"*, the participant was asked to reconsider whether this was the final sort they wanted to submit. If they clicked the button labelled *"No, I will think about it one more time"*, the popup closed and the Q Sort page was displayed again.
9. **Post-Sorting Questionnaire**.
10. **Final page.** The participants were thanked for their help, the researcher's contact information displayed again with the advice that he was available for questions or feedback.

Appendix 7.2.6 illustrates the participant experience through screenshots of the entire online Q study.

3.3.9 Pre-Testing

The online form was pre-tested with individuals outside the target group and unfamiliar with the statements to ensure unbiased technical feedback. Their engagement relied solely on the clarity and quality of the design, not professional interest. The Q Set itself had already undergone extensive pre-testing with subject matter experts and peer review (Rebehn, Nichol and Bell, 2024).

As the testers were also unfamiliar with Q Methodology, their understanding depended entirely on the study's explanations. Pre-testing of the online Q study began on September 4, 2025, with ten participants of varied ages and professional backgrounds, including one non-native German speaker. Based on their feedback, several adjustments were made:

- Simplified and clarified the consent page.
- Shortened instructions and added an explanatory video.
- Introduced images, memes, and page breaks.
- In the pre-sorting questionnaire: improved question order, changed question #13 to multiple choice, and rephrased items for clarity.
- In the post-sorting questionnaire: clarified how participants could review their Q Sort.

3.4 Sampling

3.4.1 Sampling Rationale

Many scholars agree that the psychological contract is influenced by contextual factors like personality traits (Raja, Johns and Ntalianis, 2004); Ng and Feldman (2009) pointed out the importance of age and work experience for the shape of the psychological contract and specifically note the importance of aligning human resource practices with the ageing population. Kraak *et al.* (2024) built on these findings and caution researchers to take dispositional characteristics into account when researching the psychological contract. Moreover, they suggest paying attention to national, regional, and organizational contexts. The national and regional contexts have been established; the specific sampling process described in this section refers to the dimension of organizational context (Kraak *et al.* 2024, p. 15), specifically the aspects *size of organization*, *ownership structure* and *governance structure*. Other aspects listed by the authors include *activities*, *sector* and *stakeholder views* (all of which are determined by limiting the research to hotel employees). Only the aspect of o*rganizational culture* was not considered as this would require extensive preliminary research categorizing workplaces before including them into the recruitment pool.

This section has shown that psychological contracts are expected to differ across demographic groups or people in different situations. Additionally, in order to both capture the heterogeneity of the hospitality workforce

(Guhlemann and Best, 2021) and to best utilize the strengths of Q Methodology (Watts and Stenner, 2012), a heterogenous sampling strategy (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019) is required. The goal was to achieve a sample of participants ranging across as many demographics and employment situations as possible, to access a diverse range of viewpoints – a crucial prerequisite for Q Methodology. Both Watts and Stenner (2012) and Brown (1980) made compelling cases for a sampling strategy which generates a P set that is heterogenous and expresses defined viewpoints relevant to the research subject.

3.4.2 Choice of Participants

To reach a heterogenous P Set, a matrix was developed to determine hotels that were to be contacted, and within each hotel, a second matrix to ensure internal diversity

Hotels to be contacted were selected according to a three-dimensional sampling matrix of **location** with four subsets, **ownership type** with three distinctions, and **service orientation** with two. This yielded 24 preferred hotels, distributed evenly across the geographic sampling area.

The **location** dimension comprised four categories:

- **City** hotels in large urban centres (>200,000 inhabitants), characterized by dense infrastructure and mixed business–leisure tourism (BBSR, no date; BMWSB, 2020)

- **Rural** hotels, typically small family-run inns (Destatis, no date; Statistik Nord, 2023a, 2023b) with limited demand and career opportunities (Tourismus Plan B, 2019)
- **Coastal** hotels, rooted in areas historically dependent on tourism but facing housing shortages and seasonal labour constraints (Kremer, 2006; Vogel, 2019; Feldhaus, 2022)
- **Island** hotels, marked by geographic isolation, dependence on transport infractructure, and acute recruitment challenges (Sunarti, 2018; Brökel, 2023; Chan Santana *et al.*, 2023)

Ownership type was separated into

- **Chain** hotels, typically featuring standardized operations and structured HR strategies with greater training opportunities, but also bureaucratic pressures (Ivanova and Ivanov, 2015; Ivanov *et al.*, 2023)
- **Corporate** hotels, which were defined as investor-owned and more KPI-driven, with often impersonal leadership structures
- **Private** hotels: owner-managed businesses with closer personal ties but limited advancement and risk of nepotism (Beehr, Drexler and Faulkner, 1997; Sjögrén, Puumalainen and Syrjä, 2011; Hoon, Hack and Kellermanns, 2019)

Often, these dimensions overlap to some degree, for example a business may be owned by a larger, family-owned organization, where the family retains little involvement in the operation of the hotel. By identifying ownership structures and expression of business culture, often through the hotel's websites, the researcher categorized hotels according to best judgement.

Finally, hotels were categorized by **service orientation**:

- **Luxury** hotels, where broader service portfolios and hierarchical structures imply higher employee professionalism and career opportunities (Belias, Vasiliadis and Mantas, 2020; Ruixi, 2021; Cuvi and Maradan, 2022)
- **Budget** hotels, characterized by limited staffing, flatter hierarchies, and generally less investment in training and development (Assmann, 2010; Guhlemann and Best, 2021)

Especially the characterization of service orientation is comparatively polar: as any number of concepts and values exist, the distinction between two categories does not capture the homogeneity of the product portfolio in the market. To distinguish a manageable number of hotels, the businesses considered were grouped on either side of the divide, whichever better represented their quality promise, service level, and employer brand.

Similarly, within each of these hotels, it was determined that four distinct perspectives were desirable, distinguished by **age** and **education**. Age was chosen as a variable because of the major role that youth culture and life phases play in the hospitality workforce (Guhlemann and Krüger, 2018; Guhlemann and Best, 2021). The cutoff age was determined at 40, which is the midpoint between the fringe groups in the hospitality workforce (under 25 and over 55) identified by Guhlemann and Best (2021). The second dimension was education. Vocational training has been shown to affect turnover, intrinsic motivation and career goals (Vetráková,

Šimočková and Pompurová, 2019; Smokrović *et al.*, 2022), thus likely influencing different views of the psychological contract. Consequently, four possible perspectives were identified in each hotel: two under the age of 40 – one with, one without formal education – and two aged above 40. This brought the total number of possible distinct participants to 96.

3.4.3 Number of Participants

While the P Set could possibly contain 96 participants who would be – by hard criteria – sufficiently distinct from one another, it was not expected that submissions from as many participants would be obtained. The question remained how many participants were needed to yield reliable results. The ideal size of the P Set is subject to scholarly debate (see Table 24). The recommendations extend from fixed ranges to quotas relative to the number of statements, to the simple and arbitrary rule that all it takes are *"enough"* participants. Table 25 (Appendix 7.2.4) illustrates the range of sample sizes among published Q studies on a wide variety of topics. Considering the quota rules and the number of statements for this study, between 9 to 60 participants would be required for this study depending on the rule applied. One rule that is supported by logical argument states that the number of participants should not exceed the number of statements (Watts and Stenner, 2012). This would limit the participant count to 41. Table 25 nonetheless shows that even this rule is not applied in all studies. It has been recognized that this inconsistency can confuse new researchers and make justification of sample sizes difficult

(Dieteren *et al.*, 2023). It was accepted that it would not be feasible to recruit 96 participants for this study and that a lower number of Q Sorts, if diverse enough, would still capture a generalizable picture of the existing viewpoints. The expectation was to extract between four and seven distinct viewpoints. As this was an exploratory study, however, this expectation was not based on evidence or a pre-determined limit.

3.5 Recruitment

This section describes the recruitment process used to operationalise the sampling strategy outlined in the previous section.

Data collection began on 16 September 2024. 24 specific hotels were identified as ideal settings for participant recruitment based on the recruitment matrix. The owners, managers or HR departments of these hotels were contacted by email or phone and invited to identify suitable employees and encourage them to participate in the study. For this purpose, each hotel was provided with four personalized participant codes that identified the participant according to the hotel type and their demographic information. The codes included information on location type, ownership type, service orientation, age group and professional qualification. An individualized participant code was required to access the study. This process ensured full anonymity of the participants to the researcher while still allowing interpretation of the results in accordance with sampling criteria. However, their identities were potentially known to their employers, and their responses could have possibly been identified by employers. In retrospect, this may have been a reason for individuals to refrain from participation.

Despite initial interest by several hotel owners and several pledges of support, only one Q sort was submitted using a participant code while two further submissions were begun but not submitted. All three originated from the same hotel. The original participation code was anonymized

through a random code in the format as those assigned by the software, to ensure anonymity of the participant. Repeated reminders to the managers of target hotels were initially unsuccessful, whereafter supplementary hotels were identified and contacted. At a later stage, the requirement for participant codes was removed and the managers of target hotels were requested to forward the study invitation to all employees.

At this point, handouts and flyers (see Appendix 7.2.5) were included digitally or in postal mailing with the suggestion to display them in the break rooms or notice boards of the hotels. A simplified link to the study was created and a QR code of the same to maximize accessibility.

Removing the participation codes ensured easier access and removed the risk of losing a viewpoint altogether if the respective employee did not participate in the study. It also allowed for easier dissemination of the invitation and heightened participant anonymity.

Towards the end of the data collection process in February 2025, all hotels involved in the first wave were once again contacted with a reminder and repeated invitation for participation. At this point, the researcher was able to disseminate a copy of the peer-reviewed paper about the concourse-building stage (Rebehn, Nichol and Bell, 2024) which may have lent additional credibility to the request. February is also a quiet time for hotels of the region, which may have further contributed to the increased number of positive responses and influx of Q Sort submissions.

To supplement the recruitment efforts with employers and managers, the researcher began approaching individual hotel employees personally known to him beginning in November 2024. These were given the study link and invitation sheets to participate themselves and forward them to relevant colleagues.

To include a wider range of perspectives, snowball sampling was applied as the final recruitment wave. The number of responses to the initial recruiting rounds and using the targeted recruiting method was unsatisfactory and may have caused some viewpoints to not be represented. When *"samples with the target characteristics are not easily accessible"*, snowball sampling is a viable strategy to access greater and more diverse participant numbers (Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljaie, 2017) Snowball sampling is also recommended for Q Methodology by Webler *et al.* (2009). Participants invited in the second wave were encouraged to forward the invitation to relevant colleagues. Furthermore, in February 2025 the decision was made to embed the Q study in a simple screening questionnaire hosted on survey platform *SoSci* (*SoSci*, no date), filtering for work location by state (allowing only the five northern states) and industry (allowing only for *"hotel"* amongst a list of industries) to be able to disseminate the study with less restraint yet ensure that no irrelevant submissions were possible. The *SoSci* environment protected against repeat attempts. The simple two-stage questionnaire did not collect, use or store personal data of any kind and would simply reroute the participant to the

hosted Q study. The link was then disseminated with less restraint. This coincided with the reminders sent to hotels in the first wave, leading to a significant spike in submissions in late February. The data sets collected during this phase were examined in detail and found to be of equal quality to those received prior and of sufficient diversity. They enhanced the overall picture significantly.

3.5.1 Final Numbers

3.5.1.1 Data Collected

Data collection concluded on 28 February 2025. Access to the study was closed on this day. One participant requested to have their submission removed, leaving 36 Q Sorts submitted for analysis. The average time spent was 15 minutes and 29 seconds. A further 34 participants did not proceed to or finish the Q Sort, even though many had dutifully completed the pre-sorting questionnaire. Any finished questionnaires not accompanied by a Q Sort were discarded.

3.5.1.2 Incomplete Submissions

An unknown number of further individuals opened the study and were accorded a participant code, but no instance ID by the software, meaning they did not proceed to the questionnaire. As the software subscription limited the participant pool to 100 individuals, all empty participant codes were regularly purged. Hence, the total number of instances the study was opened cannot be determined but may exceed 200, not

including testing instances (from which the screenshots in Appendix 7.2.6 originate as well).

Only participants with completed Q Sorts were considered for analysis in the study; incomplete submissions of any kind (including those who completed the questionnaire but did not submit their Q Sort) were discarded.

The reasons why nearly half of the participants did not complete the activity is unclear: possibly, the complexity of the Q Sort as opposed to Likert scales or questionnaires deterred those unfamiliar with it or insufficiently invested. The comparatively strict rules for informed consent and participant information by the University of Worcester may have had a deterrent effect as well: during pilot testing, two participants had raised concerns to this effect. Compromises on informed consent and data protection were not made.

The post-sorting questionnaire was optional. Seven participants did not provide answers. Many others amounted to *"I ranked it highest because it is the most important to me"*, giving little insight into rationale.

3.5.2 Further steps

The data collected was subjected to analysis within the *Q Method Software* environment, the process of which is described in the following chapter. Raw study data – Q Sorts and questionnaire answers – were downloaded along with the analysis report in CSV format for in-depth analysis.

3.6 Strategy for Data Analysis

Given the exploratory nature of the research project, the decisions taken for data analysis followed an inductive approach (Watts and Stenner, 2012).

3.6.1 Correlation Type

The two correlation types available were *Spearman* and *Pearson*. The Pearson correlation requires the assumption of a linear relationship between variables, and that *"the data are derived from a random, or at least representative, sample"* because *"[i]f the data are not representative of the population of interest, one cannot draw meaningful conclusions about that population"* (Schober and Schwarte, 2018). This criterion was not fulfilled as the data sample was too small and purposefully sampled. A Spearman correlation meanwhile measures the strength and direction of variables by way of *ranks*. It is the method of choice for data sets with relevant outliers (Schober and Schwarte, 2018) and unaffected by the distribution of the population (Hlastec, Mumel and Hauptman, 2023). Due to the small sample size and uneven distribution of respondents, the correlation matrix was compiled using **Spearman correlation**.

3.6.2 Factor Extraction

The second step concerns factor extraction. The options available were *Principal Component Analysis* and *Centroid Factor Analysis*. While Principal Component Analysis computes the maximum variance in the data

(Gewers *et al.*, 2021), this method bears the danger of overlooking latent, unobservable factors, which Centroid Factor Analysis is designed to identify (Allee, Do and Raymundo, 2022). Watts and Stenner (2012) argued that *"[PCA] deprives us of the opportunity to properly explore the data or to engage with the process of factor rotation in any sort of abductive, theoretically informed or investigatory fashion"* as it follows strictly mathematical rules. Q Methodology, however, typically benefits from rotating factors judgmentally (Brown, 1980), and Watts and Stenner (2012) provided a lengthy argument for using CFA instead, as *"PCA is not factor analysis and components are not factors"* and PCA does not allow for finding *"the most meaningful or the most informative solution from a substantive or theoretical perspective"*. Consequently, **Centroid Factor Analysis** was chosen to extract factors. It was determined to extract seven factors which constitutes the maximum possible within the software environment used, as in others – Watts and Stenner (2012) based their guide on another software solution, *PQMethod*, which they claimed used seven factors as the default value – in line with Brown's (1980) recommendation for working with *"the magic number 7"*. In order to ensure the largest possible range of opinions was presented to the researcher for further analysis, seven initial factors were extracted.

3.6.3 Factor Rotation

Centroid Factor Analysis allows for the judgmental rotation of factors (Brown, 1980; Watts and Stenner, 2012). While Watts and Stenner (2012)

only introduced two methods of rotation – by-hand and varimax – *Q Method Software* allowed for a variety of orthogonal and oblique rotation methods. It was however decided to use **varimax rotation**. This method aims to *"ensure that each Q sort defines, i.e. has a high factor loading in relation to, only* one *of the study factors"* (Watts and Stenner, 2012). While this is considered to *"deliver very effective factor solutions"*, it has been criticized for being *"drawn towards the crowds"* (Watts and Stenner, 2012) and depressing obscure viewpoints. In this exploratory study however, this was desired since the goal was to determine distinct viewpoints and identify exemplary individuals for each, whose supplementary data helps in interpreting the viewpoints, making varimax the most transparent and objective rotation method. While Watts and Stenner (2012) suggested following a varimax rotation with a by-hand rotation, this latter step was omitted to retain a mathematically justifiable and reproduceable result. By-hand rotation would have been best used to establish a clear vantage point from which to relate to other participants. The exploratory study, however, attempted to be objective and impartial. Thus, the manual rotation step was omitted.

CHAPTER 4:

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Process of Data Analysis

4.1.1 Factor Extraction

Factor extraction and analysis were carried out within the *Q Method Software* (Lutfallah and Buchanan, 2019) following the pre-determined steps in the analysis process: generating a Spearman correlation matrix to which centroid factor analysis was applied. The seven extracted factors are presented in Appendix 7.3.1. These factors were subsequently examined to determine the number of factors to be retained.

4.1.2 Factor Retention

The process to decide how many factors to keep was discussed at length by Watts and Stenner (2012). The built-in capabilities of the software to aid the decision represent several of the techniques presented by Watts and Stenner (2012). All seven factors satisfied the **Kaiser-Guttman Criterion** of having an Eigenvalue greater than 1.00 as well as **Humphrey's Rule**, which states that factors should be considered significant if the cross-product of its two highest loadings exceeds twice the standard error (Brown, 1980; Watts and Stenner, 2012).

A third technique put forth by Brown (1980) and presented by Watts and Stenner (2012) is the criterion of retaining any factor which has **two or more significant factor loadings**. Depending on the cutoff value for factor significance, either all factors qualify (cutoff 0.30), all but factors 4 and 6 (cutoff 0.40) or only factors 1, and 3 (cutoff 0.50). Table 27

illustrates the differences. The cut-off point used for consideration of factors was 0.30.

The **Scree Test** examines the Scree Plot (Figure 23) to visually determine after which factor the slope flattens. This test is difficult to apply to the data in this study as not only does the slope significantly flatten after factor 1 (meaning only one factor would be retained) but the Eigenvalue for factor five is higher than the preceding factor. **Parallel Analysis** suggested retaining factors 1 through 3 and 5.

The comparatively low Eigenvalue of factor 4 suggested its removal from the study, along with factors 6 and 7. It was decided however to retain factors 1 through 5, including factor 4 which had seven loadings greater than 0.30 as opposed to three for factors 6 and 7, respectively. This aligns with the goal of retaining no more than five factors to allow for sufficient distinction between the extracted viewpoints. Factor 4 proved to be bipolar and was consequently split into factors 4a and 4b.

4.1.3 Factor Rotation

After selection, varimax rotation was applied. This was not followed by by-hand rotation to retain objectivity (see 3.6.3).

4.1.4 Factor Interpretation

Factor interpretation followed the process outlined by Watts and Stenner (2012). This includes the crib sheet method as a preliminary step to sorting the data.

The crib sheets (filed in Appendix 7.3) filter the Q Statements which set the respective factor apart from others, expanding the insight gained from examining the distinguishing statements.

The Q Method Software automatically flagged participants most representative of the factors, whose pre-sorting questionnaire responses received primary attention in factor interpretation.

Each crib sheet, along with the survey responses of flagged participants, was then preliminarily analysed with the help of *ChatGPT-4-turbo* (OpenAI, 2025) to identify qualitative themes and correlations between statement rankings. The crib sheets had been compiled by the researcher and correlations and themes inferred. The raw export of the anonymized numerical study data (provided in a .csv file export) and the inducement list (as presented in section 3.3.6.2) and the crib sheets were fed into *ChatGPT*, which was subsequently tasked with identifying correlations and themes within the Q sorts which were in turn cross-referenced by the researcher with his interpretations. In doing so, the software supported the researcher in consolidating and interpreting the raw data in full, but did *not* conduct original interpretation or generate output. Building on these insights, factor and viewpoint descriptions were generated.

4.1.5 Translation of Questionnaire Answers

While the Q Sorts and questionnaires were conducted entirely in German, the English translations of the statements (as reported in Rebehn, Nichol and Bell, 2024) are used in reporting and, where they are cited,

translations of the questionnaire answers as well. The entire study and analysis were conducted in German to minimize the risk of translation-related loss of meaning (Repke and Dorer, 2021). The survey responses, purposefully subject to character limits to encourage conciseness, were not found to transport noteworthy subtextual linguistic nuances. Any loss of nuance was mitigated by using adaptive translation techniques or explanation of alterations and possible connotations of individual phrases in German. Questionnaire answers were translated using *Google Translate* and the resulting translations verified by back-translation through the same engine as well as sense-checking and critical evaluation by the researcher to retain culturally implicit notions and protect the participant's voice (Guo, 2016; Qoyyimah, 2023).

The translation workflow was as follows:

- Initial machine translation using Google Translate
- Back-translation of the English output to German using the same engine
- Researcher verification involving sense-checking, comparison to the original answer, and critical evaluation of ambiguous terms
- Adaptive translation adjustments, where necessary, to retain culturally implicit meanings and participant voice
- Explicit clarification in the presentation of the answer and its interpretation, wherever a German phrase required explanation or interpretive choices were made

4.2 Statistical Analysis

The results are presented in three steps. Firstly, a discussion of the statistical data obtained from the Q Study as well as the accompanying questionnaires is presented to compare and contrast the five extracted factors. In the second step, the data obtained and thus organized was interrogated to answer the research questions including interpreting the individual factors for the viewpoints they represent. Each individual participant was assigned a viewpoint according to their factor loadings (Table 46), which allows comparing questionnaire data and enrich demographic analysis.

4.2.1 Factor Arrays

Table 7 below displays the factor arrays for the five rotated factors. It corresponds to the graphically displayed composite Q Sorts and represents the primary source for factor analysis, description and interpretation.

Table 7: Factor arrays

#	Statement	F1	F2	F3	F4a	F4b	F5
1	I have plannable working times	-2	1	2	-3	-1	2
2	I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	1	3	1	1	-3	0
3	My reliability is valued	1	3	0	0	1	3
4	My criticism is received gratefully	-3	2	2	4	2	1
5	My professional expertise is valued	-1	1	1	2	2	1
6	I am being valued	0	4	3	3	1	2
7	My professional advancement is individually supported	3	-1	4	-2	4	1
8	I work in a professional environment	4	0	3	-1	3	3
9	I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	1	-1	-3	1	-2	-2
10	My passion for my profession is being kept alive	-3	-2	0	-2	1	-3
11	I am respected for who I am	-2	1	1	-1	-1	2
12	I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me	1	-1	-1	1	-1	4
13	I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	3	1	2	0	2	-2
14	I receive appropriate feedback	-3	-1	2	4	-1	1
15	I can provide feedback any time	2	3	-1	2	0	-1
16	My personal life plan is being taken into account	1	0	3	-1	1	-3
17	I am not left hanging	-3	1	1	2	-2	0
18	My good performance is rewarded	-2	3	4	0	2	-2
19	I work in a company which consistently evolves	0	-3	1	0	0	-4
20	I am being managed with a suitable leadership style	-1	0	0	1	0	1
21	I have the opportunity to have a varied career	2	-2	-2	-2	4	0
22	I have high-quality tools at my disposal	0	2	-1	-4	0	-1
23	I get to learn through suitable training formats	0	-3	-1	0	2	-2
24	I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	2	4	-1	2	0	2

#	Statement	F1	F2	F3	F4a	F4b	F5
25	My financial needs are being taken into account	2	0	3	-3	-1	0
26	I receive support for my commute to work	-2	2	-2	3	-2	-1
27	My flexibility is valued	-1	0	0	-1	1	2
28	Our team work is encouraged and supported	0	0	0	3	-3	4
29	I receive high-quality meals	1	1	-2	-1	-3	-1
30	My loyalty is valued	-1	2	0	0	0	-1
31	I am treated like a family member	4	-4	-4	3	-3	3
32	I can continue my career in different places	-4	-3	-3	-4	3	1
33	I have long-term career prospects	-1	-4	2	-1	3	3
34	I get to work with high-quality products	3	2	-2	-3	0	0
35	I can continuously develop myself professionally	-4	-3	0	-2	3	-1
36	I receive support for taking care of my children	3	-1	-3	-2	-4	-4
37	I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay	-2	-2	-3	0	-4	-3
38	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work	-1	-2	-2	1	-2	-2
39	I get to participate in the business success	0	0	1	1	-1	0
40	I work in a sustainable organization	0	-2	-4	-3	1	-3
41	I enjoy creative freedom	2	-1	-1	2	-2	0

4.2.2 Factor Descriptions

In this section, the composite Q sorts of the factors are presented. The composite Q Sorts list the statement number alongside the translated statement, corresponding to Table 6 and Table 7. Factor descriptions were then synthesized using the crib sheet method (Watts and Stenner, 2012, p. 150). The crib sheets are provided in Appendix 7.3, as is demographic and questionnaire data from the participants flagged as representative of each factor, which further informed the descriptions but was given greater attention in the factor interpretation leading to the extraction of viewpoints in the following chapter.

4.2.2.1 Factor 1

4.2.2.1.1 Composite Q Sort

Figure 6: Composite Q Sort for factor 1

Not as important								Very important
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
32 I can continue my career in different places	4 My criticism is received gratefully	1 I have plannable working times	5 My professional expertise is valued	6 I am being valued	2 I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	15 I can provide feedback any time	7 My professional advancement is individually supported	8 I work in a professional environment
35 I can continuously develop myself professionally	10 My passion for my profession is being kept alive	11 I am respected for who I am	20 I am being managed with a suitable leadership style	19 I work in a company which consistently evolves	3 My reliability is valued	21 I have the opportunity to have a varied career	13 I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	31 I am treated like a family member
	14 I receive appropriate feedback	18 My good performance is rewarded	27 My flexibility is valued	22 I have high-quality tools at my disposal	9 I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	24 I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	34 I get to work with high-quality products	
	17 I am not left hanging	26 I receive support for my commute to work	30 My loyalty is valued	23 I get to learn through suitable training formats	12 I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me	25 My financial needs are being taken into account	36 I receive support for taking care of my children	
		37 I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay	33 I have long-term career prospects	28 Our team work is encouraged and supported	16 My personal life plan is being taken into account	41 I enjoy creative freedom		
			38 I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work	39 I get to participate in the business success	29 I receive high-quality meals			
				40 I work in a sustainable organization				

4.2.2.1.2 Description

Factor 1 has an eigenvalue of 5.6 and explains 15% of the study variance. Three participants are flagged as significantly associated with this factor: 89IZ (factor loading 0.52384), 3IPE (-0.42751) and Z4CF (0.55374). Their questionnaire answers are reported in Table 28. Their average age was 27.3 years, ranging from 21 to 35. This makes it the second-youngest group of flagged participants (after factor 5), and the one with the smallest age spread. Two participants reported being single, one was in a relationship. Two participants had a professional qualification they did not specify further, while one did not. Their average tenure in the industry was two years, making them the group 'freshest' to the industry.

All these participants worked in city locations in mid- to premium-range hotels owned privately or by chains. They used a variety of modes to commute to work: bicycle, train and car, respectively.

Distinguishing statements for this factor are listed in Table 29. This group emphasizes professionalism (#8 at +4, #34 at +3) as well as loyalty and belonging (#31 at +4, #3 at +1; but #11 at -2). Further emphasis is placed on tangible personal support (#36 at +3, #25 at +2, #16 at +1, #2 and #29 at +1).

Statement #31: *"I am being treated like a family member"* was most important for this factor overall and for four participants of the study individually. Statement #3 received a moderately positive ranking. The negative ranking of statement #11 somewhat contradicts the importance of

the theme of belongingness; however, some individuals may prioritize being accepted and integrated to being recognized for their individuality, thus de-prioritizing this inducement. However, no single participant ranked the item at -4, and subsequently none provided information about their sentiment and interpretation of it in the post-sorting questionnaire.

This factor's prioritization of tangible personal support was exemplified by the rankings of statements #36, #25, #16, #2 and #29. Factor 1 prioritizes employer's attention to their financial needs relatively high (#25 at +2), showing that financial aspects play a role in their psychological contracts. Reward-oriented inducements are less important to this factor than to others (#18 at -2).

This is the sole factor which ranks childcare support (#36) on the positive side of the scale (second highest being -1 by factor 2), though no single participant has ranked it as a top priority, yet it was ranked -4 by no fewer than ten out of the 36 participants.

Another emerging theme for factor 1 is structured, internal career development and professional participation, expressed through #7 and #13 at +3 and #21 and #24 at +2. The high priority of general career development contrasts with themes of career mobility (#32 at -1) and personal growth (#35 at -4); furthermore, #33 is ranked at -1 and #23 at 0. Statement #32 polarized in the Q Sorts, but was considered of low priority more often than not.

The verdict on feedback is split: Being able to provide feedback is expected (#15 at +2) while receiving feedback was not (#14 at -3, lower than in any other factor). It didn't take the lowest priority for any individual participant, however. This may be related to their relative indifference to personal growth, for which receiving feedback is essential. How feedback given by the employee is received appears of lower importance as well (#4 at -3, also lower than any other factor). They placed relatively low emphasis on the leadership style they were managed with (#20 at -1) and whether their passion for the job was being kept alive (#10 at -3).

The views expressed through the Q Sorts and supplementary questionnaire answers that inform factor 1 highlight the themes of professionalism, loyalty, and tangible personal support. Research question 1 is concerned with the viewpoints that exist among the population researched. The quantitative and qualitative data underlying factor 1 forms the basis for the emerging Viewpoint 1 (see 5.2.1 for the viewpoint description) which is labelled, after the defining priorities, "**Professionalism, Loyalty, and Work-Life Balance**."

4.2.2.1.3 Negatively loading participants

Participant 3IPE was the sole flagged participant loading negatively on factor 1, making this a bipolar factor. For this case, Watts and Stenner (2012) suggested providing a second, independent interpretation to an inverted factor array. 3IPE is the youngest among the participants flagged for factor 1, but the one with the longest tenure. Looking at the Q Sort of

this participant individually, they most valued aspects of material remuneration (#26 at +4, #18 at +3, #25 at +2, #37 at +1 and #29 at 0). Aspects of communication and leadership were moderately important (#4 and #20 at +3, #28 at +2 and #14 at +1), though certain elements were ranked lowly (#15 and #6 at -4). Inducements regarding career development were ranked between -3 and +4 (#7 at -3, #33 at -1, #21 at 0, #32 at +3 and #35 at +4), indicating that professional development (#35) and achieving career mobility (#32) were very important, while long-term prospects (#33) and individual support (#7) were not. The neutral ranking of #21: *"I have the opportunity to have a varied career"* follows logically as some aspects of ensuring a varied career were important, others not. Work-life balance proved to be of lower-than-average importance for this participant, who ranked #36 and #1 at -2 and #16: *"My personal life plan is being taken into account"* at +1. As the only one among the flagged participants for this factor who had not worked in other places before their current one, they ranked the corresponding statement (#32) relatively high – at +3 – while the factor consensus placed it at -4. Another point where they disagreed was statement #31: *"I am treated like a family member"*, which they ranked at -1 while the factor array places it at +4.

Interpretation of the inverted factor array for factor 1 (compare Figure 6) led to the formulation of emerging viewpoint 2: "**Independence and Career Growth**", which is presented in section 5.2.2. The interpretation was done independently based on the inverted data, rather than simply

assuming the opposite thematic position of factor 1 – a fallacy that Watts and Stenner (2012) specifically warned about. The insight gathered from examining the independent sort and questionnaire responses of participant 3IPE enriched this interpretation.

4.2.2.2 Factor 2

4.2.2.2.1 Composite Q Sort

Figure 7: Composite Q Sort for factor 2

Not as important								Very important
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
31 I am treated like a family member	19 I work in a company which consistently evolves	10 My passion for my profession is being kept alive	7 My professional advancement is individually supported	8 I work in a professional environment	1 I have plannable working times	4 My criticism is received gratefully	2 I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	6 I am being valued
33 I have long-term career prospects	23 I get to learn through suitable training formats	21 I have the opportunity to have a varied career	9 I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	16 My personal life plan is being taken into account	5 My professional expertise is valued	22 I have high-quality tools at my disposal	3 My reliability is valued	24 I am being taught all skills necessary for my job
	32 I can continue my career in different places	37 I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay	12 I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me	20 I am being managed with a suitable leadership style	11 I am respected for who I am	26 I receive support for my commute to work	15 I can provide feedback any time	
	35 I can continuously develop myself professionally	38 I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work	14 I receive appropriate feedback	25 My financial needs are being taken into account	13 I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	30 My loyalty is valued	18 My good performance is rewarded	
		40 I work in a sustainable organization	36 I receive support for taking care of my children	27 My flexibility is valued	17 I am not left hanging	34 I get to work with high-quality products		
			41 I enjoy creative freedom	28 Our team work is encouraged and supported	29 I receive high-quality meals			
				39 I get to participate in the business success				

4.2.2.2.2 Description

Factor 2 has an eigenvalue of 2.17 and explains 6% of the study variance. Five participants are flagged as significantly associated with this factor (see Table 31) – 0Q40 (factor loading 0.75608), DBMN (0.59017), DEL3 (0.59802), F5U9 (0.41768), and KR2D (0.6679). Their average age was 40.2 years, ranging from 21 to 58. It is the second-oldest group of flagged participants, after factor 4a, with two participants aged 57 and 58; at the same time, it has the largest spread with participant DBMN being one of the youngest in the entire P Set. The reported relationship status varied across the group, from single to married. Three participants had vocational qualifications, though one had obtained theirs in an unrelated field. Another did not specify their kind of qualification, one reported not having one. Their average tenure in the industry was nine years, with one reporting 26 years in the hotel sector, while the others had between three and seven years.

These individuals were employed across the location and ownership types classified for the purpose of this study. Their workplaces were slightly more upscale than those of participants associated with the other factors, but with a focus on leisure travel. All but one commuted to work by car, the other by bicycle.

Table 32 lists three statements representative of expected inducements that set this group apart: Reconciling work and personal life (#2), which this group found more important than any other; further having high

quality tools available to conduct one's work (#22 at +2) and the relative disregard for the prospect of a long-term career development (#33 at -4).

This group wants to feel valued, above all. The phrasing of statement (#6) was deliberately left as ambiguous as it had been in the job advertisements the Q Set was derived from (Rebehn, Nichol and Bell, 2024), leaving it to the participant to define what being valued meant to them. In the context of the composite sort for factor 2, it can be understood as a form of recognition and appreciation, which is an emerging theme this group of employees prioritizes higher than others do (further exemplified by statements #3 at +3, #30 at +2).

Furthermore, tangible rewards are expected (#18 at +3) and a high expectation of quality must be fulfilled (#24 at +4, #22 and #34 at +2, #29 at +1). While #24 only indirectly relates to quality, it can be interpreted as part of the theme in this case, as employees sharing this viewpoint clearly have an interest in delivering work of good quality: working with people was listed by three of the five flagged participants as what they loved most about their job, the others appreciated variety – performing a variety of tasks likely required good training for them.

Statement #2: *"I receive support for reconciling work and personal life"* was ranked at +3, considerably higher than by any other factor, showing that this aspect of the working relationship is a defining priority for employees identifying with this factor.

All inducements regarding career development were ranked noticeably low (#33 at -4, #32 at -3, #10 and #21 at -2, #7 at -1), indicating that this group does not expect their employers to provide them with the respective resources.

The second de-emphasized theme is that of close-knit relations at the workplace (#31 at -4 and #28 at 0). However, statement #28 received a medium priority.

This factor is dominated by the themes work-life balance, reward and recognition, and quality; likewise by a clear de-emphasis on career advancement. The viewpoint that emerges (see 5.2.3) is therefore labelled "**Reward and Work-Life Balance**." While it shares the emphasis on work-life balance with factor 1 (see 4.2.2.1.2), the psychological contract held by individuals identifying with this factor is considerably more transactional and oriented towards immediate personal returns.

4.2.2.3 Factor 3

4.2.2.3.1 Composite Q Sort

Figure 8: Composite Q Sort for factor 3

Not as important								Very important
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
31 I am treated like a family member	9 I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	21 I have the opportunity to have a varied career	12 I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me	3 My reliability is valued	2 I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	1 I have plannable working times	6 I am being valued	7 My professional advancement is individually supported
40 I work in a sustainable organization	32 I can continue my career in different places	26 I receive support for my commute to work	15 I can provide feedback any time	10 My passion for my profession is being kept alive	5 My professional expertise is valued	4 My criticism is received gratefully	8 I work in a professional environment	18 My good performance is rewarded
	36 I receive support for taking care of my children	29 I receive high-quality meals	22 I have high-quality tools at my disposal	20 I am being managed with a suitable leadership style	11 I am respected for who I am	13 I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	16 My personal life plan is being taken into account	
	37 I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay	34 I get to work with high-quality products	23 I get to learn through suitable training formats	27 My flexibility is valued	17 I am not left hanging	14 I receive appropriate feedback	25 My financial needs are being taken into account	
		38 I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work	24 I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	28 Our team work is encouraged and supported	19 I work in a company which consistently evolves	33 I have long-term career prospects		
			41 I enjoy creative freedom	30 My loyalty is valued	39 I get to participate in the business success			
				35 I can continuously develop myself professionally				

4.2.2.3.2 Description

Factor 3 has an eigenvalue of 2.52 and explains 7% of the study variance. Six participants are flagged as significantly associated with this factor, more than any other factor (see Table 34): 5GL4 (factor loading 0.50211), 94H3 (0.50156), 9FL1 (0.56519), KLEL (0.36289), O74M (0.57975), and YZA0 (0.55213). Their average age was 38.5 years, ranging from 24 to 45. 38.5 years is the exact median age of all participants in the study (the average being 35.74 years). Four of the six flagged participants were above forty years of age, only one below 30. Two participants reported being single, two in a committed relationship (one with children), and two were married. All but one had professional qualifications, two regular vocational ones, two advanced vocational and one reported having an academic degree in a hospitality-related field. On average, they had been in the hotel industry for fourteen and a half years, one participant having apparently started at the age of fourteen (which will most likely have been a part-time job only).

These participants came from a variety of location types, though generally more rural and leisure-oriented hotels. Ownership of their workplaces was either private or corporate.

Most members of this group used their car to get to work, though two alternated between car and train or bicycle, respectively. The last one reported only using the bus.

This factor only has one distinguishing statement: #25: *"My financial needs are being taken into account."* This statement was ranked at +3 and can be interpreted to be simultaneously connected to three of the themes emerging in this factor array: performance recognition, enhancing quality of life, and support for personal needs. It is the central node for understanding the factor. This statement must be appreciated before the background of historically low wages in hotels and rising cost of living; with the added trauma of having hours cut or losing one's job altogether during the Covid-19 pandemic. Half of the flagged participants reported a change in their personal priorities due to the pandemic. Given their relatively high age, financial responsibilities may be greater than for other groups of employees. Consequently, rewards take a top priority for these participants (#18 at +4).

The second theme, enhancing quality of life, is exemplified by statements #1 at +2 and #2 at +1.

Statement #36 (childcare) did not take priority for this group. It is worth remembering that this statement may take little to no priority for those employees who do not have children, and that the focus group had requested statement #2 to be created additionally for precisely this reason (Rebehn, Nichol and Bell, 2024).

The factor is further characterized by its requirement to have personal needs met which are unrelated to material or practical needs. Statement #17 was ranked at +1, slightly above the average for all sorts, #28 at 0,

and #31 at -4. The rankings for statement #17 are varied across all Q Sorts and no conclusive picture can be formed of which demographics or backgrounds could influence this inducement – which is one of the more vaguely phrased ones in the study – towards high or low priority. Inducement #28, teamwork, is equally disputed. On being treated like a family member (#31), this group has a very clear opinion in that they value this inducement less than others, which, like factor 2, sets it clearly apart from factor 1.

A fourth relevant theme, which takes significance unrelated to #25, is career advancement. Statement #7 is ranked most highly at +4. Consequently, #16 was ranked +3 in the composite sort – the personal life plan here likely relating to career plans more than personal plans – and #33 at +2. However, a varied career in different places appears to not be of priority for these individuals (#32 at -3, #21 at -2). Learning was moderately unimportant (#23 and #24 at -1), indicating that these employees might prefer advancing linearly in their organization and role to secure their standard of living.

Given that the entire viewpoint hinges on statement #25 and maintenance of material quality of life, with emergent themes consisting of inducements prerequisite to this goal, especially an interest in career advancement, the viewpoint emerging out of this factor, Viewpoint 4 (see 5.2.4), is named "**Career and Material Quality of Life**."

4.2.2.4 Factor 4a

4.2.2.4.1 Composite Q Sort

Figure 9: Composite Q Sort for factor 4a

Not as important								Very important
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
22 I have high-quality tools at my disposal	1 I have plannable working times	7 My professional advancement is individually supported	8 I work in a professional environment	3 My reliability is valued	2 I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	5 My professional expertise is valued	6 I am being valued	4 My criticism is received gratefully
32 I can continue my career in different places	25 My financial needs are being taken into account	10 My passion for my profession is being kept alive	11 I am respected for who I am	13 I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	9 I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	15 I can provide feedback any time	26 I receive support for my commute to work	14 I receive appropriate feedback
	34 I get to work with high-quality products	21 I have the opportunity to have a varied career	16 My personal life plan is being taken into account	18 My good performance is rewarded	12 I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me	17 I am not left hanging	28 Our team work is encouraged and supported	
	40 I work in a sustainable organization	35 I can continuously develop myself professionally	27 My flexibility is valued	19 I work in a company which consistently evolves	20 I am being managed with a suitable leadership style	24 I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	31 I am treated like a family member	
		36 I receive support for taking care of my children	29 I receive high-quality meals	23 I get to learn through suitable training formats	38 I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work	41 I enjoy creative freedom		
			33 I have long-term career prospects	30 My loyalty is valued	39 I get to participate in the business success			
				37 I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay				

4.2.2.4.2 Description

Factor 4 has an eigenvalue of 1.47 and collectively explains 4% of the study variance. Factor 4 was split, after which three participants are flagged as significantly associated with factor 4a – AM0C (factor loading 0.42583), V0XG (0.44701), and RO5Z (0.48111) – whose questionnaire answers are reproduced in Table 37. Their average age was 42 years, ranging from 25 to 55, making this the oldest group. This group, too, was evenly distributed by relationship status: one reported being single, one to be in a committed relationship, and one married. The progression of relationship status among the three participants correlated with their age. Among these participants, too, was one without a professional qualification, while the other two reported vocational certifications. The former had only just entered the hotel industry two months prior to participating in the study, the others reported three and six years, respectively. This places them alongside factor 1 as relatively new entrants to the industry, but considerably older. All had worked elsewhere before, supposedly in other industries. This factor thus apparently represents lateral entrants who took up hospitality as a second career.

Of these three participants, two worked in coastal destinations in hotels with a clear thematic focus, one in a generic, limited-service hotel in a city. Two worked in privately owned hotels, one in a corporate one. Commute to work was mostly done by car (2x) and bicycle.

Table 38 lists five statements that explain this factor's uniqueness. Three of them (#4, #14, #38) are ranked on the positive side of the scale, two (#16, #25) on the negative side. Overall, the defining themes of this factor are communication (#4 and #14 at +4, #15 at +2) and relational leadership (#6, #28 and #31 at +3, #17 at +2 and #20 at +1).

Statement #28 was ranked relatively high by this factor at +3 while the three preceding factors had it ranked at 0 and the contrasting factor 4b ranks it lowest at -3. It takes top priority for factor 5.

An open, cooperative culture in the organization is valued (#31 at +3, #13 and #19 at 0) and personal recognition is considered important (#6 at +3, #17 at +2, #3 and #30 at 0, #11 and #27 at -1). #3 received a lower ranking by this factor than all others, tied with factor 3. Like in factor 1, statement #11 *"I am respected for who I am"* takes a lower-than-average priority while related inducements valuing specific behaviours and traits are ranked higher and being valued in general (#6), which to some participants may hold a similar meaning, was ranked at +3. The same rank was assigned to statement #31, which emerges as a key variable for determining whether a viewpoint values belongingness.

All these themes appear to be interrelated in these employees' understandings, which is why they can be summarized as communication and empathy, which in turn imprints on the organizational culture, leadership, and individual treatment of employees. Passion and empathy towards guests (#9, #12 and #38 at +1) correlate with this, showing an

overall picture of a group of individuals who place very high priority on these two key features. Tangible support (#25 at -3, #36 at -2, #29 at -1 and #37 at 0) is moderately unimportant to this group, safe for support in commuting to work (#26 at +3).

Overall, the data received for this factor paints the picture of a group of employees who favour a workplace that is empathetic and offers open communication, while not expecting their workplace to provide career support (#32 at -4, #7, #21 and #35 at -2, #33 at -1) but also do not plan on leaving their job. The emerging viewpoint, Viewpoint 5 (see 5.2.5), will therefore be labelled "**Communication and Empathy**."

4.2.2.5 Factor 4b

4.2.2.5.1 Composite Q Sort

Figure 10: Composite Q Sort for factor 4b

Not as important								Very important
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
36 I receive support for taking care of my children	2 I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	9 I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	1 I have plannable working times	15 I can provide feedback any time	3 My reliability is valued	4 My criticism is received gratefully	8 I work in a professional environment	7 My professional advancement is individually supported
37 I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay	28 Our team work is encouraged and supported	17 I am not left hanging	11 I am respected for who I am	19 I work in a company which consistently evolves	6 I am being valued	5 My professional expertise is valued	32 I can continue my career in different places	21 I have the opportunity to have a varied career
	29 I receive high-quality meals	26 I receive support for my commute to work	12 I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me	20 I am being managed with a suitable leadership style	10 My passion for my profession is being kept alive	13 I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	33 I have long-term career prospects	
	31 I am treated like a family member	38 I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work	14 I receive appropriate feedback	22 I have high-quality tools at my disposal	16 My personal life plan is being taken into account	18 My good performance is rewarded	35 I can continuously develop myself professionally	
		41 I enjoy creative freedom	25 My financial needs are being taken into account	24 I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	27 My flexibility is valued	23 I get to learn through suitable training formats		
			39 I get to participate in the business success	30 My loyalty is valued	40 I work in a sustainable organization			
				34 I get to work with high-quality products				

4.2.2.5.2 Description

This factor resulted from the splitting of factor 4. Three participants are flagged as significantly associated with this viewpoint (see Table 40). TF1G had a factor loading of 0.66143, VHB5 of 0.43519, and YUFQ of 0.64817. Their average age was 33 years, ranging from 20 to 52. One participant was single, two in a relationship. None were married. All associated participants reported relevant professional qualifications: one had an academic degree, one a completed vocational certification and one, the youngest, still in traineeship after one year in the industry. Overall, the average tenure in the industry was 11.3 years, the second longest among the factors.

While one participant worked in a city centre location for a hotel belonging to an international chain, the others came from mid-range, privately owned hotels in villages. Commute types varied: the participant working in a city centre took the municipal public transport, another the bicycle and the last one their car.

The distinguishing statements for factor 4b (Table 40) exemplify the sharp distinction from factor 4a. Unlike factor 4a, this group expressly de-empathizes inducements related to empathy and close personal relations (#28 and #31 at -3, #9 and #38 at -2) and instead sharply focusses on career-related support (#7 and #21 at +4, #32, #33 and #35 at +3, #18 and #23 at +2). They do however share an openness to communication where it benefits their career development (#4 at +2, #15 at 0).

This factor assigns the top ranking to statement #7, just as factor 3 does. However, contrary to factor 3, this factor – as the sole one – assigns a very high priority to having a varied career (#21). Participant YUFQ is representative of this sentiment. This is the only factor that ranks statement #32 very highly, in contrast to the four factors discussed so far, suggesting that these are the only employees with a strong interest in advancing their careers through different geographical locations. Statement #35 meanwhile is concerned with continuous professional development, for which this factor is the only one assigning it a positive value (+3, while the next highest ranking was 0 by factor 3). Only one participant (3IPE) gave this statement the highest priority but did not explain why. Its importance for this factor can be understood through the holistic observation of the composite Q Sort, however. This factor ranked seven career-related statements higher than any other factors did (see Table 42). The absolute career focus and interest in contribution indicates the desire for professional development to be the underlying desire – unlike other factors where career advancement desire appears to be founded in material needs. This is underlined by the high rankings of #18 (reward for performance) and #23 (learning formats), showing that employees sharing this viewpoint expect to be able to learn well (see also #20 and #24) and to reap rewards for good work, which may come in the form of career opportunities. In any case, these employees expect their employer to be heavily invested in their development and growth.

Instead of just demanding one-sided career support, this group also expects to be allowed and enabled to contribute actively to the positive development of their organization (#4 and #13 at +2, #15 and #19 at 0). In line with these expectations, this group also focused on quality and professionalism (#8 at +3, #20, #22 and #34 at 0). However, their passion for a hospitality career did not correlate with a high priority on guests' interests (#9 and #38 at -2). Expectations of work-life balance were lowly prioritized (#36 at -4, #2 at -3, #1 at -1). Their rankings of tangible support for personal matters (#36 at -4, #29 at -3, #26 at -2 and #25 at -1) indicate that they are prepared to arrange their lives outside work more independently than others.

Exemplified by the outstanding ranking of statements #35 *"I can continuously develop myself professionally"* and #32 *"I can continue my career in different places,"* augmented by ranking other career-related inducements higher than the other factors, e.g. #23, this factor is, more than others, defined by the expectation of their employer to take an active role in their career development. In return, these employees are willing to deprioritize work-life balance (#1, #2, #36) and appreciate the ability to contribute to their organization's development and success (#4, #13, #19). This factor informs the emergent Viewpoint 6, which is consequently labelled "**Career and Active Contribution**" and described in section 5.2.6.

4.2.2.6 Factor 5

4.2.2.6.1 Composite Q Sort

Figure 11: Composite Q Sort for factor 5

Not as important								Very important
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
19 I work in a company which consistently evolves	10 My passion for my profession is being kept alive	9 I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	15 I can provide feedback any time	2 I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	4 My criticism is received gratefully	1 I have plannable working times	3 My reliability is valued	12 I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me
36 I receive support for taking care of my children	16 My personal life plan is being taken into account	13 I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	22 I have high-quality tools at my disposal	17 I am not left hanging	5 My professional expertise is valued	6 I am being valued	8 I work in a professional environment	28 Our team work is encouraged and supported
	37 I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay	18 My good performance is rewarded	26 I receive support for my commute to work	21 I have the opportunity to have a varied career	7 My professional advancement is individually supported	11 I am respected for who I am	31 I am treated like a family member	
	40 I work in a sustainable organization	23 I get to learn through suitable training formats	29 I receive high-quality meals	25 My financial needs are being taken into account	14 I receive appropriate feedback	24 I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	33 I have long-term career prospects	
		38 I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work	30 My loyalty is valued	34 I get to work with high-quality products	20 I am being managed with a suitable leadership style	27 My flexibility is valued		
			35 I can continuously develop myself professionally	39 I get to participate in the business success	32 I can continue my career in different places			
				41 I enjoy creative freedom				

4.2.2.6.2 Description

Factor 5 has an eigenvalue of 1.95 and explains 5% of the study variance. Five participants are flagged as significantly associated with this factor: 1Z0R (factor loading 0.57379), 707B (-0.53408), E6BN (0.38986), GN59 (0.56552), and ZA8F (0.41712). For 707B, no questionnaire data was received, the questionnaire responses of the others are reported in Table 43. The average age of the four remaining participants was 25.5 years, ranging from 19 to 35. This is the youngest group amongst those compared, though only slightly younger than the participants associated with factor 1. Three participants were single, one in a relationship. All participants associated with this factor had a professional qualification, the only such group besides 4b. The average tenure in the industry was 7.4 years. Although being, on average, slightly younger than the participants flagged for factor 1, these individuals had more than three times as much experience in the industry.

All participants reported working in city hotels, though one misinterpreted the question and did not answer regarding location type; their answer was thus disregarded. The hotels these individuals worked for were generally premium business hotels, one a superior lifestyle hotel. Two were chain-owned, one private, one by another form of organization. This group, much more than the others, relied on public transportation to commute.

Factor 5 is distinguished by four statements (see Table 44), which are all ranked relatively low and indicate that this factor is most clearly distinguished by what its associated participants do *not* primarily expect from their employers. #13 was ranked at -2, lower than by other factors. Related to this, #15 was ranked at -1 and #19 at -4; all indicating that these employees take relatively little interest in their organization's development and feel no urge to participate in it. #21 and #32, ranked at 0 and +1, respectively, indicate only moderate priority of career development – considering the rankings of other career-related statements (#7 at +1, #35 at -1) supports this notion; #33: *"I have long-term career prospects"* however, took a very high priority in the sorts associated with this factor (+3).

The most highly prioritized statements were #12 and #28 at +4, followed by thematically related statements in high rankings (#8 and #31 at +3, #6, #11 and #24 at +2, #20 at +1, #17 and #25 at 0) which can be summarized as a group of expectations related to stability, belonging and needs fulfilment.

Having ranked both statements #11 and #12 higher than other factors, this group of employees clearly prioritizes the ability to express their individuality and bring their authentic personality to work and towards the guests.

Teamwork (#28) takes an even higher priority than it does for factor 4a (section 4.2.2.4.2) which clearly sets these two factors apart from the others.

Being treated like a family member (#31) is important to this group of employees, which appears to be related to their enjoyment of personal interaction with guests, but at the same time they expect a professional working environment (#8). This distinction sets it apart from factor 4a, where professionalism was much less of a priority.

#16 was ranked at -3, lower than by any other factor, and stands out among this theme. The very young age of the group may play a role here, as these individuals may still be forming life plans or not currently have plans and responsibilities that clash with work needs. Despite their age, these participants had considerable working experience in the industry, indicating that they had likely aligned life plans well with their career or work needs, not expecting their employer to expend lots of attention to them.

Factor 5 shares certain distinguishing priorities with factor 4a, particularly the emphasis on teamwork. It does however differentiate itself by a lower prioritization of communication and instead the need for belonging and comfort, which are different motivations for entering into a family-like workplace. Based on the themes identified as most prioritized needs for this group, long-term prospects, teamwork and individual authenticity, the viewpoint emerging from this factor, Viewpoint 7, will be labelled "**Comfort and Predictability**."

4.2.2.6.3 Negatively loading participants

Like factor 1, this factor is bipolar with one flagged sort loading negatively. This is participant 707B, for whom no questionnaire data was received for unknown technical, reasons. This participant clearly prioritized being respected for who they are and their individual needs as a person (#11 at +4, #16 and #25 at +3, #20 and #36 at +2, #6 at +1); while their opinions on #11 and #6 align with the general viewpoint of factor 5, the others stand in clear disagreement: while factor 5 assigns a low priority to having their personal life plan taken into account (#16), this participant clearly prioritized this inducement. For them, getting their financial needs taken care of by the employer was important while the factor in general only took a medium ranking of 0. This participant's demand for being supported in childcare responsibilities stands in clear contrast to factor 5 and aligns them more closely with factor 1. However, they did not expect to be valued for individual traits or behaviours (#27 at -4, #5 at -2, #3 and #30 at -1), which resembles traits of factors 1, 3, and 4a rather than factor 5. Work-life balance per se as an inducement is not a priority (#2 at -3, #1 at -2) however. Career-related inducements only have moderate to low priority (#33 and #24 at -2, #7 and #35 at -1, #21 and #32 at 0) but development of the organization, in which they like to be personally involved (#19 at +4, #13 and #15 at +3, #40 at +1, #41 at 0) and individual learning (#23 at +1) are important to them. 707B loads on each factor only moderately (between -0.1212 on factor 4a and +0.1212 on factor 4b), and significantly negatively on factor 5. It had near

zero correlation with all other Q Sorts, making a triangulation through investigating highly correlating Q Sorts impossible. Besides 707B, V0XG had a factor loading of -0.1788, a representative participant for factor 4a. SH22 had a factor loading of -0.11323. Like 707B, they do not align significantly with any factor. SH22 was 42 years old, not unlike V0XG (46), single, and worked in a management position in an upscale city hotel with a total of seven years of industry experience (another similarity with V0XG, who had three years). It is possible that 707B has similar basic demographics – a slightly advanced age and having chosen hospitality as a second career. Further participants loading negatively on factor 5 are 3IPE (-0.09546, aged 21) and YUFQ (-0.07.672, aged 20).

In accordance with Watts and Stenner (2012), the existence of the one significantly negatively loading participant requires the interpretation of the reversed factor array for factor 5. Analysis of the reversed factor array reveals several themes that are of relevance for the employees which align with this viewpoint.

The first is their expectation of organizational stability. Statement #19 was ranked at +4, individually at +4 by 707B, +3 by V0XG and +2 by SH22. #40 stands at +3; statement #30, ranked +1, can be interpreted as related to the theme of organizational stability: by valuing loyal employees, an employer builds a stable workforce and environment. #30 ranks at -1, +1, and 0 by the three considered participants. This stability is ostensibly also required to be reciprocal, as the factor array reveals that concrete

support measures for personal life rank highly (#36 at +4, #37 at +3, higher than anywhere else, #26 and #29 at +1 and #17 at 0).

Unlike organizational job stability, relational belonging, team spirit, and communication are less prioritized (#28 at -4, #31 at -3, #6 at -2, #4 and #14 at -1). #28 was least prioritized by two participants: F5U9 and VHB5, both of whom were above 50 years old and thus, like the three participants identified as associated with this viewpoint, above the average age for study participants. Both reported issues with bureaucracy and remuneration.

However, individuals aligned with this viewpoint expect to be able to contribute to their organization by freely providing feedback (#15 at +1, #13 at +2, #41 at 0).

The third theme is individual recognition, on which the opinion appears split between broader and long-term inducements and more specific, individual ones. Receiving childcare support (#36 at +4) takes the highest priority for this group, further having their life plan considered (#16 at +3) and general work-life-balance support (#2 at 0). On the other hand, concrete and individual inducements like being allowed to fill one's role authentically (#12 at -4), plannable working times (#1 at -2) and being individually recognized (#11 at -2) as well as the employer caring about individual personal needs (#25 at 0) play a decidedly smaller role for these employees. Instead, they care about their guests and being able to do their work empathically (#9 and #38 at +2, #10 at +3).

Career-related inducements take a medium to low priority (between -3 and +1).

Based on these emerging themes in the composite sort, which show a focus on seeking stability and concrete support while prioritizing empathy for working with guests of teamwork and career, the final emerging viewpoint shall be labelled "**Stability and Empathy**."

4.3 Methodological Limitations

The process of developing the Q Set (see 3.3.4 to 3.3.6) is open to criticism in two points. Firstly, relying on a single source of information at a single point in time might not capture all possible employers, though information was gathered from Germany's premier job portal for hospitality, including job advertisements across a wide geographical area. As Q Methodology captures a *"snapshot"* of opinions at a given moment (Rost, 2021; Mantzalas, Richdale and Dissanayake, 2023), this strategy aligns with the methodology. Secondly, deriving statements about expectations based on promised inducements could bias the concourse towards employers. A diverse focus group discussion of experienced hotel employees was conducted to enrich and critically evaluate and finalize the Q Set (Rebehn, Nichol and Bell, 2024).

The sample size was consistent with Q Methodology (see 3.4.3). Recruitment became less targeted over time but yielded valid responses. Since a Q Study is not intended to be representative, it is impossible to infer from the results of this study the prevalence of viewpoints among the population.

CHAPTER 5:

FINDINGS & DISCUS-SION

5.1 From Factors to Viewpoints

In the preceding chapter, the statistically determined factors were identified and described. In this chapter, these are interpreted and developed into more complex, qualitative viewpoint descriptions in order to answer research question 1. Bipolarity in factors 1 and 5 causes the synthesis of two independent viewpoints, bringing the total number to eight (Table 8). These eight viewpoints also serve as the basis for answering the remaining research questions.

Table 8: Assignment of factors to viewpoint denominators

Factor	Viewpoint
1	1
1 (inverted)	2
2	3
3	4
4a	5
4b	6
5	7
5 (inverted)	8

5.2 Identified Viewpoints

This section will answer research question 1: **What shared viewpoints exist among hotel employees in Northern Germany about the employer inducements expected in their psychological contract?** This is the central research question of the exploratory study as it identifies the variety of psychological contracts present and their distinct characteristics. Eight viewpoints emerged from the study, based on interpretation of the six factors. In line with the process described by Watts and Stenner (2012), through abduction the factors are interpreted and a *"story"* (Watts and Stenner, 2012) is built for each of them.

5.2.1 Viewpoint 1: Professionalism, Loyalty & Work-Life Balance

Viewpoint 1 is based on factor 1. Employees sharing this viewpoint emphasize the need for professionalism in their working environment that not only provides high-quality products and resources, but also actively supports the personal well-being of its employees. On professionalism, participant YZA0 explained it was *"the beginning of everything"*, indicating that they considered it the very basis of any good working conditions. O74M reported seeing too little professionalism in their workplace, especially because too few colleagues had a professional qualification. GKQP explained their ranking statements #8 and #20 at +4 as such:

> *"A professional environment is essential for making meaningful and efficient decisions. And an appropriate leadership style provides the framework for precisely this."*

E6BN, who also ranked statement #8 at the top, explained that they were used to a professional environment from their previous employer. They were one of the youngest participants (19 years) but had apparently firmly incorporated this inducement into their psychological contract after having received it at a previous workplace. This suggests that employees associated with this viewpoint regard professionalism as a foundational element of their psychological contracts. Statement #34 was ranked +4 and -4 only once, respectively: JRJA considered it to be the one of the most important inducements but only responded to the post-sorting questionnaire with *"It takes priority for me"*, not explaining their reasoning further. Likewise, DXFX, who ranked the item at -4, left the field blank.

Employees holding viewpoint 1 especially value being treated like a family member. RO5Z explained their high ranking of statement #31: *"It is a whole different kind of motivation when one is treated like a family member"*, HIUV stated that *"…a good, friendly, familiar environment at work [is] very important for me to feel comfortable."* – showing that for them, it led to a very different outcome (comfort) than for RO5Z (motivation). In any case, the high ranking of this inducement suggests that the

psychological contract of viewpoint 1 is distinctly relational in nature, emphasizing belonging and long-term orientation.

Besides professionalism and relational belonging, these employees value work-life balance – not primarily through rigid, plannable working hours, but via tangible support measures that address their specific personal and professional needs. For instance, they appreciate when their employers offer concrete assistance such as enabling efficient childcare and other services that enhance the quality of life at work. This in turn is appreciated as a form of individualized recognition. However, participants UHF3, GN59, 1Z0R, YUFQ, UC7W, F5U9 and TF1G explained that childcare support did not matter to them because they did not have children. YZA0 had children but still ranked this particular inducement at the lowest priority, explaining that they were considering this to be contingent on being able to plan their free time (see 5.3). The variation in how childcare support is valued illustrates how individual life circumstances shape the prioritization of specific inducements, reinforcing the idea that psychological contracts are both shared and personalised.

3IPE and Z4CF clearly stated that remuneration was the aspect of working for hotels that needed to change the most urgently – by no way an answer unique to this factor, but indicative of the importance of financial considerations that come with (continued) employment in hospitality (statement #25).

Where financial needs are met, performance-based rewards (#18) are of low priority and not a valued incentive, and they rank low within this relational viewpoint. This suggests that financial rewards are more likely to be present in psychological contracts of non-relational focus. E6BN, whose psychological contract appears to be heavily influenced by previous experiences, states that past experiences are the reason for de-prioritizing this statement entirely. E6BN is most closely associated with the viewpoint emerging from factor 5. A second participant, FTN0, placed this inducement in the lowest tier, but did not explain why.

These employees however do not expect their employer to fuel their professional passion (statement #10). GN59 explained that they took it upon themselves to retain their passion for the job, SH22 stated that this was one of the aspects they could overlook in favour of others. This suggests that they were intrinsically motivated and more interested in having a stable and positive working relationship than the job itself, hence their career ambitions on a wider scale (being able to grow elsewhere long-term) were de-emphasized compared to securing growth and variety within the organization.

However, loyalty is a cornerstone of this viewpoint. These employees pride themselves on being reliable, and they expect their employer to reciprocate with consistent acknowledgment, respect, and appreciation for their unique strengths and contributions. While they do not focus on receiving external career opportunities, they still expect solid support for

professional advancement within their current roles. Statement #7 took top priority for four individual participants. Low rankings of statement #32 appear to vary, but to coincide with advanced age: RO5Z's organization had only one location, and they apparently did not consider moving to a different employer. For 0U5C and TMUK, continuing their career elsewhere were not considered at all. All these three participants were over 50 years old and married, potentially indicating that their lives were highly stabilized in the place they were located. The same is true for YZA0, who de-prioritized this inducement as well – this participant was 44 years old, in a stable partnership with a child. Participants 94H3 and GKQP ranked the statement at -4; both were above 40 years old and in stable relationships. 94H3 explained in their post-sort answer that they weren't intending to move geographically anymore, and if yes, they would switch to a different employer at the same time. GKQP explained outright that geographical mobility was not something they expected their employer to provide: *"Continuing my career elsewhere is up to me, not the employer."* HIUV, in their mid-20s and single, also assigned this inducement the lowest priority but did not explain why. Statement #35 received the lowest ranking by five participants. None of them provided a reasoning in the post-sorting questionnaire beyond stating that they placed it last because it was less important than other inducements. Statement #33 was least prioritized by KLEL, KR2D and DEL3, who all had a professional qualification and belonged to various age cohorts. They did not explain their

sorting decisions in their post-sorting questionnaires, but explained that the pandemic had affected their priorities:

> *"I need time for myself. I would like to work remotely more."*
>
> – KLEL

> *"A certain sensitivity for job security in a situation of crisis."*
>
> – KR2D

All had comprehensive answers for the question about what had to change in hotel workplaces, indicating a very critical view and heightened sensitivity for the industry's working conditions:

> *"Salaries and working hours: predictable roster ideally 4 weeks in advance"*
>
> – DEL3

> *"Clean onboarding, appreciation from superiors, uninterrupted breaks (30-60 minutes), and healthy staff meals for everyone. Funded continuing education and pension benefits are ideal. Remote work"*
>
> – KLEL

> *"Appreciation. Satisfied colleagues perform better. Because only colleagues who feel valued and comfortable at work can offer guests a pleasant and friendly stay."*

– KR2D

UHF3 reported wanting to develop themselves intensively. TF1G stated: *"I want to develop quickly based on my interests and skills and would like support in doing so."* Both participants appear to have a clear idea of their career development and unwilling to comply with standardized career pathways. YUFQ, who ranked both statements #7 and #21 at +4, stated that they wanted to expand their career especially quickly, for which individual support and mentoring may be helpful. Post-sorting answers from the two participants who assigned a top rank to statement #13 were generalized and did not provide insight into their rationale. Statement #24 is concerned with being taught the necessary skills for one's job, which in factor 1 is grouped under career development support. KR2D ranked it at the top position, explaining that it was essential for their job satisfaction; two others ranked it at the highest tier but did not elaborate on their rationale.

This viewpoint values professionalism. Statement #15 is concerned with the ability to provide feedback to the employer; ranked at +2 by the factor, indicating moderately high importance for this viewpoint, the statement was ranked at +4 by a sole participant (UC7W), along with #5, who explained that:

> *"Because it's a give and take. Just as I do my work, I also want to be appreciated for it. And since I'm doing the work, my criticism should have value."*

UC7W loaded highest on factor 2 and negatively on factor 1. Their response nonetheless provides insight into the importance of being able to provide feedback.

These employees have clear expectations regarding the inducements they wish to receive. In essence, they thrive in environments where professionalism and personal care intersect, and where they are seen as valuable, confident colleagues. Their strong emphasis on loyalty and low interest in geographical mobility reflects a long-term relational contract centred around expecting a professional, relational workplace with a long-term orientation.

Employers who understand and meet these expectations are more likely to retain these loyal and dependable employees, though it is crucial to ensure that their goodwill is not taken for granted. Practitioners ought to identify employees falling into this category and secure their loyalty. While these employees are not willing to go the extra mile for the company, they can be counted on as consistent performers in senior operational positions that benefit from experience and knowledge, like the reception desk.

5.2.2 Viewpoint 2: Independence & Career Growth

Viewpoint 2 represents the inverted factor array for bipolar factor 1, where one of the flagged participants loaded negatively. Interpreting it independently yielded distinct priorities.

In their post-sorting questionnaire, 3IPE did not explain the rationale behind their top and lowest rankings, thus not enriching the understanding for the sorting decisions. They did however explain that the two items ranked at -4 were more important, but the forced distribution grid did not allow them to place them in higher positions. This however still provides an insight, as the prioritization forced by the grid shows which aspects were – perhaps subconsciously – more important than others. This supports the understanding of Q methodology that even when participants cannot articulate their reasoning, the forced-choice structure still reveals underlying priorities within their psychological contract.

The simulated composite sort suggests that holders of this contrarian view value, above all, continuous career progression and exploring opportunities in other places, as well as a high degree of independence, making them somewhat less loyal. They also place little importance on feeling treated like a family member or being able to reconcile work and personal life. They do not primarily expect support for childcare – a distinguishing priority of viewpoint 1 – or even acknowledgement of their financial needs. Rather, holders of this viewpoint appear to be prepared to do this independently, for which they however require plannable working times. This contrast to viewpoint 1 indicates a different understanding of the responsibilities of employer and individual, and which role the individual allows for the employer in their personal life. While holders of viewpoint 1 expect their employer to render specific structured support

to enable work-life balance, their opposites expect merely the provision of the conditions necessary to manage work-life balance themselves. To them, this includes being provided with suitable living conditions and support to maximize efficiency of their commute to work.

Overall, this viewpoint represents a coherent configuration of expectations centred on independence, mobility, and self-directed career growth, with limited emphasis on long-term organisational attachment.

For practitioners, retaining these employees in the long-term should not be a priority. Their drive to move on however manifests itself in a strong work ethic and positive, passionate attitude towards their job. These employees are best employed in entry-level positions with plenty of learning opportunities and clearly articulated development pathways. Their eventual departure from the organization or upwards movement should be anticipated by proactively developing new talent – ideally apprentices – to take over the position in due time.

5.2.3 Viewpoint 3: Reward & Work-Life Balance

Viewpoint 3 represents factor 2. Employees identifying with Viewpoint 3 emphasize recognition and reward as well as work–life balance and expect employers to respect their needs outside of work. This combination indicates a psychological contract that balances transactional expectations of fair reward with a strong desire for manageable boundaries between work and personal life, in contrast to the strongly relational viewpoints.

Participant 0Q40 indicated *"too little free time"* as the thing they liked least about working in hotels. They ranked statement #2 at +2, and the corresponding statement #1: *"I have plannable working times"* at 0, indicating that they did not expect their employers to provide these things as a priority. For this individual, knowing their critical feedback was received gratefully (#4) took top priority (ranked +2 by the factor in general), as did not being left hanging (#17); this does not exclude the possibility that they are bringing the working time issue to their employer's attention and expect to be accommodated.

Participant DBMN explains their top ranking of statement #2:

> *"I prioritize the balance between work and personal life, as I greatly appreciate the support that takes my personal appointments and plans into account when scheduling my shifts."*

In the questionnaire answers, these participants express a relatively low career interest or even interest in remaining in the industry at all. No additional information was given regarding individual rankings of statement #33, which means that it needs to be understood in the holistic context of the composite Q Sort and demographics: with a relatively high average age, the participants influencing this factor may be considering retirement more than long-term career aspirations. KR2D, the oldest participant in the study, ranked the item at -4, F5U9 was only a year younger and placed the statement at -3; only prioritizing statements #28 (teamwork) and #36 (childcare) lower. The younger members of the group

flagged for factor 2, DBMN and DEL3, ranked the statement at -1 and -4, respectively. DEL3 prioritized work-life balance over all others, ranking items of belonging (#31 at -3) and others regarding career development (#7 and #32 at -3, #21 at -2) low overall. For DBMN, work-life balance (#2) and being valued (#3) took top priority, while career-related inducements ranked lower by them, too (#32, #35 and #21 at -2, #33 at -1). While DEL3 reported being unsure about leaving the hospitality industry eventually, DMBN stated that they were definitely planning to do so, hence not expecting to be supported with long-term career support. While the previous viewpoints 1 and 2 are anchored in loyalty and career growth, this viewpoint signals far lower attachment to employer and industry.

These individuals are willing to contribute their loyalty, reliability, and expertise as transactional items, for which they expect to be acknowledged, rewarded, and valued. They require high-quality tools and products that enable them to perform at their best. For them, being made to feel genuinely valued, through both intangible recognition and tangible benefits, is one of the most important inducements an employer can provide to them. #6 was ranked at the top position by four individual participants, among them DBMN. DXFX states that *"appreciation is the be-all and end-all in the workplace"*, KR2D considers it crucial for their job satisfaction. UC7W ranked statement #30 at +3. They urged hospitality employers to *"appreciate employees and their work more, better career*

opportunities" in response to the question what had to change most urgently in the industry.

Loyalty, however, does not translate to relational belonging for these employees. TF1G ranked statement #31 last because they felt that working for a large corporation, there was no 'family' to belong to, and they drew a clear distinction between work and relationships (*"We are here to work."*) Teamwork is only of moderate importance: throughout the study, two participants gave it top priority, two others ranked it last. For TMUK, a good relationship between colleagues was very important at their age (55); F5U9 felt that teamwork at their job was already *"optimal"* and did not require further development impulse. This however still indicates that they might value good teamwork despite the rating.

They appreciate opportunities to render feedback and constructive criticism, viewing these processes as essential for maintaining a culture of continuous improvement. Unlike colleagues associated with Viewpoint 1, those in Viewpoint 3 place the least importance on being treated like a family member, instead preferring a more formal, professional and transactional atmosphere. At the same time, this group places only limited priority on support for career aspirations or external mobility, favouring instead a steady, well-recognized and rewarding role within their current organization. Their balanced approach to the psychological contract results in a reliable workforce that values fairness, clarity, and a supportive framework for both work and life outside the hotel.

Overall, this viewpoint represents a coherent configuration of expectations centred on reward, appreciation, and a sustainable work–life balance. Employees seek stability and recognition rather than advancement or emotional closeness, forming a psychological contract that is structured, fair, and transactional.

5.2.4 Viewpoint 4: Career & Material Quality of Life

Viewpoint 4 is derived from the Q Sorts representing factor 3. Employees sharing this viewpoint are strongly focused on career advancement and material quality of life. Professional growth, reward for their work, and acknowledgement of their life plans are the defining themes in their psychological contracts. While this indicates a largely transactional psychological contract, the overall story told by the composite Q Sort is one of internal career advancement rather than low loyalty and high mobility. They see career development as the key driver of their work life, demanding opportunities for promotions, individual guidance, and skill enhancement. Individually, participant UHF3 ranked statement #7: *"My professional advancement is individually supported"* at the top position because they are willing to trade high performance for career development. YUFQ (loads at 0.41962) explains that their priority was swift career advancement. They were still undergoing their professional apprenticeship and expected to be able to experience many things in a hospitality career. Like for viewpoint 2 (Independence & Career Growth), career advancement can be a reward for good performance. Participant 94H3 stated their

unhappiness with the fact that they were expected to exert great efforts for company profits but felt unfairly rewarded for it – the factor overall ranks #39: *"I get to participate in the business success"* at +1. Participant UHF3 ranked statement #18 as top priority in their individual Q Sort and explained their rationale as follows:

> *"I want to develop myself further. To achieve this, I give my all, and I want to be rewarded with support for my development."*

This answer shows that in general, reward for performance must not necessarily be in monetary form. Rather, it is important to understand the reasons why an employee expends much energy on performing well. UHF3 loaded moderately on factor 3 (0.38788) and is most closely associated to factor 4b (0.58758), another career-focussed viewpoint. The importance of rewards indicates the strong influence of transactional elements on the psychological contract underlying viewpoint 4.

Unlike other viewpoints, being treated like part of a family holds minimal importance for these employees; their allegiance is to their professional ambitions and performance rewards rather than the emotional or familial aspects of the workplace. That said, they still expect their employer to facilitate teamwork.

Although career progression is a clear priority, these employees maintain a balanced perspective. For them, work should not overshadow other aspects of life. As such, while they expect the opportunity to invest

considerable energy into their professional development, they also ensure that their employer preserves their personal time and self-care. DEL3 and 9FL1 specifically named poor shift planning as primary attention need for industry leaders. This balance distinguishes them from individuals sharing viewpoint 6 (Career & Active Contribution), for instance, who prioritize sheer career advancement at the expense of work-life balance. This however distinguishes Viewpoint 4 from more relational ones, where belonging or interpersonal closeness play a central role. Here, employees seek a balanced but clearly career-driven relationship in which advancement is inspired by practical needs, earned through effort, and supported through structured organisational mechanisms.

The distinctive approach of these employees is characterized by a clear demand for structured career support. They thrive in environments where tangible opportunities for growth are provided, such as clear pathways for advancement and consistent recognition of their achievements, while still safeguarding the quality of life outside of work. In essence, they blend ambition with balance, ensuring that their professional journey contributes to, rather than consumes, their overall well-being.

Overall, this viewpoint represents a coherent configuration of expectations centred on career progression, structured support, and material quality of life. Employees seek clear advancement pathways, fair recognition of effort, and working conditions that enable both ambition and

personal well-being. Practical, mostly financial, needs are the defining driver for these employees' motivations, and restrict their mobility.

Practitioners who identify employees with this viewpoint in their teams should develop sustainable, long-term internal career plans with them. New positions should be earned through experience and seniority rather than through expending additional energy on learning or the stress of exposure to new challenges.

5.2.5 Viewpoint 5: Communication & Empathy

Viewpoint 5 is based on factor 4a and is defined by a strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships and open dialogue. Employees who share this perspective highly value an environment in which communication flows freely, supporting a reciprocal feedback culture and governed by competent, supportive leadership. This indicates a strong relational psychological contract based on interpersonal connections.

The only individual participant who provided a post-sorting response explaining the top rating for statement #4: "*My criticism is received gratefully*" was E6BN: they had learned to appreciate certain inducements at previous workplaces and incorporated them into their psychological contract. Another, SH22, stated that human resource management in the hotel industry urgently needed to be reformed, while E6BN listed the interaction between colleagues as the primary action point – both related to being open for constructive feedback from employees and colleagues. O74M, whose post-sorting questionnaire answer was analysed as part of

their contribution to viewpoint 1, rated item #14 at the highest priority. They clearly value professionalism in leadership and thrive on feedback because of their interest for a career in hospitality, answering the question whether they were planning for a career in the industry with an all-caps *"YES" [sic!]* and stating that no other industry was of interest for them. The other participant for whom receiving feedback took top priority was V0XG, who didn't plan on advancing their career (while at 46 being much older than O74M at 24), also stated that they had no intention to leave the industry; what they cherished the most was developing their ideas creatively. This may indicate why receiving feedback was so important for them – in developing new products, procedures or other improvements, they likely rely on feedback to ensure their development was on the right track. Statement #15 was ranked lower by all the mentioned participants, at 0 by E6BN, at +1 by SH22, at +2 by 0Q40, and at +3 by each V0XG and O74M. Statement #15, in its phrasing *"I can provide feedback at any time"* concerns itself less with the general opportunity or the reception of feedback, but with the timely aspect. Providing feedback at any given time may not be as important for employees who rely on the regular opportunity, for instance in the form of regularly scheduled individual performance reviews, surveys, or employee townhalls. Yet, it takes higher than average priority for all these individuals and for the factor at large, showing that employers should always be prepared to listen to their employees; especially those associated with viewpoint 5, whose

psychological contracts are grounded in relational exchange, trust, and mutual support.

This insight connects to the second theme of relational leadership: the value of statement #6 to individual participants has been discussed in section 4.2.2.2.2 as it takes top priority for factor 2. The importance is exemplified by the explanation of participant DXFX: *"Appreciation is the be-all and end-all in the workplace."* Whereas other viewpoints expect rewards for performance, these employees seek emotional resonance, appreciation and a sense of interpersonal safety.

Being recognized for reliability is important as well. Though statement #3 in general ranked on the side of higher priority amongst this viewpoint, it received a +4 ranking by only one participant, F5U9. For them, reliability and flexibility were the most important traits in the hospitality business, because, in their opinion, guests had to be able to count on them. By this reasoning, reliability in individual employees is seen as being in the best interest of the business. Consequently, this participant expects an employer to value this trait in them.

Besides interpersonal and cultural aspects of the working environment, these employees appreciate when their employer provides tangible assistance, such as tailored provisions for commuting that are suitable to the hotel's location and practical help in securing comfortable housing. Those inducements are valued much more strongly by this group than the others. Support of this kind likely reinforces their sense of being cared for at

work and having needs met. Participant RO5Z ranked statement #26 at the top of their priorities, explaining that it was important for them to be financially supported in offsetting the cost of going to work.

For employees sharing this viewpoint, relational needs trump demands for career advancement and professional development. Instead, these employees derive satisfaction from a cohesive team culture and collaborative work environment. They take great pride in positive guest interactions, viewing their service as an extension of the empathetic culture they value. This is the group of employees most oriented towards guest needs and empathetic service. The quality of products and tools plays a secondary role in their job satisfaction compared to the warmth and support fostered by effective communication and empathetic leadership. Ultimately, employees aligned with viewpoint 5 see the workplace as a community where open dialogue and practical support are essential in creating a positive and nurturing work environment.

Overall, this viewpoint represents a coherent configuration of expectations centred on empathy, communication, and relational harmony. Employees aligned with this perspective prioritise a supportive interpersonal climate over career progression or material benefits, viewing the workplace as a community built on trust, dialogue, and mutual care.

For hotel managers, having holders of viewpoint 5 in their teams means access to a wealth of, partly external, experience and knowledge. These employees do not have high expectations of quality in tools or products,

or career inducements, but expect a very strong and harmonious relational environment. This includes communication by superiors and managers, who are expected to support good team spirit. These employees typically do not intend to leave the industry or continue their hospitality career elsewhere – provided they find the team atmosphere acceptable – meaning that practitioners can bank on their commitment for the long-term.

5.2.6 Viewpoint 6: Career & Active Contribution

This viewpoint, which is expressed through the data in factor 4b, represents employees who are extremely career-focused and prioritize professional advancement above all else. For them, any inducement that fosters growth – whether through training, development plans, or the opening of new opportunities – has immense value. They actively seek structured pathways for career development, showing a strongly advancement- oriented psychological contract in which career mobility takes precedence over long-term organisational attachment. These are also the employees that actively seek support for taking their career around the world (statement #32). Many individual participants gave this inducement a decidedly low rank, though sometimes because they expected to change to a different employer when moving geographically (see the explanation by 94H3 in section 4.2.2.1.2). Six study participants – E6BN, F5U9, GN59, VHB5, YUFQ and Z4CF – however ranked this inducement at +3 or +4. Their average age of 34.83 years (ranging 19-57) corresponds closely with

the average age of the flagged participants for this factor, while those ranking the inducement lower tend to be noticeably older (see 4.2.2.1.2). Of the six attaching high priority, only one (F5U9) reported being married, while two others were in a relationship and three were single. Two were still undergoing professional training; the others, save for Z4CF, had a qualification. Four had not worked elsewhere before, explaining their relatively strong desire to do so. Three of these participants explained clearly that they did not have children – which may be an additional factor in the desire or openness towards relocation.

In exchange for these robust career opportunities, they are eager to contribute actively to the company's development, demonstrating initiative and a strong drive to enhance business success. An insightful explanation by participant UHF3, who was not flagged as exemplary for this factor but loaded very highly on it, was quoted in 5.2.4: these individuals work hard to contribute to their organization, and expect to be able to advance in their careers as a reward for the hard work rendered. Participants T1FG and YUFQ explained their +4 rankings (#33 and #7; and #7 and #21, respectively) with their desire to have an illustrious, fast career. In being willing to commit actively to the business but not overly attached to a single employer, these individuals share a balanced psychological contract which is strongly oriented towards own development but with a strong sense of obligation towards the current employer.

These employees are willing to sacrifice, to a greater extent than their peers, work-life balance and the predictability of set schedules if it means accelerating their professional progress. Furthermore, they do not require extensive opportunities for empathetic guest service or highly collaborative team environments, as their focus remains squarely on turning their individual contributions into tangible advancement opportunities. Practical supports such as assistance with commuting or finding a residence are not a priority for these individuals. Instead, retaining and motivating employees sharing this viewpoint hinges on being receptive to their input and eagerness to contribute, in turn enabling them to build a career. Rewarding their active involvement and consistently delivering opportunities that align with their long-term professional goals are the gateway to mutually beneficial employment relationships. Thus, viewpoint 6 is distinguished from the more relational viewpoints like 1, 5, and 7, but also from the needs-driven and externally restricted development motivation of viewpoint 4; in contrast to viewpoint 3, these employees do not expect rewards for their work but share a greater focus on their contributions towards the employer. They share expectations of rapid advancement, active contributions, and are willing to personally invest more than their peers.

Supervisors may be overwhelmed or annoyed by these individuals, who actively seek to involve themselves in the organization, possibly even in areas outside their job scope. However, it is advisable for management to

actively involve these very invested individuals in furthering the business, allowing fresh perspectives and change. Meanwhile, employers should consistently reward the contributions made and, wherever possible, work with the employee on seeking the next step in their career. If this means stepping out of the current organization, a structured development plan could involve training a replacement for their position. In the meantime, valuable contributions may be harnessed from these individuals.

5.2.7 Viewpoint 7: Comfort & Predictability

This viewpoint is based on factor 5 and represents a group of hotel employees who cherish comfort and predictability in their daily work. This includes professionalism and teamwork, respect, and sufficient training, but career development is not a priority: while advancement and development are moderately important and are superseded by the need for comfort and harmony, a long-term career prospect is more important to this group than to others. This pattern reflects a psychological contract oriented toward stability and relational comfort rather than advancement or mobility. Six individual participants ranked this statement (#33) at +3 or +4. On average they were 36 years old and thus belonged to the more experienced participants with on average 10.5 years in the industry and all but one with a vocational or academic certification. They reported different aspects of the work as those they liked best, common themes were the variety that the industry offers as well as the interaction with other people:

"The opportunity to work internationally."

-GN59

"Contact with different people."

-SH22

"The variety, the dynamism and the contact with people."

-UHF3

All had had experience in other workplaces before the current one and were ostensibly interested in staying in the industry for the long-term. These experiences appear to have shaped a preference for predictable, harmonious environments where interpersonal ease outweighs ambition.

Whether this career is necessarily a steep advancement or rather a long-term employment with moderate improvement of position is contingent on the subjective interpretation of the individual sorters; but the moderate interest in working elsewhere and experiencing variety – so long as the needs for comfort and predictability are met – indicates that these employees are not averse to growth. They are however far less aggressive than those sharing viewpoint 6, for example. Plannable, reliable working times are more important to this group than others and takes equal priority as for people sharing viewpoint 3, suggesting that duties or needs outside of work play an important role.

Statement #12 reflects the ability to fill one's role in a comfortable and suitable way. It was especially important for participant 94H3, who had 24 years of industry experience and felt unfairly compensated for their hard work in the interest of profit:

> *"It's important to me to bring my style and personality to the table, so I can express myself and deliver top-notch performance. No one should pretend to be someone they're not and should be respected for who they are!"*

94H3 also placed statement #11: *"I am respected for who I am"* at the top of the scale, which is thematically closely linked to #12 as both relate to emotional labour and the role one must play at work. This emphasis on authenticity and respect aligns with a relational psychological contract, where being valued as a person is central to needs fulfilment.

On the contrary, employees associated with viewpoint 7 do not expect their employer to be considerate of their personal life plans (statement #16). One single participant, HIUV, assigned the lowest rank to this statement explaining that

> *"… these [#16 and #32] are things that do not characterize the profession."*

With this answer, this participant shows that their psychological contract was strongly influenced by the characteristics of the profession and industry, as well as previous experiences and individual possibilities. Their

assessment of continuing one's career in different places (#32) directly contradicts the image the industry prefers to give itself. HIUV was 26 years old with eight years of experience, including an apprenticeship and professional certification, and is demographically representative of the factor.

The theme of comfort and predictability also includes a desire to work in a close-knit team. TMUK and FTN0 ranked statement #28 at +4, both were, contrary to the participants flagged for this factor, among the oldest participants: 55 and 57 years, respectively, and both married. However, both had relatively short tenures in the industry, suggesting that they had entered hospitality late in their career, and stated that they did not intend to leave again. At the same time, neither wanted to build a career and were happy in their current positions. Both worked in small, privately-owned hotels. For them, the motivation for their work was the work with people, as TMUK explains:

"The job is very varied, with new tasks and guests all the time."

Three further participants placed statement #28 at the second-highest rank, two of which were under 30 years old and another above 50 who had also entered the industry late, only six years prior to the study, and worked in a privately-owned mid-range hotel. These three participants stated very similarly that guest contact was their primary motivation. Yet, while a comfortable, harmonious work environment is of high priority, empathy for guests and passion about the job or profession is not.

Employees holding viewpoint 7 are most concerned with their colleagues and less with the profession or the characteristics of the job themselves.

Overall, this viewpoint represents a coherent configuration of expectations centred on predictability, interpersonal harmony, and long-term stability, with limited emphasis on career acceleration or professional passion.

Employees of viewpoint 7 feel most at home in relationally strong, empathetic teams where their individuality is appreciated. Though many think of someday leaving the hotel industry, they still appreciate a long-term employment outlook. Providing predictability is the biggest priority for practitioners managing individuals of this type. They may not be particularly passionate about hospitality or invested in the company they work for, but are likely to provide reliable, stable work in basic operational or back-of-house functions and through their long-term outlook, relational orientation and responsiveness to transformational leadership prove valuable parts of the puzzle.

5.2.8 Viewpoint 8: Stability & Empathy

Emerging from the interpretation of the reversed composite Q Sort of factor 5, Viewpoint 8 is characterized by an emphasis on needs fulfilment. Organizational stability is important to employees sharing this viewpoint: they look for workplaces which continue evolving and staying sustainable by maintaining good quality. SH22 reported that what they loved best about the industry was the human interaction, while they decried poor

HR management and unfavourable working times. This signifies the contrast to viewpoint 7 in that holders of viewpoint 8 take an interest in their organization and the work they do. In contrast to the priority role of comfort and predictability that distinguishes viewpoint 7, employees associated with viewpoint 8 bring a need for meaningful contribution to the exchange relationship.

Meanwhile, they value when their employer provides concrete support for stability and security in life at large, through enabling childcare, accommodation and commuting. Unlike viewpoint 7, these employees do not look for comfort but rather a stable positive development, to which they gladly contribute actively. To ensure their prioritized needs for a stable working environment and a secure material relationship, they are ready to forego opportunities for good team spirit and individuality. Challenging work schedules are less of an issue for these employees if their long-term plans are taken into account and the employer retains some sensitivity for their financial needs. What sets these employees apart is that they desire to work with empathy and in the interest of their guests, even as the team spirit is less important. These employees tend to be older than others and chose to enter a hospitality career later in life. While some career ambitions remain, they are not as important as working with guests and ensuring continued stability.

Viewpoint 8 provides insight into employees who retain a healthy distance from their workplace, actively seek stability and meaningful

relationships as well as great pride in their work. They balance relational and transactional expectations with an interest in growth but without the aggressive career motivation of viewpoint 6.

Supervisors of employees sharing viewpoint 8 might find themselves engaged with passionate individuals, who however might be better than others suited for working alone. They might also have very specific individual needs and challenges which an empathetic employer can help them overcome, earning their loyalty. These very individual requirements may pose a challenge to smaller organizations. To retain and efficiently use the strengths of these individuals, practitioners need to be prepared to – and implement structures that allow them to – think outside the box, and implement very individualized arrangements in the context of *I-Deals* (Rousseau, 2005).

5.2.9 Eight Distinct Viewpoints

In this section, the factors derived from the data have been further developed into eight distinctive viewpoints held by hotel employees in Northern Germany. These represent distinct forms of psychological contracts, with some valuing career development and others relationally stable environments with communication and empathy. They illustrate the diversity of viewpoints present within the Northern German hotel workforce and the different ways in which employees interpret employer inducements.

Viewpoint 1 represents individuals who most prioritize their employers providing professionalism, loyalty and work-life balance. Individuals

associated with Viewpoint 2 meanwhile focus on independence and career growth. Viewpoint 3 is one of employees looking to be rewarded for good performance but also retain work-life balance. Viewpoint 4 stands for individuals who seek employer support in career advancement with the overarching goal of securing or improving their material quality of life. While holders of Viewpoint 5 look for a workplace that fosters communication and empathy, Viewpoint 6 represents hotel professionals who passionately prioritize career advancement and want to help build and develop their organization. Viewpoint 7 stands for employees expecting comfort and predictability while their peers holding Viewpoint 8 look for stability and empathy in their working relationships.

These viewpoints provide a comprehensive answer to research question 1 and underline the diversity of psychological contracts, which both research and practitioners should acknowledge and incorporate into strategies and practices.

Table 9 summarizes the viewpoints' priorities. Table 46 assigns each participant the viewpoints they are strongly or secondarily associated with.

Table 9: Key priorities of each viewpoint

Viewpoint	Key Priorities
1	Professionalism, loyalty, work-life balance
2	Independence, career growth
3	Performance rewards, work-life balance
4	Employer support, career advancement, material life quality
5	Communication, empathy
6	Career advancement, organizational development
7	Comfort, predictability
8	Stability, empathy

5.3 Inducements Equally Valued by Employees

This section will answer research question 2: **Are any inducements equally valued by employees across different viewpoints?** This research question seeks to determine whether there are inducements that practitioners should focus on regardless of the composition of their workforce and their respective psychological contracts. For future research, this section provides an overview of possible shared expectations across the hospitality workforce.

Only one consensus statement emerged from the study: statement #39: *"I get to participate in the business success"* was ranked on average at position 0.17 across all factors, with two viewpoints (4 and 5) ranking it a little higher at +1 and one (6) at -1. Across individual sorts, three participants (UC7W, SY2N and FTN0) ranked it at -3, and one (TMUK) at +4, meaning that it was of utmost importance for this participant, who did not offer an explanation in the post-sorting questionnaire. They however ranked items related to recognition, feeling valued and teamwork very highly. This participant was very new to the industry – 2 months – and very happy with their position and role. For this person, who most related to factor 4a (viewpoint 5), loading at 0.37143, participation in business success – which may not come in monetary form but also in the shape of security and growth – may be a form of appreciation by the employer. Overall, the inducement is of medium priority for the different groups of

employees. It may also be expected to come in different forms, as Q Methodology refrains from pre-determining the meaning of statements. The fact that only one consensus statement emerged, and that it is on average given only a moderate ranking, indicates that psychological contracts among Northern German hotel employees are highly diverse and distinct.

The viewpoints exhibit large differences in their highest-ranked inducements, as their respective priorities are quite divergent. The highest average ranking is 2.17 for statement number 6: *"I am being valued."* Table 10 lists the five statements with the highest average ranking.

Table 10: Statements with the highest average ranking across factors

#	Statement	Avg. Rank
6	I am being valued	2.17
8	I work in a professional environment	2.00
7	My professional advancement is individually supported	1.50
24	I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	1.50
3	My reliability is valued	1.33

These inducements share a common theme of fairness, competence, and interpersonal respect, suggesting that employees across viewpoints expect a baseline of professional treatment even when their broader psychological contracts differ. Raeder and Grote (2004) suggested loyalty to be an inducement employees value across all settings. While a specific inducement of that name was not part of this study, it shines through several of these inducements. An employer may show loyalty through consistent training and individual development as well as making an employee feel valued.

In contrast, Table 11 lists the statements which were least prioritized across all factors.

Table 11: Statements with the lowest average ranking across factors

#	Statement	Avg. Rank
10	My passion for my profession is being kept alive	-1.50
32	I can continue my career in different places	-1.67
36	I receive support for taking care of my children	-1.83
40	I work in a sustainable organization	-1.83
37	I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay	-2.33

These inducements share the characteristic of being anchored outside the employment relationship proper, relating to intrinsic motivation and individual plans or personal life needs. This suggests that employees on average do not expect their employers to interfere in personal life domains but rather to provide a suitable environment for these needs and plans to be tended to by the individual. Sustainability, meanwhile, is a theme of corporate strategy and values rather than the exchange between the organization and the individual.

The lowest average ranking was received by statement #37: *"I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay,"* suggesting that, overall, most employees did not expect their employer to provide accommodation or render support in finding it. It was ranked relatively low by all participants, with the highest ranking (+3) given by SY2N. This participant worked on an island. Most island destination in Northern Germany rely on employees temporarily or permanently relocating from elsewhere, who consequently need to look for affordable accommodation in a difficult

market. This participant gave tangible support in commuting to work the same ranking and allocated a slightly lower rank (+2) to receiving high-quality meals from their employer, suggesting that they looked for an employer to provide fulfilment of the basic needs as part of the employment relationship. SY2N was most associated with factor 4a (viewpoint 5), with a factor loading of 0.27266 and likely, according to their hotel's location, associated these tangible rewards with a caring and supportive employer.

Interestingly, concerns of sustainability (#40) and geographical career mobility (#32) were among those of the lowest importance to participants. Statement #36: *"I receive support for taking care of my children"* was also among the least important inducements. Although reconciling work commitments and childcare is considered a major challenge (Seidel, 2021), it was not a priority for the participants of this study. This may be rooted in the demographic composition of the P Set: of the 36 participants, 17 reported being single and 8 to be in a relationship. Participants were not asked whether they had children, although one (YZA0) reported having a child. This participant ranked the statement at the lowest position (-4), stating in the post-sorting questionnaire:

> *"For me, childcare is directly linked to plannable leisure time. If that is guaranteed, I don't need any help with childcare."*

The participant thus expressly does not expect their employer to make accommodations for their childcare responsibilities but is prepared and able to arrange childcare if their leisure time can be reliably planned; the

inversion of this notion is statement #1: *"I have plannable working times"*, which they ranked at +1. In return, this individual expected their flexibility towards work needs to be respected by their employer. YZA0 is most closely related to viewpoint 3 (0.55213), for which they are a flagged participant.

The evaluation of average rankings reproduces and validates, to some extent, the results of Rebehn, Nichol and Bell (2024), which resulted in the numbering of statements in the Q Sample in accordance to the focus group's ranking of inducement importance. This also serves as validation of the focus group's composition across the factors which subsequently emerged in the Q Sort. Table 12 lists the average ranking for each statement.

Table 12: Average ranking of statements across all factors

#	Statements	Avg Rank
1	I have plannable working times	-0.17
2	I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	0.50
3	My reliability is valued	1.33
4	My criticism is received gratefully	1.33
5	My professional expertise is valued	1.00
6	I am being valued	2.17
7	My professional advancement is individually supported	1.50
8	I work in a professional environment	2.00
9	I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	-1.00
10	My passion for my profession is being kept alive	-1.50
11	I am respected for who I am	0.00
12	I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me	0.50
13	I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	1.00
14	I receive appropriate feedback	0.33
15	I can provide feedback any time	0.83
16	My personal life plan is being taken into account	0.17
17	I am not left hanging	-0.17
18	My good performance is rewarded	0.83
19	I work in a company which consistently evolves	-1.00
20	I am being managed with a suitable leadership style	0.17
21	I have the opportunity to have a varied career	0.00
22	I have high-quality tools at my disposal	-0.67
23	I get to learn through suitable training formats	-0.67
24	I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	1.50
25	My financial needs are being taken into account	0.17
26	I receive support for my commute to work	-0.33
27	My flexibility is valued	0.17
28	Our team work is encouraged and supported	0.67
29	I receive high-quality meals	-0.83
30	My loyalty is valued	0.00
31	I am treated like a family member	-0.17
32	I can continue my career in different places	-1.67
33	I have long-term career prospects	0.33
34	I get to work with high-quality products	0.00
35	I can continuously develop myself professionally	-1.17
36	I receive support for taking care of my children	-1.83

#	Statements	Avg Rank
1	I have plannable working times	-0.17
38	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work	-1.33
39	I get to participate in the business success	0.17
40	I work in a sustainable organization	-1.83
41	I enjoy creative freedom	0.00

This section is concerned with research question 2 and attempts to establish an understanding for inducements which are commonly prioritized across viewpoints. Only one consensus statement emerged from the Q sort, which received an overall medium priority across all viewpoints and participants.

To augment this insight, an average ranking across all factors was calculated for each statement. The five inducements with the highest average priority are:

- Making employees feel valued (average rank +2.17)
- Providing a professional working environment (+2.00)
- Rendering individualized career support (+1.50)
- Teaching skills necessary for the job (+1.50)
- Recognizing an employee's reliability (+1.33)

While the least prioritized inducements are:

- Supporting employees in finding accommodation (-2.33)
- Working in a sustainable organization (-1.83)
- Providing assistance in child care (-1.83)
- Supporting career advancement in other locations (-1.67)
- Maintaining an employee's passion for their profession (-1.50)

While individual rankings and those within viewpoints, as well as their respective underlying reasoning, are highly divergent, this measure provides a crude overview of commonly held perceptions. The next section will engage in establishing which inducements incurred highly divergent rankings.

In summation, the analysis of average rankings shows that top priorities differ greatly across the hotel workforce. Where consensus widely exists, it suggests that employees across all viewpoints wish to be recognized and valued individually, and that they prefer to separate personal life from work resulting in lower importance being attached to employers being involved in personal life domains.

5.4 Contested Inducements

This section answers research question 3: **Which inducements are valued differently across viewpoints?** To achieve this, the rankings of inducements across viewpoints are being compared to determine where the psychological contracts of Northern German hotel employees differ most. It determines, complementary to research question 2, which inducements are only relevant for select groups of employees, and provides practitioners with insight into inducements they need to (re-)consider depending on the mix of psychological contracts in their existing team, or the types of employees they wish to retain and attract.

To determine the most contested inducements, the difference between the highest and lowest ranking across the eight viewpoints was calculated for each statement, with a minimum possible variance of 0 (same ranking across all factors) and a maximum of 8 (-4 to +4). These are summarized in Table 13. Two statements (#20 and #39) had a variance of two ranks, two more of three and five had a variance of four. This suggests that generally great divergence from the consensus (see 5.3) exists and employers ought to consider individual viewpoints rather than the average.

Table 13: Complete factor array with calculated variances

#	Statement	V 1	V 2	V 3	V 4	V 5	V 6	V 7	V 8	Var
1	I have plannable working times	-2	2	1	2	-3	-1	2	-2	5
2	I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	1	-1	3	1	1	-3	0	0	6
3	My reliability is valued	1	-1	3	0	0	1	3	-3	6
4	My criticism is received gratefully	-3	3	2	2	4	2	1	-1	7
5	My professional expertise is valued	-1	1	1	1	2	2	1	-1	3
6	I am being valued	0	0	4	3	3	1	2	-2	6
7	My professional advancement is individually supported	3	-3	-1	4	-2	4	1	-1	7
8	I work in a professional environment	4	-4	0	3	-1	3	3	-3	8
9	I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	1	-1	-1	-3	1	-2	-2	2	5
10	My passion for my profession is being kept alive	-3	3	-2	0	-2	1	-3	3	6
11	I am respected for who I am	-2	2	1	1	-1	-1	2	-2	4
12	I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me	1	-1	-1	-1	1	-1	4	-4	8
13	I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	3	-3	1	2	0	2	-2	2	6
14	I receive appropriate feedback	-3	3	-1	2	4	-1	1	-1	7

#	Statement	V 1	V 2	V 3	V 4	V 5	V 6	V 7	V 8	Var
15	I can provide feedback any time	2	-2	3	-1	2	0	-1	1	5
16	My personal life plan is being taken into account	1	-1	0	3	-1	1	-3	3	6
17	I am not left hanging	-3	3	1	1	2	-2	0	0	6
18	My good performance is rewarded	-2	2	3	4	0	2	-2	2	6
19	I work in a company which consistently evolves	0	0	-3	1	0	0	-4	4	8
20	I am being managed with a suitable leadership style	-1	1	0	0	1	0	1	-1	2
21	I have the opportunity to have a varied career	2	-2	-2	-2	-2	4	0	0	6
22	I have high-quality tools at my disposal	0	0	2	-1	-4	0	-1	1	6
23	I get to learn through suitable training formats	0	0	-3	-1	0	2	-2	2	5
24	I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	2	-2	4	-1	2	0	2	-2	6
25	My financial needs are being taken into account	2	-2	0	3	-3	-1	0	0	6
26	I receive support for my commute to work	-2	2	2	-2	3	-2	-1	1	5
27	My flexibility is valued	-1	1	0	0	-1	1	2	-2	4
28	Our team work is encouraged and supported	0	0	0	0	3	-3	4	-4	8
29	I receive high-quality meals	1	-1	1	-2	-1	-3	-1	1	4

#	Statement	V 1	V 2	V 3	V 4	V 5	V 6	V 7	V 8	Var
30	My loyalty is valued	-1	1	2	0	0	0	-1	1	3
31	I am treated like a family member	4	-4	-4	-4	3	-3	3	-3	8
32	I can continue my career in different places	-4	4	-3	-3	-4	3	1	-1	8
33	I have long-term career prospects	-1	1	-4	2	-1	3	3	-3	7
34	I get to work with high-quality products	3	-3	2	-2	-3	0	0	0	6
35	I can continuously develop myself profession-ally	-4	4	-3	0	-2	3	-1	1	8
36	I receive support for taking care of my children	3	-3	-1	-3	-2	-4	-4	4	8
37	I receive support to be able to have a comfort-able place to stay	-2	2	-2	-3	0	-4	-3	3	7
38	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a pri-ority in my work	-1	1	-2	-2	1	-2	-2	2	4
39	I get to participate in the business success	0	0	0	1	1	-1	0	0	2
40	I work in a sustainable organization	0	0	-2	-4	-3	1	-3	3	7
41	I enjoy creative freedom	2	-2	-1	-1	2	-2	0	0	4

Eight statements incurred the maximum variance, of which some only polarize between two viewpoints (inverted factors) while others show a more diversified range of opinions:

#8: *"I work in a professional environment"* was highly prioritized (rank >= +3) by viewpoints 1, 4, 6 and 7, very lowly prioritized (rank <= -3) by viewpoints 2 and 8.

#12: *"I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me"* was of high priority for viewpoint 7, lowest priority for viewpoint 8 and of moderate importance (-1 to +1) by all other viewpoints.

#19: *"I work in a company which consistently evolves"* was of very high priority for viewpoint 8, very low priority for viewpoints 3 and 7, with a near-neutral ranking by all others.

#28: *"Our team work is encouraged and supported"* ranks highly for viewpoints 5 and 7, lowly for viewpoints 6 and 8, and neutral (rank 0) for all others.

#31: *"I am treated like a family member"* ranks very highly for viewpoints 1, 5 and 7; very lowly for viewpoints 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8. It received no ranking between -2 and +2, showing that it is highly polarizing.

#32: *"I can continue my career in different places"* polarizes as well, though slightly less so, with a very high ranking by two viewpoints (2 and 6) and very low priority for viewpoints 1, 3, 4 and 5.

#35: *"I can continuously develop myself professionally"* was a high priority for viewpoints 2 and 6, and of low importance for viewpoints 1 and 3.

#36: *"I receive support for taking care of my children"* is of high priority for viewpoints 1 and 8, while the majority (2, 4, 6 and 7) assign it a very low priority.

Further six statements had a variance of seven ranks:

#4: *"My criticism is received gratefully"* was highly important for viewpoints 2 and 5, and of very low priority for viewpoint 1.

#7: *"My professional advancement is individually supported"* ranked +4 by viewpoints 4 and 6 and +3 by viewpoint 1, it is of relative unimportance for viewpoint 2.

#14: *"I receive appropriate feedback"* was important for communication-focussed viewpoint 5 and slightly lesser so for viewpoint 2, it is decidedly not a priority for viewpoint 1.

#33: *"I have long-term career prospects"* was important for employees holding viewpoints 6 or 7, though apparently for different reasons. Viewpoints 2 and 8 do not make it a priority.

#37: *"I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay,"* while ranking highly in viewpoint 8 and slightly above average (+2) in viewpoint 2 – both viewpoints represented by single individuals in the study – it is otherwise generally de-prioritized. As elaborated in section 5.3, this

inducement may take very high priority based on the workplace location and whether an individual is moving there from elsewhere.

#40: *"I work in a sustainable organization"* ranked highly in viewpoint 8, but is of very low priority for viewpoints 4, 5 and 7.

The study calculated the variance in rankings across eight viewpoints for 41 statements, with an average variance of 5.83 ranks (72.88% of the maximum possible). Twelve statements showed a very high variance of seven or eight ranks, indicating significant divergence in opinions. These statements covered aspects such as professional environment, role flexibility, company evolution, teamwork support, familial treatment, career mobility, professional development, and childcare support.

In tandem with the findings presented in section 5.3, this demonstrates that different opinions exist on how far the employer should be involved in themes of personal life, identity, and long-term development.

The findings highlight the substantial divergence in employee preferences regarding workplace inducements, suggesting that a universal approach to inducements will be insufficient for most hotels and that workplace conditions need to be tailored to the predominant psychological contract within a team, or even at the individual level to retain key employees.

CHAPTER 6:

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter links the findings to existing literature and develops viewpoints into operationalizable *archetypes*. The archetypes represent the main element of the research aim: understanding the diversity of the structure of psychological contracts. The chapter opens with introducing the archetypes of psychological contracts (6.2) to answer research question 1, *"What shared viewpoints exist among hotel employees in Northern Germany about the employer inducements expected in their psychological contract?"* in a form that is easily operationalizable for practitioners and non-academic audiences. Subsequently (6.3), the identified viewpoints are linked to the theories of psychological contract typology by Rousseau (2000) and Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003). The findings on viewpoints and their characteristics are then linked to existing theories and scholarly debates, especially on the theory of how psychological contract types relate to age and tenure as part of the contribution to knowledge (6.5.1). Research question 2, *"Are any inducements equally valued by employees across different viewpoints?"* and 3, *"Which inducements are valued differently across viewpoints?"* inform the contribution to practice by determining inducements to be prioritised and de-prioritised in streamlining retention strategies. The contribution to practice is described in section 6.5.2, including recommendations for operationalizing the archetypes in HRM and HRD practice. The chapter concludes by discussing limitations and future research opportunities.

6.2 Eight Archetypes of Hotel Employee

This section generates a standard biography of a typical holder of each of the eight viewpoints (*archetypes*). The presentation is inspired by Rose (2022), who used this format to report results on a study of musical taste profiles to a mostly non-academic audience. The exemplary biographies presented here, including their names and images, are entirely fictional and not based on real individuals. Genders of the avatars are alternated between cis-male and cis-female; this does not constitute a claim that a respective viewpoint is more prevalent in a specific gender. The names of the avatars were chosen to represent names that would be expected to be encountered in Northern Germany, while maintaining an ascending alphabetical order for aesthetic purposes. The biographies incorporate the insights gained from factor interpretation (section 5.2). The accompanying images were generated using *ChatGPT-4-turbo* (OpenAI, 2025) by providing the generated biography alongside the average demographics – anonymized and generalized – for each viewpoint. The prompt for image generation is reproduced in Appendix 7.4.1.

This set of archetypes is intended to complement the viewpoint descriptions by interpreting the Q Sorts, demographic information, and questionnaire answers of participants holistically. They serve as a more refined and comprehensive answer to research question 1, and as a guide in aiding practitioners identify psychological contracts among their workforce and provide suitable working environments for the employees they

wish to retain. Their intended audience are practitioners and non-academic readers, hence the presentation was designed to be clear and tangible.

6.2.1 Alex (V 1)



Figure 12: Avatar for "Alex" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)

Alex just turned 30 and has worked at his hotel for about two years now. After finishing his vocational training, he has explored other things but now found his calling as a front desk agent in a city hotel. It isn't a fancy hotel, but it provides solid, quality service. Being located in the city centre means that plenty of interesting people come along who make every day an adventure. It also means that he can cycle to work and has access to activities with friends and nightlife after his shifts. He loves to meet people, both at work and outside, and cherishes his friendships. But he dislikes chaos, which is why he appreciates that his boss has crafted a team of dedicated professionals. Together, they uphold a high-quality service throughout the hotel and pride themselves on high guest satisfaction. That way, the daily adventure is easily manageable. Alex appreciates that his boss listens for feedback and

trusts him with a variety of new tasks to develop his professional knowledge. He knows that the boss is grateful for the team's dedication and hard work, considering them his extended family. Alex sees that his colleagues with children can take care of their families at home despite the irregular shift schedules. He is happy to pick up the unpopular late shifts – he meets his girlfriend and friends afterwards to party anyway, and he is glad that his colleagues in turn volunteer for the morning shifts. Everyone works together, and the boss knows everybody well enough to be able to accommodate. Alex wants to stay here longer; he knows that if he decides to settle down with his girlfriend, his hotel family will be there all the way. Maybe he can someday become department head and continue making the hotel better. The international allure of the hospitality career has never interested him much; everything he needs is right here in his city.

6.2.2 Bianca (V 2)



Figure 13: Avatar for "Bianca" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)

Bianca is 21 now and just finished her vocational training as *Hotelfachfrau*, a hotel professional. This means she is well equipped to handle any operational and many administrative tasks in her hotel. At the moment, she works as a waitress in the hotel's à la carte restaurant, but she has big dreams. The world is calling, and she chose her profession partly because it allows her to work in a lot of cool places around the world. Sure, the pay is not great, but as her career advances, it will surely improve. Bianca aims for the top, and she wants to get there step by step. She is single anyway and has no commitments, so she can focus on building her career now with the structured support of her employer. What she has come to appreciate in her three years of training is the feedback her supervisors constantly provide, and the structured learning sessions to build skills. They also appreciate her critical remarks: Bianca keeps her eyes open for things that do not go as well as they could. She had stellar marks in her classes as well and finished as one of the best in the state. That means something, and it means something to her general manager who was happy to keep her on full

time after graduation. Bianca expects that she continues to be rewarded for her great performance, and that her boss will make good on her promise to develop Bianca's career, eventually recommending her for a promotion to another hotel in the group. She chose to work in this hotel in the city centre for the exposure – but it means that she has a longer commute than most of her colleagues. That and the fact that most of her friends do not work in hospitality means that she prefers when her supervisor creates a reliable schedule well in advance. That way, she can plan her personal life around work.

6.2.3 Clemens (V 3)



Figure 14: Avatar for "Clemens" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)

In over a decade in the hotel industry, Clemens has seen a lot. He is 38 now and after finishing his vocational training, he worked in different countries and for very interesting companies. He now wants to put his experience and knowledge to good use but also take it a bit slower: that is why he elected to work at a coastal resort in Northern Germany. One thing he learned in his travels around the world is that no hotel is the same, so he has asked his supervisor right

away to teach him everything. Of course, Clemens doesn't need to learn his profession from scratch, and he trusts that his boss knows that. While he is prepared to bring – among the many crazy stories from foreign shores – his proven good performance and reliability to his new job as customer service manager, he also expects to use his wealth of experience and knowledge to shape the job and his team according to his vision. He had other offers – better ones, some might say – but Clemens chose to take this job and intends to keep it as long as the boss values him for what he is and rewards the excellent results produced. In fact, during his job interview Clemens was asked about the frequent career moves, but he is done with those and wants to focus on this hotel for the long term. The resort is relatively remote on the coast, which is why Clemens appreciates the company car he received for his commute; he has also been assured that he could fulfil personal commitments by way of flexible working hours. His boss also knows that Clemens prefers to work with high quality products, seamlessly functional systems and good tools. He just loves to interact with all the different people, but he values his personal time, too. That is what always bothered him: working too much, on weekends, at crazy times. Being able to bring his many hobbies and interests in line with his work has always been a challenge but Clemens is increasingly adamant to make that happen.

6.2.4 Diana (V 4)



Figure 15: Avatar for "Diana" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)

Diana just turned 36, and while her hotel career has been rewarding, her priorities have now shifted towards her family. Though she is highly qualified, she does not want to continue moving between employers and workplaces, nor to take on new areas of work. But she wants to continue developing her professional profile: in this day and age, employers should make advancement possible for working mums. She does need to advance in her job, because the young family with the house under construction needs to keep an eye on its financial situation. That is why she made sure that her hotel provides her with long-term prospects. Working in housekeeping means that she has fairly regular hours, but it also means working on weekends. That is fine for Diana, but she expects the housekeeping manager to post schedules well in advance. After all, Diana needs to make sure her daughter is taken care of. Some employers offer childcare support – but Diana prefers to arrange that by herself. What she needs from her boss is clarity and reliability. Unfortunately, some hotels expect their employees, including Diana, to prioritise work over everything, without giving the proper rewards.

The owner of Diana's last hotel once went on a long cruise during the busiest time of the year, leaving her to manage the housekeeping department when colleagues called out sick. That almost made her hang up the apron for good, but now she works in a hotel owned by a professional, who makes sure everything runs smoothly. Luckily, this is not one of the hotels where everyone pretends to be a big family – most colleagues here have a family at home that is more than enough, and they come to work as professionals. That way, there is less drama and less reliance on maintaining personal favours. The housekeeping manager is talking about leaving for a big chain soon, prompting Diana to start readying herself for taking over the role. She would like to be able to have a bigger influence on how the organization develops, and as housekeeping manager she would have that.

6.2.5 Elias (V 5)



Figure 16: Avatar for "Elias" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)

Elias entered the hotel industry late in his career, in his 50s. But his experience as a plumber makes up for the lack of industry tenure and enriches his work as facility manager for a small family hotel. At least that is what the hotel's owner told him when he first started. Now Elias handles all repairs and maintenance at the hotel, which is less stressful than his previous job. Creatively solving problems related to everything concerning the building and grounds is more engaging, too. He appreciates the open communication with the hotel's owner: when something doesn't work properly, Elias can speak freely about it and is taken seriously. He values this appreciation for his work and experience. At the same time, the owner constantly provides valuable constructive feedback on Elias' work, helping him to learn and improve. The best feeling is fixing a guest's issue and receiving their gratitude. Even as a repairman, his mission is caring for guests. Good teamwork makes the job easier: Elias has trained the housekeepers to keep an eye out for maintenance issues and tell him immediately; the front desk communicates issues clearly and promptly. Colleagues are grateful for Elias

explaining how systems work and now, small issues can be fixed by them. Hence, they can provide more prompt assistance to the guests and reduce waiting times. To that end, the owner has followed Elias' suggestion and purchased software for team communication and logging of maintenance issues. Elias doesn't feel the need to climb the career ladder. He cherishes coming to work to familiar faces. The work isn't exhausting: the small size of the property, the fantastic teamwork and open communication make everything easy and enjoyable. The hotel is not the best in town, but it is the spirit that counts. Last month, Elias' car broke down. Without bus service, he was concerned about being unable to reach work. But the hotel owner arranged for a replacement and even loaned him some money for the car repairs. This is the kind of support everyone at the hotel can count on.

6.2.6 Franzi (V 6)



Figure 17: Avatar for "Franzi" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)

At 33, Franzi has finally been recommended for a coveted position as a management trainee for a large business hotel. She knew that working for this international chain would catalyse her career; now her hard work and ambition have been recognized. Upon graduating from high school, she went straight into a dual-track academic programme that gave her four years of working experience while simultaneously awarding her a bachelor's degree in hotel management. That positioned her for more complex positions than a vocational apprenticeship would have, but those didn't come at first. She had to prove herself as in entry-level positions in different departments. In thirteen years, Franzi has seen many hotels, even took some seasonal jobs in other countries, and learned a lot. She knows hospitality inside out, and now, in her early thirties, the trainee programme will put her at the starting line for an international career in hotel management. The chain takes great pride in its internal career development and lifelong learning strategy. It constantly looks for talents that are willing to grow with the business. People like Franzi. She has been sacrificing a lot – friends,

relationships, regular sleep – to prove her worth. Her last GM feared losing a reliable hard worker if she helped Franzi succeed, but that changed with the new manager. Now Franzi can always share her suggestions on improvements to workflows, elevating the guest experience, and the hotel's competitiveness. She has rediscovered her love for the job and is proud to be called upon to lead initiatives. In her first appraisal interview with the new GM, she made her career plans clear and communicated that she expected the hotel to make good on the chain's promises of career development. Part of the application process for the trainee programme was envisioning an initiative to improve guest satisfaction at her own hotel, which she has since implemented. While she has her eyes set on a management position overseas, Franzi makes sure to pay her GM back for the support shown.

6.2.7 Giulio (V 7)



Figure 18: Avatar for "Giulio" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)

After completing hotel trade school in his home country, Giulio worked in resorts there and eventually came to Germany for a higher-paying job as a conference attendant in a large conference hotel. The profession isn't his life's passion, but it promised safe employment. He plans to leave someday and work in a different industry. Still, he wants to do his work well. Since arriving in Northern Germany, Giulio has relied on his colleagues and supervisors to help him adjust both to the language and the cultural differences. Fortunately, he works in a very supportive team. The hotel was the only one he applied to that offered to pay for a language class, and the only one that provided an unlimited contract, giving him the long-term security he was looking for. Settling in wasn't easy: finding a flat was difficult and expensive, but when Giulio raised the issue, the hotel increased his hours and gave him a full-time contract. The managers foster a strong team spirit, something Giulio finds essential in what can feel like a cold and distant culture. At work, he feels part of a family and he has made many friends among his colleagues. He works hard, is never late, and is willing to cover shifts on

short notice. His supervisors appreciate that, but make sure not to take advantage of his dedication. Schedules are posted well in advance, so Giulio can manage his leisure plans and appointments more easily. His colleagues value his fresh perspective: he learned tricks in his home country that they weren't taught. Recently, the company started building a new property in Giulio's home country and a manager asked whether he might consider transferring there one day, in a supervisory role. This would allow him to bring together everything he's learned, remain in a comfortable environment, and take the next step in his career.

6.2.8 Hannah (V 8)



Figure 19: Avatar for "Hannah" (Image generated by AI based on the author's description)

When Hannah had her baby, she couldn't return to her old hotel. Management there refused to make any concessions for childcare and expected her to be available at all hours. She knew that frequent overtime was common there. But Hannah loves her profession; she enjoys caring for guests and meeting new people. She understands that hospitality often involves working at unfavourable hours, putting in long shifts, and jumping in on short notice. All that is fine – she's

happy to do it. But her child takes priority, and work schedules need to fit around childcare. Now, Hannah works for a hotel owned by a single mother who understands her needs. She was hired as a reservations agent, and because the hotel has embraced modern technology and implemented innovative procedures, part of her job can be done remotely. Her working hours are stable, and her schedule is rarely changed. Setting up a home office was necessary, something that wasn't possible in her old apartment. The hotel owner helped her find a larger place and furnish the office. This modern and supportive approach has impressed Hannah deeply. Her boss takes sustainability and ongoing development very seriously, which reassures Hannah that the business will remain stable for years to come. That gives her peace of mind. Although working in reservations doesn't offer as much guest contact as her earlier restaurant service job, Hannah enjoys handling calls and supporting the front desk. She has also taken on responsibility for guest communications and is working on a plan to modernize that part of operations.

6.3 Viewpoints and Psychological Contracts

6.3.1 Psychological Contract Types

In this section, the eight identified viewpoints are associated with the four types of psychological contract and their respective subdivisions as perceived by Rousseau (2000), summarized in Table 14. Rousseau (2000) conceptualized three distinct types of psychological contract as well as the transitional stage. According to Rousseau (1990), psychological contracts evolve from transactional to relational with tenure and duration of the relationship with their superiors. This suggests that given the diversity of the P Set, transactional, balanced, and relational contracts were expected to be present.

Viewpoint 1 is characterized by expectations of professionalism, loyalty and work-life balance. This suggests a relational psychological contract is in place for individuals sharing this viewpoint. Within the relational contract type, Rousseau (2000) distinguishes between sub-categories of *stability* and *loyalty*. While loyalty is an aspect of these individuals' psychological contracts, according to Rousseau (2000), the so named contract includes an obligation of the employee to *"manifest … commitment to the organization's needs and interests. Be a good organizational citizen."* The definition further includes an obligation by the employer to care for the well-being of the employee and their families. The high priority of

statements #25, #31, and #36 suggests that caring for well-being beyond the pay of a competitive wage is desired by the employees while they are willing to contribute and grow and care for professionalism in the workplace. The *stability* subcategory constitutes a psychological contract that is more pragmatic in nature and clearly differentiates work and life outside of it. Thus, the data suggests that viewpoint 1 is associated with the **Loyalty** focus of the relational psychological contract.

Viewpoint 2 places greatest priority on being given opportunities for continuing their career in different places and continuous development. They value being rewarded for performance and having clearly communicated shift schedules. These aspects suggest that the psychological contract at play is far less relational. Indeed, a key aspect of this viewpoint is their focus on independence. These employees do not expect much in terms of professionalism and quality from their current workplace, do not desire to be given extensive care for their internal development, and clearly deprioritize familial relationships. This reciprocal contribution to development and the long-term employability focus suggest that this viewpoint is located within the balanced psychological contract type. In Rousseau's (2000) framework, these aspects can be found in the **External Employability** focus, where career development is oriented towards external opportunities and marketable skills are developed for the pursuit of external opportunities. Ideally, employee and employer work together on these

goals, without the primary interest in retaining the employee for the organization or location that currently employs them.

Viewpoint 3 represents employees that are confident in their value and wish their professional expertise respected. At the same time, they expect to be well-introduced and developed in their role and receive high-quality tools and products. However, passion and empathy are not of primary concern in this viewpoint. These employees have significant experience in the industry but are uncertain if they wish to continue, making it contingent on the improvement of working conditions. This uncertainty manifests itself in the desire for better work-life balance support, active involvement in future development of the organization, and concrete material support. These mixed elements suggest that the psychological contract of these individuals is in the transitional stage. A strong relational involvement is not noticeable. Especially the aspect of uncertainty regarding future commitment to the hospitality career suggests that this viewpoint falls into the **Mistrust** focus. While Rousseau's (2000) definition of this sub-category reads entirely negatively, viewpoint 3 appears characterized by the desire for improvement of the context and strengthening of the employment relationship, suggesting that a psychological contract defined by mistrust is salvageable.

Viewpoint 4 is distinguished by an apparent external anchor for identification and material needs serving as a push factor for career advancement desire. This suggests that the viewpoint is most closely associated

either with the *loyalty* focus of the relational psychological contract, or the *internal advancement* focus of the balanced psychological contract. Placement in the former category is supported by its definition through organizational citizenship and employer support for the family of the employee. However, inducement #36 is ranked low in priority for these individuals, as is #31. Their interest in the organization and its goals suggests that relational loyalty is not the primary motivation for employees holding this viewpoint. The definition for the **Internal Advancement** focus of the balanced psychological contract, meanwhile, includes employee obligation for the development of skills valued by their current employer, which these employees expect their employer to support. In return, the employer obligations include the creation of long-term prospects within the firm, which is of moderately high priority for the individuals sharing viewpoint 4.

Viewpoint 5 values empathy and communication above all. Employees prioritize belonging, collaboration, and open communication in their psychological contracts. Without significant career ambitions and mobility desires. While they do not expect much in terms of quality, they value being able to contribute to the development of the organization. The absence of a clear indication of desire for continuous development suggests that a balanced psychological contract is not present in this case, while the strong emphasis on relationships and communication rule out a transactional contract. Within the relational contract, the viewpoint best

fits the definition of the **Loyalty** focus, as organizational citizenship and commitment to the organization or team are noticeable. Employer obligations of caring for well-being can be found represented in statements #12, #17 and #26.

Viewpoint 6 represents very career-driven individuals. This viewpoint is defined by expecting their employers to provide career opportunities of great variety, long term outlook, and mobility. Their firm focus on their career and de-prioritization of belonging suggest that their psychological contract is not of relational nature. The negative aspects of a transitional contract – uncertainty, expectation of declining returns, lack of trust – are not indicated, either. A transactional contract, by definition (Rousseau, 2000), is either of very narrow scope or short duration. In contrast, individuals associated with viewpoint 6 appear to expect a broad scope of tasks and long-term employment. Within the balanced psychological contract, meanwhile, the desire for mobility suggests and external career focus while the expectation to contribute actively to the development of the current employer's business indicate that internal development is accepted as well, at least until further internal growth becomes impossible. The **Dynamic Performance** focus of the balanced psychological contract is defined through these growing and varied internal responsibilities the employee is entrusted with, while the employer is obligated to provide continuous learning and growth.

Viewpoint 7 looks for employers that provide comfortable working conditions in a good team. Comfort derives from the acceptance of individuality and predictability, primarily through long-term job security and scheduling. Advancement and mobility are not ruled out, but of lower priority. Beyond this, the data does not suggest an increased weight of mutual involvement beyond the immediate job scope. A classification as transactional psychological contract is however not supported as interpersonal aspects, long-term orientation and in-principle availability for a broader scope of tasks appear high in the composite Q Sort. A balanced psychological contract by the definition put forward by Rousseau (2000) would include consistent and structured growth of marketable skills and responsibilities. Indeed, the rankings of items #28 and #31, along with the associated themes, strongly suggests a relational contract, and within it the relatively narrow scope of involvement and commitment towards the **Stability** focus.

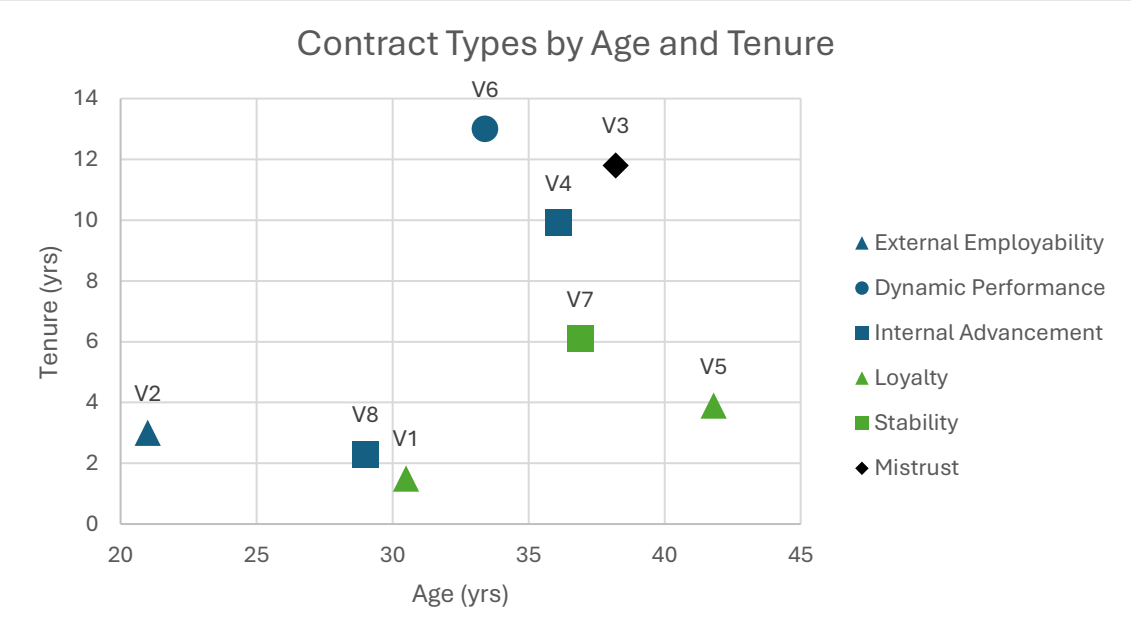
Viewpoint 8 represents individuals who are likely to have extremely individual needs and heavy reliance on *I-Deals* (Rousseau, 2005). Their focus on stability and empathy suggest a placement on the relational side of the scale. Strong interest in their organization, passion for their job, and desire to contribute, as well as support for their individual development within the organization and commitment to high performance indicate that task-orientation, work for the organization, and professional growth are key elements. Comfort in the role, teamwork, and embedding

in a close team are ranked on the lower end of the scale. The fictional avatar Hannah exemplifies a hypothetical scenario where an ambitious employee had to combine their career growth with external responsibilities, finding a highly individualized solution. The passion, high interest in the organization and moderate desire for continuous development suggest that this viewpoint is most closely associated with the **Internal Advancement** focus of the balanced psychological contract.

Table 14: Mapping the viewpoints to psychological contract types

Viewpoint	Contract Type	Subtype	Age (yrs)	Tenure (yrs)
V1	Relational	Loyalty	30.5	1.5
V2	Balanced	External Employability	21.0	3.0
V3	Transitional	Mistrust	38.2	11.8
V4	Balanced	Internal Advancement	36.1	9.9
V5	Relational	Loyalty	41.8	3.9
V6	Balanced	Dynamic Performance	33.4	13.0
V7	Relational	Stability	36.9	6.1
V8	Balanced	Internal Advancement	29.0	2.3

Figure 20: Psychological Contract Types by Age and Tenure (own work)



Neither of the identified viewpoints could be associated with a transactional contract, while all subtypes of balanced and relational contracts were identified as well as a group in the transitional state. Moreover, Figure 20 illustrates that, contrary to the theory by Rousseau (1990), longer tenure was not associated with a more relational contract. On the contrary, the viewpoints associated with relational contracts are characterized by a combination of *shorter* tenure but higher age. Loyalty-oriented viewpoints 2 and 5 had the shortest industry tenures compared to their age, while the stability/security-oriented viewpoint 7 was characterized by comparatively longer tenure. The viewpoints with the longest industry tenure – 3, 4 and 6 – were meanwhile associated with a balanced or transitional psychological contract. Viewpoints 2 and 8, the youngest on average, were associated with internal or external development-oriented psychological contracts.

Notably absent in the study responses are transactional psychological contracts. These are defined by Rousseau (2000) as either of very short term or narrow scope. Most participants in the Q study were seasoned professionals, many with a professional certification and long tenure in the industry or strong career ambitions. The industry does however employ large numbers of casual helpers on limited, flexible contracts (*"Mini-job"*), who are likely to hold transactional contracts focussed on economic transaction. It appears that these jobs are underrepresented in the present study. However, the absence of employees with psychological

contracts may be a residual effect of the workforce drain experienced during Covid-19 (see 2.2.9), as employees who have left the industry may have been the ones with transactional contracts, choosing to migrate when the sudden change in circumstances caused their psychological contracts to be breached.

6.3.2 Psychological Contract Clusters

A different approach to classifying psychological contracts is the theory of clusters put forward by Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003). Being a feature-oriented framework, the applicability to the content-oriented results of the present study is limited. However, an investigation into correlations is warranted.

Based on the assumptions made by Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003), it was concluded that hotel employees would likely fall into the *instrumental, unattached* or *weak* clusters; some employees, employed for a long time, in the *loyal* one. Table 15 and the analysis in this section however suggest that indeed all clusters appear to be present among hotel employees in Northern Germany.

Viewpoint 1 is distinguished by expectations of loyalty, professionalism and work-life balance. Loyalty extends primarily to relational inducements and the fact that they do not expect to be fashioned with opportunities for external career development. Meanwhile, these employees also expect to be able to contribute to the business' development, indicating a level of involvement. Their expectation of high-quality products and

professionalism suggests a moderate to high level of expectations from the employer. Expecting little reward for performance and relatively little validation of contributions like loyalty or flexibility indicates that the obligation towards the employer is considered moderate to low, and that other aspects of life take priority over work commitments. This suggests that viewpoint 1 is most closely aligned with **cluster 3: the loyal psychological contract**. In the study by Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003), this cluster was associated with the lowest-paid, blue-collar individuals in operational jobs. Viewpoint 1 is associated with relatively young employees with short tenure in the industry, presumably entry-level jobs. Of the two individuals associated with this viewpoint, one had a vocational education, the other had none. This suggests that the result is in line with those of Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003). It does however reject the assumption made that a loyal psychological contract would only develop in hotel employees after considerable tenure – indeed, viewpoint 1 represents the 'freshest' employees rather than the most seasoned ones.

Viewpoint 2 values their independence and prioritizes career growth, with a perspective on external career growth. They are willing to provide feedback and expect to be rewarded for good work. Loyalty and flexibility are considered contributions that the employer ought to value and reward accordingly. Their involvement with the business development and especially the establishment of strong interpersonal relationships are de-

prioritized. For them, the job is a stepping stone and not a life's calling. This most closely aligns with **cluster 5: the unattached psychological contract**. In this cluster, long-term involvement was not expected but loyalty contributed in exchange was low as well.

In the study, cluster 5 represented the highest-educated participants, some in supervisory positions. Viewpoint 2 generated in this study also suggests that its holders are young and – for their age – educated and experienced.

Viewpoint 3 represents older, experienced and highly educated hotel employees. For them, feeling valued – which can manifest in different ways both tangible and intangible – is most important, alongside work-life balance. They expect to work in a professional environment focused on quality, which includes expecting to be provided with all necessary skills to fill their role. In return, they are willing to contribute loyalty to their current position (suggested by de-prioritizing career-related inducements), reliability and constructive feedback.

These constitute high expectations from their employer in both interpersonal and tangible, workplace-related matters. In return, the expectations suggest that employees like Clemens are prepared to contribute high personal investment. This aligns most closely with **cluster 1: the instrumental psychological contract** by Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003). In their study, this cluster was associated with low education and operational jobs. This is not the case for viewpoint 3, which

instead represents more highly educated employees. While hierarchical level, position and salary were not part of the pre-sorting questionnaire, it can be expected that, given the education and experience level of these employees, they hold more senior positions.

Viewpoint 4 also represents more experienced employees with mostly vocational certifications. Their focus however was on transactional inducements, securing quality of life and providing financial stability; where necessary, by way of career progression. For them, receiving reward for good performance is the most important inducement an employer can provide, alongside individual support for professional development. Relational inducements, especially a family atmosphere were completely rejected. These individuals appear to be mostly interested in job security and advancement, requiring little of the employer otherwise. They are also moderately invested in the company. In the cluster model (Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande, 2003a), this best aligns with **cluster 2: the weak psychological contract**. A weak contract does not necessarily imply poor performance or low loyalty. Rather, these employees are relatively content, expecting their employers to meet basic needs and fostering a long-term – albeit transactional – relationship.

Viewpoint 5 represents mature employees who can be expected to have entered the industry through lateral move from another industry. Empathy and communication are the defining themes of these individuals' psychological contracts. Being able to both provide and receive feedback are

their most important employer inducements. They are especially invested in taking care of their guests and expect to be able to prioritize this in their work. Belonging and teamwork are important to them, as is feeling valued and recognized, which to a lesser degree also means being rewarded for good work and their contributions to the business. Having individual needs fulfilled is of lesser importance. This indicates that holders of viewpoint 5 feel obligated to contribute their energy, time and expertise to the greater good, which is the team. In return, they have high expectations of being valued as a member of said team and being communicated with in a suitable manner and openly. While these inducements are almost purely relational in nature, they appear nonetheless very strongly expected. This equilibrium of high expectations and high obligations correlates with **cluster 4: the strong psychological contract**. Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003) found this cluster to be associated with participants aged 41.5 years, which almost exactly coincides with the average age of viewpoint 5 (41.8 years). In the present study, they were more commonly employed in privately owned leisure hotels, not in chains.

Viewpoint 6 represents the most driven career-oriented individuals. These individuals have committed themselves to learning skills and earning experience that they expect their employer to honour and develop further. Although relatively young, these employees are already very experienced and expect to capitalise on this. However, their demands are

not one-sided as they are willing to contribute to their business, taking ownership and an active interest. Professionalism and quality are important to them, which expressly includes feedback channels – particularly when it comes to *them* providing feedback to the organization. In return, they are willing to forego work-life balance and individuality. They do not feel a strong relational connection to their employer or colleagues and do not expect to be treated accordingly.

This means that these employees are willing to contribute their full energy to their work, but in return they expect to be able to grow their career with focus and speedily. This type of thought is associated with **cluster 6: the investing psychological contract**, which Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003) associated with senior management positions, high income, and high education. In this study, it represents at least individuals who are on a clear path towards senior management positions.

Viewpoint 7 represents employees of more senior age (36.9 years) from a wide variety of demographic indicators – no one pattern in relationship status, hotel type, education, or career intention stands out, although a larger than average share report intending to leave hospitality someday. What unites them is the need for stability in a comfortable relational environment. Filling the role in a suitable manner and having an employer who actively supports teamwork are the most important inducements. In the same manner, they value being respected for their individuality and being managed in a leadership style suitable to them as well as feeling

part of a family. Plannable working times are ranked higher by this factor than by any other. Inducements they do not prioritize include the chance for active contribution to their organization or passionately providing service to guests, and performance-based rewards. In terms of the cluster model, this points towards expectations of less active leadership involvement, lower expectations of active inducements by employers. Contributions on the side of the employee meanwhile appear to be low (low feeling of obligation), as exemplified by the de-prioritization of service excellence and passion; low prioritization of performance rewards and active contribution suggests that contributing (exceptionally) high performance is not intended by these employees. With low expectations and low feeling of obligation, but an expectation of long-term involvement, this viewpoint most closely aligns with **cluster 2: the weak psychological contract**. Like the viewpoint in this study, Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003) found this cluster to be prevalent across a variety of backgrounds.

Viewpoint 8 was synthesized without direct questionnaire data to draw on. The core themes of their psychological contract are stability and empathy. In opposition to viewpoint 7, this viewpoint places utmost importance on employers providing direct support for childcare, while the need for receiving plannable working times is of low priority. Some questionnaire answers suggest that both inducements are mutually exclusive for affected employees, who either prefer to arrange childcare themselves and require reliable scheduling and work-life balance support; or are

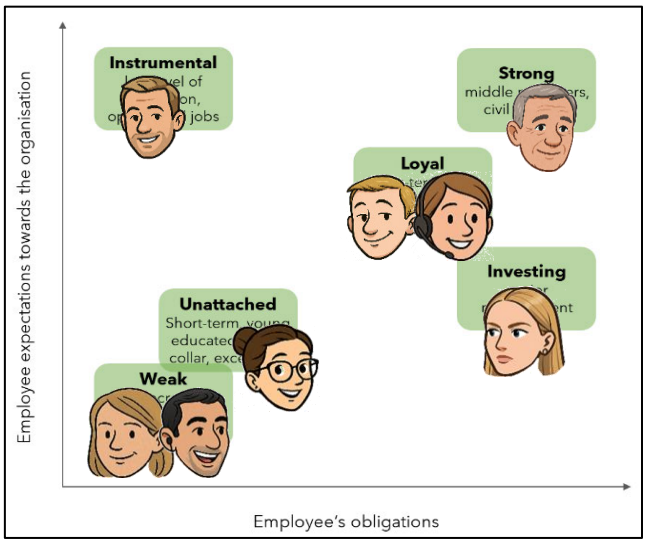
willing to work at shorter notice contingent on employers ensuring child-care taken care of. On a longer timescale, this includes a person's life plan that they expect their employer to pay attention to and accommodate. They also highly value being provided staff accommodation or being supported in finding a suitable home. What characterizes viewpoint 8 is their passion for guest service. They do not expect to be trained fully for their role (#24) or supported individually but wish to continuously develop themselves and take an active interest in the company's development. Wherever learning is involved, they expect to be trained in a suitable format. They least expect to be accommodated for their individuality or included in a tightly knit team. The emerging picture suggests that expectations of employers may be high – not necessarily concerning the number or frequency of inducements, but their severity and complexity. The fictional exemplary biography of Hannah illustrates this challenge. In return, the data suggests that these individuals feel a strong obligation to an employer who fulfils their needs and expectations. This most closely resembles **cluster 3: the loyal psychological contract**, albeit without the long-term orientation that Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003) ascribe to the cluster. Against the association of this viewpoint with the *strong* psychological contract speaks that the latter is associated strongly with equal treatment of all employees. Viewpoint 8 however indicates that very individualized treatment may be necessary and expected.

Table 15 and Figure 21 summarize the association of the viewpoints with psychological contract clusters.

Table 15: Mapping the viewpoints to psychological contract clusters

Viewpoint	Contract Cluster
V1	Loyal
V2	Unattached
V3	Instrumental
V4	Weak
V5	Strong
V6	Investing
V7	Weak
V8	Loyal

Figure 21: Archetypes superimposed on corresponding PC clusters (adapted from Lau 2022)



This section expands the results of the context-oriented study by applying them to the feature-oriented cluster model by Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003). The eight viewpoints could be closely associated with the six clusters, suggesting that all clusters are present among hotel employees in Northern Germany. Moreover, the link to the insights generated by Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003) allows for the

generation of concrete recommendations for practitioners in engaging in meaningful and rewarding working relationships with each of the eight archetypes.

6.3.3 What the models reveal

The frameworks of psychological contract types and clusters represent different perspectives on the psychological contracts of hotel employees. While Rousseau's (2000) expanded psychological contract continuum illuminates the level of relational versus transactional elements within the respective archetypes' contracts, the cluster model by Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003) illuminates the level of obligation the employee feels towards their organization versus the intensity of the expectations they hold. Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003) directly challenged the subtextual notion that both are naturally in balance. The archetypes identified within this study are found across most of Rousseau's psychological contract continuum, demonstrating that the exchange relationship needs to be designed to satisfy both relational and transactional expectations. Meanwhile, mapping the archetypes onto the cluster model demonstrates that all levels of contribution and expectation intensity are to be expected from the hospitality workforce, and that to harness the respective strengths of each of the archetypes, organizations need to anticipate these differences in intensity. Table 16 summarizes both theories and demonstrates that they must not be used interchangeably to design employment exchange relationships as viewpoints may share a cluster or

contract type but differ in the other, respectively. For instance, viewpoints 1 and 5 (Alex and Elias) both hold a relational contract with a loyalty focus, but while viewpoint 1 falls into the loyal cluster, viewpoint 5 fits into the strong one, exhibiting higher levels of perceived obligation.

Table 16: Viewpoints with PC Type and Cluster

View-point	Contract Type	Subtype	Contract Cluster
V1	Relational	Loyalty	Loyal
V2	Balanced	External Employa-bility	Unattached
V3	Transitional	Mistrust	Instrumental
V4	Balanced	Internal Advance-ment	Weak
V5	Relational	Loyalty	Strong
V6	Balanced	Dynamic Perfor-mance	Investing
V7	Relational	Stability	Weak
V8	Balanced	Internal Advance-ment	Loyal

Nonetheless, patterns are discernible in so far as employees with stronger intrinsic motivation and independence (viewpoints 2 and 6) expect comparatively little from their employers, while relational contracts exhibit a balance between employee obligations and expectations from their organizations. How intense these are depends on the employee's individual motivation: viewpoint 5 cherishes interpersonal relationships and emotional attachment, and perceives high obligations; while viewpoint 7 seeks stability at a lower level of obligation. Viewpoint 6, highly intrinsically motivated and career-driven, exhibits a higher obligation to make

contributions than they expect inducements in return, while viewpoint 3 is characterized by a mistrustful transitional stance where expectations are far higher than the perceived obligations.

Mapping the viewpoints and archetypes on both frameworks supports the creation of meaningful and mutually beneficial exchange relationships. They are however unable to predict the needs and priorities of individual employees. In applying the two theories of psychological contract type and cluster to the archetypes identified in the study, it is further demonstrated that psychological contracts in the hotel industry are highly diverse and individual, and that their content and creation must be carefully considered when designing working conditions. Taken together, the two frameworks reveal complementary but non-overlapping aspects of the employment relationship: Rousseau's typology clarifies the form and orientation of the exchange, while the cluster model captures the intensity and direction of obligations. Several archetypes blend elements across categories, indicating hybrid or evolving contracts that neither model fully anticipates. This is particularly visible in viewpoints that combine strong guest-orientation or value-based commitments with pragmatic expectations of development or stability. These findings suggest that psychological contracts in hospitality are shaped not only by exchange logic but also by identity, passion, and personal circumstances, reinforcing the need for a more flexible and context-sensitive understanding of psychological contracts in service work.

6.4 Fulfilment of Research Aim

The research aim was *to generate an understanding of the structure of the psychological contracts of hotel employees in Northern Germany, including the different viewpoints present and factors correlating with individuals' alignment to these viewpoints*. The study achieved this through the research design of Q Methodology. By sourcing the Q Set directly from a relevant concourse (see 3.3.4) and subsequently extracting eight different viewpoints existent in the population of hotel employees in Northern Germany (see 5.2), a holistic picture of the psychological contracts thereof was developed. In doing so, the findings provide an understanding for the elements, the structure and the different viewpoints on the psychological contract of Northern German hotel employees which both researchers and practitioners can build on to improve employee retention.

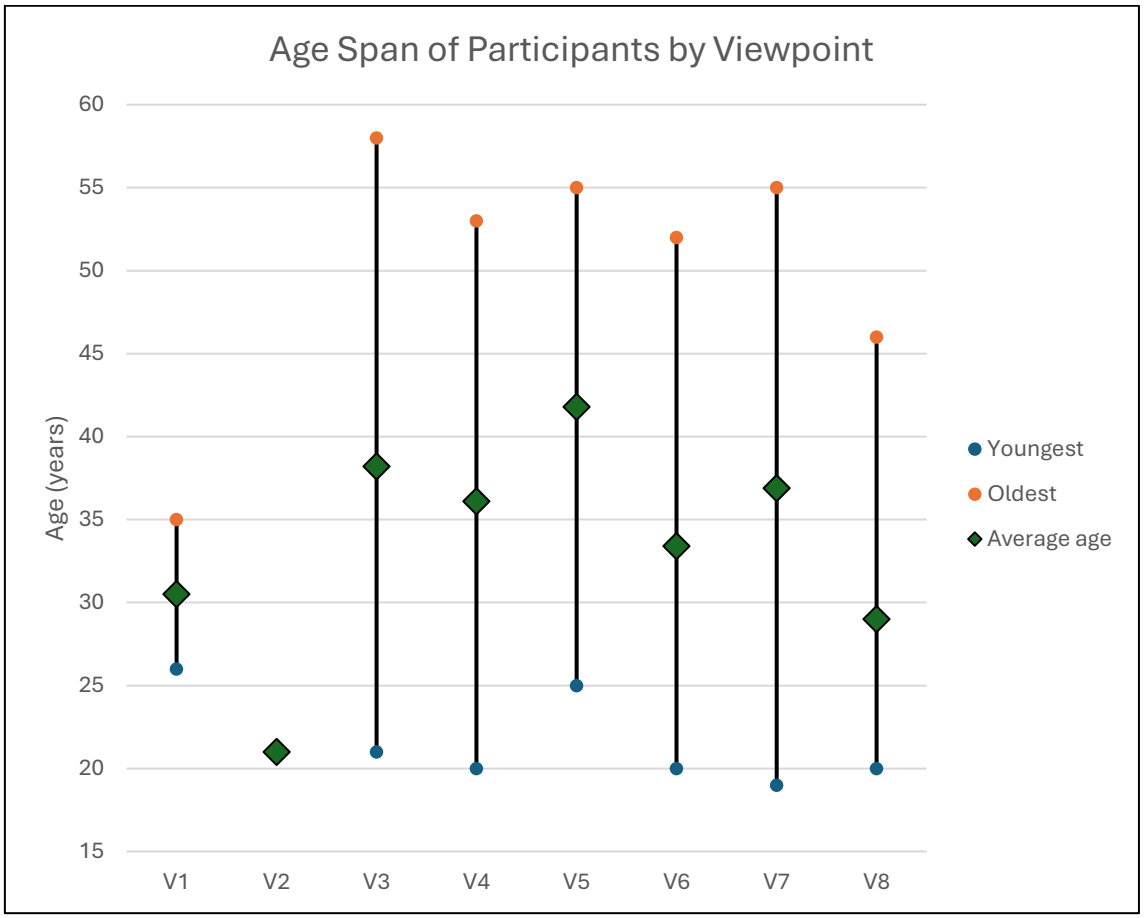
6.5 Contribution

6.5.1 Contribution to Knowledge

In response to both Kraak *et al.* (2024), who advocated for psychological contract research to be embedded in and informed by context, as well as Lopez and Fuiks (2021), who specifically called for an exploration of the psychological contract in the current temporal context (post-Covid), this study systematically explored the psychological contracts of hotel employees in Northern Germany. As first noted by Daser (2009), psychological contracts are under-researched in Germany although they can serve as a valuable tool for understanding and managing the interplay between working conditions or context, job satisfaction, well-being and turnover (see 2.11). As psychological contracts are in part shaped by cultural influences (Kutaula, Gillani and Budhwar, 2020), this exploratory study yielded valuable knowledge about the content, structure, and diversity of psychological contracts in the specified context, thus opening the door for further research and effective management practices. Although context-specific, the archetypes generated and conceptual patters offer analytically generalisable insights that may be transferable to hotel employees in other regions of Germany, Europe or labour markets in WEIRD countries in general. The archetypes may also exist in other cultural and economic contexts. Their existence can be tested directly by practitioners, or in a larger context by researchers in the respective region.

The results are in line with previous findings that employees of different age groups hold different varieties of the psychological contract (see 2.6). However, as illustrated by Figure 22, the ages of participants associated with individual viewpoints spread and overlap considerably. This challenges the existing literature as it demonstrates that age should not be considered to predict which type of psychological contract an individual holds.

Figure 22: Ages of participants associated with viewpoints (own work)



This research finds that the viewpoints are distributed across all subsections of Balanced and Relational contract types on Rousseau's (2000) continuum, and that they can be associated with all clusters described by Janssens, Sels and Van Den Brande (2003). However, this research contradicts their findings on which kinds of employees were more commonly found to belong to respective clusters. It demonstrates that psychological contracts of hotel employees in Northern Germany are heterogenous and that generalizable predictions of which type of contract an employee holds, or what structure an employee's contract may have, cannot be made. This also extends to attempts to create inducements based on generational theory, as prioritization of inducements appears to not be primarily influenced by age or cohort.

Questionnaire answers and Q Sorts indicate that employee's psychological contracts are primarily anchored in needs fulfilment. This is evident especially in Viewpoint 4: Career and Material Quality of Life (exemplified by Diana – see 6.2.4), where material needs feature prominently. Lambert (2011) posited that needs fulfillment best explained how psychological contract fulfillment is assessed, and that inducements which were *"proximal to need satisfaction"* mattered more than distal ones. This means that an assessment of employees' psychological contracts in practice should seek to uncover which needs exist, and that inducements should be designed to fulfill these as closely as possible. The present study

contributes knowledge on the relative prioritization of inducements, from which needs of the different viewpoints can be inferred.

None of the viewpoints identified were associated with a transactional contract. Even though some study participants had very short industry tenures, they held balanced or relational psychological contracts. This directly informs inducement planning and retention strategy, as it shows that transactional inducements do not define the psychological contracts. Choi, Fang and Khatter (2022) suggested that in hotels, pay was a satisfier rather than a hygiene factor. The findings from this study appear to support this argument, as the priorities and basic needs of most employees were of different nature. Meanwhile, many stated that they felt pay needed to improve, but low pay had apparently not been a reason for either of them to leave the industry. This suggests that the industry needs to develop other means of retention besides pay increases.

Besides the variety of ages associated with almost all viewpoints, their distribution on the transactional-relational continuum (Rousseau, 2000) described in section 6.3.1 furthermore suggests that hotel employees in the region do not develop more relational contracts over time. Instead, longer industry tenure was associated with balanced psychological contracts. This might be rooted in the high turnover rates in the hotel industry, which cause relatively frequent changes in exchange partners (superiors or even workplaces), further indicating that general assumptions about the nature and dynamics of psychological contracts gathered from

previous studies may not be applicable to hotel employees in Northern Germany.

The results demonstrate that exploring the psychological contract in German contexts can yield important context-specific knowledge, from which further inquiries can be developed and on which practitioners and academics can build for a better understanding of the employment relationship in German companies and contexts. Josan *et al.* (2024) stated that problems associated with lack of recognition and working conditions, which lead to turnover, could be addressed through specific strategies like improvement to benefit packages. Their improvement is contingent on an understanding of the needs that are to be addressed, for which the exploration of the psychological contract conducted in this study proves to be a useful tool. Moreover, the psychological contract has been established as a useful lens through which to view different challenges faced by human resource management (see 2.11). Its further establishment in researching German contexts is warranted.

Methodologically, this project adopted a highly context-specific process for Q Set creation (Rebehn, Nichol and Bell, 2024) which is replicable in other contexts for exploratory studies. The creation of archetypes for the different viewpoints corresponds with the strategy of grouping similar psychological contracts into *"types"* (Müller and Kals, 2004) in a format that is accessible to non-academic audiences and allows dissemination of the research results outside of academic publications.

This study makes analytically generalisable contributions to theory by refining existing understanding of psychological contract diversity and challenging assumptions about the correlation between psychological contract types and demographic markers, specifically age and generation. The findings extend psychological contract theory by demonstrating that predictors like age or industry tenure may impact psychological contract type differently than expected. The archetype framework developed for psychological contract classification can therefore be applied to similar industry or cultural contexts.

6.5.2 Contribution to Practice

This subsection summarizes how the results of the study help hotel owners, managers, and human resource departments in developing strategies for improved employee retention through understanding and responding to employees' psychological contracts. Subsequently, it lists concrete actions that can be taken in short and medium-term timeframes.

Although developed from the Northern German context, the archetypes and associated inducement strategies offer a transferable framework that practitioners in similar contexts can apply to improve psychological contract fulfilment and retention. While the results of this study do not predict prevalence or existence of all these archetypes in other contexts, they offer conceptually transferrable guidance for practitioners in labour markets comparable to Northern Germany and hospitality.

This study has uncovered eight distinct viewpoints and generated eight corresponding, tangible archetypes. For each archetype, their ideal working conditions and motivators have been described, based on the findings of the study and their subsequent interpretation. This allows hotel and human resource managers to gain a differentiated understanding of the motivations, aspirations and contributions of employees. Most crucially, the findings established that viewpoints of the psychological contract differ greatly among hotel employees in Northern Germany, and that differentiated management and retention strategies are advised. The current section outlines how the findings of the study can be used to develop novel approaches to assessing and understanding the psychological contracts of hotel employees.

The study furthermore establishes that certain employees are more likely to have career ambitions and be accordingly mobile, while others seek stability and long-term engagement with one employer. This means that while *retention* is the primary objective, employers are well advised to facilitate certain employees' career progress and anticipate their eventual departure from the team, seeking mutual benefit for both parties during the employee's tenure. Such a departure can be planned, ideally together with the employee, well in advance to ensure a smooth transition once replacement is sought and hired. The findings thus support the suggestion by Michael and Fotiadis (2022) to boost retention by developing robust career strategies.

The archetypes also feature very different priorities regarding their job design and workplace conditions, for example in the level of professionalism they expect from their employer or the quality of products and tools they work with. This suggests that holders of certain viewpoints may be less satisfied in certain types of hotels and roles where others thrive. Thus, the archetypes should be taken into consideration when assessing person-job fit and can serve as a scaffold for defining the target audience for employer branding. In job design, the best-suited archetype for a particular role can be defined, after which the benefit package for this role can be tailored in accordance with the needs and priorities of the individuals desired. The method of hiring, language used, and media utilized to attract the desired candidates can be defined in accordance with the archetype as well. In this sense, the archetypes function as a practical diagnostic tool that enables organisations to align job design, recruitment practices, and retention strategies with the needs of their workforce.

Archetype identification should furthermore be part of career and development planning – which can be done both by individuals themselves and by the employer in cooperation with the employee. By being aware of one's archetype, or possible changes in priorities moving the individual towards a different viewpoint, career ambitions and strategies can be discussed, agreed upon, and implemented to mutual benefit.

By relating individual employees to one of the archetypes, leaders are empowered to adjust their management styles, motivational practices,

and workplace design to efficiently and effectively support and motivate their team members. By maximizing psychological contract fulfilment, a powerful antecedent to job satisfaction and staff retention is established.

The questionnaire data showed that most participants were highly motivated for their profession and derived joy from the variety, the personal interaction and the challenges it provides. At the same time, they also have clear grievances – primarily regarding fair remuneration – and many vocalized explicitly what it would take for them to be happier in their jobs. Practitioners can draw from the survey data, provided in Appendix 7.3, but should also be encouraged to ask their team members directly for constructive feedback. The data suggests, however, that pay is not a hygiene factor in motivating hotel employees, meaning that pay increases alone are insufficient to improve satisfaction and retention. Rather, catering to the social, psychological and personal needs expressed through the Q Sorts is the foremost priority to ensure retention. Pay serves as an important satisfier, motivating an employee to perform their best and retain a positive attitude.

The findings from this study are of interest to all leadership personnel in the hotel industry, particularly human resource departments. The findings can inform career support as well as training efforts and organizational culture, particularly communication and feedback culture. Retaining and attracting suitable employees for the roles where they can thrive is further made possible by refining employer branding and advertising

in accordance with target groups, which can be derived from the archetypes. In addition, communication with employees can be more efficient as the model of the psychological contract and the knowledge of divergent viewpoints enables more explicit communication of needs, expected inducements, career plans, and contributions.

General managers, hotel owners and strategists in larger firms can build on the findings for all areas of strategy as job design, workflows, and tools directly influence the employees' job satisfaction. Product design for future developments or renovations can be directly informed by the needs of the employees present in the organization or preferred future employees.

The findings furthermore indicate that employees who are generally "on the way out" in their externally-oriented careers can still provide value to the organization during their stay and are likely to stay longer and contribute more if their psychological contracts are fulfilled.

6.5.2.1 Practical Implementation

This subsection outlines actions that practitioners can take in short and medium-term time frames to improve employee psychological contract fulfilment and cater to the different archetypes of employee.

Table 10 lists the inducements that were ranked highest across the study. The findings suggest that making employees feel valued, providing a professional work environment, and providing individual career support are

strategies that will have the greatest overall impact on employees' psychological contracts, job satisfaction, and retention.

Table 17 suggests the time frame in which each inducement can be implemented, as well as the cost. The last column suggests preliminary actions that need to be taken before implementation.

Table 17: Implementation schedule for commonly most prioritized inducements

Inducement	Time Frame	Cost	Preparation
Being valued	Short-term	None to low	• Assess why employees do not feel valued • Assess what makes them feel valued
Professional environment	Medium-term	medium	• Provide training • Professionalize administration and communication
Support professional advancement	Medium-term	Low to medium	• Develop PDP with each employee • Source training resources • Establish networks
Teach necessary skills for the job	Short-term	None to low	• Assess training deficits • Set training goals • Source training resources • Enable supervisory personnel to provide training
Value reliability	Short-term	None	• Sensitize supervisory personnel to communicate recognition

Correspondingly, Table 11 (see section 5.3) lists the inducements that are least prioritized by employees. Employers wishing to streamline their inducement portfolio for all employees may consider de-prioritizing support for career mobility options, childcare support and accommodation

provision. However, such reductions need to be carefully considered regarding their role in the themes that are relatively important for certain viewpoints. Particularly the low ranking of accommodation may not be mistaken for overall low importance as some destinations have a practical need to house workers they recruit from afar.

In the short term, practitioners should focus on the least costly, least technical and generally most prioritized inducements which derive from Table 17. Furthermore, assessment of the viewpoints prevalent in the organization should be carried out. The archetypes and crib sheets (Appendix 7.3) guide practitioners in conversation with employees about which archetype they may most closely relate to and what they prioritize in their psychological contracts. Having thus established an understanding for the viewpoints held in the organization, the employer can begin to plan and implement inducements accordingly. The findings of the study can also inform interview guidelines for appraisal conversations and job applications, allowing for a structured assessment of the psychological contract.

In the medium term, personal development plans (PDP) should be developed for each employee, especially those identifying with the career-oriented viewpoints 2, 4 and 6. A development plan that provides strategic career planning and explicitly lists the obligations of each party helps employees reach their individual goals as well as the organization to strategically plan for replacements and draw maximum value from the

employee during their tenure with the team. The development plans should inform future employee placement in roles where they feel most comfortable or gain the most for their advancement. In tandem with this, employers should make provisions for the implementation of *I-Deals* based on the knowledge gathered from the classification and PDP conversations.

In the long term, organizations can evolve holistically to suit the needs of the employees present or desired for the future. This includes tailoring corporate culture and employer branding to be suitable for the archetypes the organization wants to attract. It also extends to corporate identity and future product design as well as investment planning, for example where employees prioritize high-quality tools to work with and constant organizational evolution.

Taken together, the insights generated from this research project provide a strategic foundation for evidence-based HRD and HRM strategies in hospitality organisations, enabling them to design work environments, employment conditions and even products to align with employee needs and ensure sustainable workforce retention.

6.6 Limitations and Future Research

6.6.1 Limitations

This study has three key limitations. Firstly, it was highly context-specific, focusing on hotel employees in Northern Germany. While this context was chosen purposefully, it limits statistical generalisability of the results. The results are also limited to the temporal context of the study, limiting generalisability across time.

Secondly, as typical for a Q methodological study, the P Set does not aim to be statistically representative. Q Methodology can only identify the presence of viewpoints (archetypes), not their prevalence within the work-force or wider contexts.

Furthermore, the positionality of the researcher as an insider-outsider researcher implies researcher bias in study design and interpretation of the results. The methodology was designed to minimize this bias and pro-vide for a maximum of participant voice. However, decisions made during concourse development, Q-set refinement and data interpretation reflect subjective influence.

6.6.2 Future Research

This exploratory study is to be understood as groundwork for several pos-sible avenues of future research.

Firstly, to investigate the prevalence of viewpoints within the workforce, representative quantitative research can be employed. This will generate valuable knowledge about prevalences and focal points for practitioner action, while also providing more reliable data about correlations between viewpoints and demographics.

Additionally, longitudinal research can track how psychological contracts evolve and change over time based on the archetype structure, and how these changes relate to professional and personal developments.

To support and evaluate the implementation the practical recommendations made, action research designs can be employed and measure developments in outcomes like job satisfaction or turnover.

Lastly, the research design employed here, including the Q Set development, and the archetype concept can be replicated in other contexts and at later points in time to allow for comparison and interpretation of how contextual factors influence the formation of psychological contract archetypes in hotel employees. It will also improve the generalisability of knowledge generated.

6.7 Final Reflections

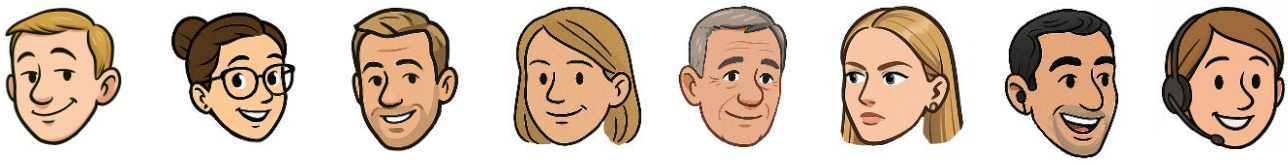
This research project was conceived in response to overwhelming labour shortages experienced by Northern German hotels. Both the German environment as well as the special workplaces that hotels are form a distinctive context. Existing literature suggests that these influences create a special set of challenges and forms of psychological contracts which differ from those in other industries. Previous research findings indicate that mechanisms affecting job satisfaction and turnover intention are slightly different in the hotel industry than in the general working population, and that psychological contracts take different forms. The results of the study support the theory that psychological contracts are individual and can be grouped in eight major viewpoints. Whether these differ significantly from other industries is a worthwhile inquiry to be made by future research.

This study aimed to explore the content and structure of psychological contracts among hotel employees in Northern Germany. Through Q Methodology, hotel employees from across the region provided insights into their priorities and needs. Eight distinct viewpoints were identified. Each of these prioritizes different aspects of their work and looks for different qualities in employers and working conditions. This demonstrates that management must be highly adaptive to individual psychological contracts and that their role in person-job fit must be considered to create reliable working relationships.

By developing eight archetypes, hotel employees themselves as well as their employers can, without requiring academic expertise, characterize their psychological contract, which helps in vocalizing it and developing strategies for greater job satisfaction, retention, and career planning.

Scholars benefit from the findings of this study by gaining a systematic account of hotel employees' psychological contracts in Northern Germany, showing them to be highly individual, needs-driven, and not crucially influenced by age, industry tenure, or generational categories. By challenging assumptions from prior studies regarding the formation and structure of psychological contracts, and by offering a replicable methodological approach, this work establishes a foundation for deeper, context-sensitive exploration of psychological contracts in Germany and beyond.

This study highlights the need to continue examining psychological contracts as dynamic, context-bound constructs, inviting future research to build on and extend these insights to provide guidance to hotel owners and managers for more effective staff retention strategies.



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APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix: Literature Review

7.1.1 Location of Psychological Contract Literature

Table 18: Locations of relevant PC literature

Country/Region	Study
North America	Ayoun *et al.* (2022); Eyoun *et al.* (2020); Park and Kim (2019); Park (2013); Schuster *et al.* (2022); Shi and Gordon (2020); Thomas *et al.* (2016); Triola and Chanin (2023); Wong *et al.* (2021); Woodruff (2022)
South America	Tekleab *et al.* (2019)
South/South East Asia	Rousseau (2000); Santhanam *et al.* (2017); Ahmad and Zafar (2018); Chan (2020); Saleem *et al.* (2021); Bandyopadhyay and Srivastava (2022); Mehta *et al.* (2022); Schuster *et al.* (2022); Lim *et al.* (2023); Mehta *et al.* (2024)
China (excl. Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan)	Gardner, Pierce and Peng (2020); Hui, Lee and Rousseau (2004); Karatepe, Rezapouraghdam and Hassannia (2020); Li and Chen (2018); Liu, Liu and Cai (2020); Schuster *et al.* (2022); Thomas *et al.* (2016); Wu, Lin and Wang (2021); Zhang, Deeprasert and Jiang (2024)
East Asia (incl. Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan)	Park (2013); Wu and Chen (2015); Chen and Wu (2017); Kim *et al.* (2018); Bavik (2020); Schuster *et al.* (2022); Bavik, Wan and Okumus (2023); Wu, Chen and Zhuang (2023); Zhou, Luo and Chen (2025)
Middle East	Sobaih, Ibrahim and Gabry (2019); Diab-Bahman and Al-Enzi (2020); Kaya and Karatepe (2020); Al-Serhan, Al-Eitan and Bani_Khalid (2021); Hammouri et al. (2022); Salama *et al.* (2025)
Australia	Chan (2020); Gilbert, Turner and Holdsworth (2021); Samson and Swink (2023); Sheehan *et al.* (2019)
Africa	Ampofo (2021); Ampofo *et al.* (2022); Anyaoku (2022); Gresse and Linde (2020); Noble-Nkrumah, Anyigba and Mensah (2022)
Poland	Mihelič *et al.* (2021); Rogozińska-Pawełczyk (2018)
Slovenia	Mihelič *et al.* (2021)
Slovakia	Egerová, Komárková and Kutlák (2021)
Czech Republic	Mihelič *et al*. (2021)
Italy	Magni and Manzoni (2020)
Greece	Manolopoulos *et al.* (2022)
Spain	Estreder *et al.* (2021)
Malta	Cassar and Buttigieg (2015)
United Kingdom	Allan (2010); Mihelič *et al.* (2021); Rayton and Yalabik (2014); Woodrow and Guest (2020)
Ireland	Mihelič *et al.* (2021); Smith (2021)

Netherlands	Lub *et al.* (2012); Solinger *et al.* (2016); Tekleab *et al.* (2019)
Belgium	Griep and Vantilborgh (2018); Solinger *et al.* (2016); Tekleab *et al.* (2019)
Germany	Reimann and Guzy (2017); Schuster *et al.* (2022)

Table 19: Locations of relevant PC studies in Hotels

Study	**Country**
Karatepe, Rezapouraghdam and Hassannia (2020)	China
Wu, Lin and Wang (2021)	China
Zhang, Deeprasert and Jiang (2024)	China
Bavik, Wan and Okumus (2023)	China (Macau)
Zhou, Luo and Chen (2025)	China (Macau)
Li (2014)	China (Taiwan)
Wu and Chen (2015)	China (Taiwan)
Chen and Wu (2017)	China (Taiwan)
Wu, Chen and Zhuang (2023)	China (Taiwan)
Sobaih, Ibrahim and Gabry (2019)	Egypt
Salama *et al.* (2025)	Egypt
Ampofo *et al.* (2022)	Ghana
Manolopoulos *et al.* (2022)	Greece
Santhanam *et al.* (2017)	India
Lim *et al.* (2023)	India
Mehta *et al.* (2024)	India
Smith (2021)	Ireland
Al-Serhan, Al-Eitan and Bani_Khalid (2021)	Jordan
Lub *et al.* (2012)	Netherlands
Anyaoku (2022)	Nigeria
Bashir and Nasir (2013)	Pakistan
Ahmad and Zafar (2018)	Pakistan
Saleem *et al.* (2021)	Pakistan
Park and Kim (2019)	USA
Eyoun *et al.* (2020)	USA
Shi and Gordon (2020)	USA
Wong *et al.* (2021)	USA
Kim *et al.* (2018)	South Korea
Kaya and Karatepe (2020)	Turkey

7.1.2 Methods Used to Survey Psychological Contracts

Table 20: Questionnaires used by previous researchers to survey the psychological contract (own work)

Authors	Context	Research Category	Methodology
Anyaoku (2022)	Nigeria Hotel Employees	Feature-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Bavik (2020)	China (Hong Kong) Domestic Helpers and their employers	Evaluation-oriented	Mixed Methods Interviews and Questionnaires
Bingham (2005)	USA Private-sector employees	Feature-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Conway and Briner (2006)	General Template	Content-oriented Feature-oriented Evaluation-oriented	
Coyle-Shapiro and Conway (2005)	UK Government employees	Content-oriented Feature-oriented Evaluation-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000)	UK Government employees	Content-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Coyle-Shapiro *et al.* (2019)	Provide a list of possible organizational actions to manage and prevent PCB (p.160)		
Estreder *et al.* (2021)	Spain Retail and education workers	Evaluation-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Freese, Schalk and Croon (2008)	Netherlands Healthcare Employees	Evaluation-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Gardner, Pierce and Peng (2020)	China	Evaluation-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire

	Employees and Managers in Information Services Industry		
Gresse and Linde (2020)	South Africa University Students	Content-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Guzzo, Noonan and Elron (1994)	USA Expatriate Managers	Content-oriented Feature-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Herriot, Manning and Kidd (1997)	UK Across industries, Managers and Employees	Content-oriented	Qualitative Interviews
Isaksson *et al.* (2006)	Sweden, UK, Spain, Belgium, Israel, Germany, Netherlands Education, Manufacturing, Service	Evaluation-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Karatepe, Rezapouraghdam and Hassannia (2020)	China Hotel employees	Feature-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Kaya and Karatepe (2020)	Turkey Hotel employees	Feature-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Kehoe and Wright (2013)	USA Food service HR Managers	Feature-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Kickul, Lester and Finkl (2002)	USA University Students (MBA)	Feature-oriented Content-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Lau (2022)	Germany Undergraduate Students	Content-oriented	Qualitative Multi-Method
Liu, Liu and Cai (2020)	China Garment industry Supplier-client relationship	Evaluation-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Lu and Lu (2025)	China (Taiwan) Hotel employees	Evaluation-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire

Manolopoulos *et al.* (2022)	Greece Hotel employees	Content-oriented Feature-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Mazumdar *et al.* (2022)	Bridge employees	Evaluation-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Mehta *et al.* (2022)	Compiled items from literature	Content-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Millward and Hopkins (1998)	UK Employees of Private-sector multinational service companies	Content-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
O'Neill, Halbesleben and Edwards (2007)	USA Various backgrounds	Evaluation-oriented	Mixed Methods Interviews Questionnaire Q Methodology
Purvis and Cropley (2003)	UK Nurses	Content-oriented	Mixed Methods Q methodology
Robinson and Morrison (2000)	USA University Graduates	Evaluation-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau (1994)	USA MBA students	Content-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Rousseau (1990)	USA University Graduates	Content-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Rousseau (2008)	(USA) General template	Content-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Schaufeli, Bakker and Salanova (2006)	Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, Spain Several Industries	Feature-oriented (Measuring Work Engagement rather than PC)	Quantitative Questionnaire
Sheehan *et al.* (2019)	Australia Nurses	Feature-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire

Sherman and Morley (2020)	Multi-party employment relationships (gig economy)	Content-oriented	Qualitative Repertory Grid
Shi and Gordon (2020)	USA Hotel employees (Management level)	Feature-oriented	Quantitative Szenario-based Questionnaire
Sia (2013)	India Government university employees	Content-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
ten Brink (2004)	Netherlands Farmers, Bank, Hospital, Car dealership, multinational company, and government employees	Content-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Thomas and Anderson (1998)	UK Army Recruits	Content-oriented	Quantitative Questionnaire
Wong *et al.* (2021)	USA Hotel employees	Content-oriented (Focus on work stress rather than PC)	Quantitative Questionnaire
Wu, Lin and Wang (2021)	China Hotel Employees and Managers	Content-oriented	Qualitative Interviews

7.2 Appendix: Methodology

7.2.1 Ethical Approval

University of Worcester

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SOCIETY RESEARCH ETHICS PANEL (ECS REP)

CONFIRMATION OF APPROVAL

29 February 2024

REP CODE: ECS23240020-R

EXPLORING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTS OF FRONTLINE HOTEL EMPLOYEES IN NORTHERN GERMANY

Dear Christian

Thank you for your revised application for proportionate review ethical approval to the Education, Culture and Society Research Ethics Panel submitted on 22 February 2024.

Your application has been reviewed in accordance with the University of Worcester Ethics Policy and in compliance with the Standard Operating Procedures for proportionate ethical review.

The outcome of the review is that the Panel is now happy to grant this project ethical approval to proceed.

Your research must be undertaken as set out in the approved application for the approval to be valid. You must review your answers to the checklist on an ongoing basis and resubmit for approval where you intend to deviate from the approved research. Any major deviation from the approved application will require a new application for approval.

As part of the University Ethics Policy, the University undertakes an audit of a random sample of approved research. You may be required to complete a questionnaire about your research.

Yours sincerely



DR PETER GOSSMAN
Chair – Education, Culture and Society Proportionate Review Panel
Deputy Chair – Education, Culture and Society Research Ethics Panel
ethics@worc.ac.uk

7.2.2 Iterations of the Q Set

Table 21: Initially sourced Q Statements

Cat.	#	Statement (original German)	Statement (English translation)	From nodes	Theoretical Foundation
Work-Life-Balance	1	Ich bekomme Zugang zu Freizeitaktivitäten	I am provided access to leisure activities	Discounts External Discounts Staff Rates	Mercanoğlu and Şimşek (2023)
	2	Ich habe planbare Arbeitszeiten	I have plannable working times	Job Content Work-Life Integration	Heimerl *et al.* (2020); Rohita *et al.* (2022); Wanger (2017)
	3	Ich werde dabei unterstützt, die Arbeit und das Familienleben unter einen Hut zu bringen	I receive support for reconciling work and family life	Corporate Culture Work-Life Integration Workplace Description Health	Guhlemann and Best (2021); Guhlemann and Krüger (2018); Lee, Back and Chan (2015); Susanto *et al.* (2022)
	4	Ich bekomme mehr Zugang zu privaten Reisen	I have better access to leisure travel	Discount Staff Rates Mobility	Song (2022)
Material support	5	Ich werde für meine Zukunft abgesichert	I receive security for my future	Corporate Culture Monetary Benefits Health	Drechsler *et al.* (2021); von Eisenhart Rothe (2021)
	6	Ich bekomme Unterstützung dabei, komfortabel zu wohnen	I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay	Staff Housing	Fink (2020); Neukrich (2023)
	7	Meine finanziellen Bedürfnisse werden berücksichtigt	My financial needs are being taken into account	Corporate Culture Work-Life Integration Health	Mhlanga (2018)
	8	Ich bekomme Unterstützung beim Pendeln	I receive support for my commute to work	Mobility Workplace Description	von Eisenhart Rothe (2021)

Expectations on employee's personal traits	9	Ich darf mich bei der Arbeit von Empathie leiten lassen	I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	Job Content	Bahadur *et al.* (2020); Kraak *et al.* (2024)
	10	Die Leidenschaft für meinen Beruf wird am Leben gehalten	My passion for my profession is being kept alive	Personality Corporate Culture Team Spirit	Crawford *et al.* (2022)
	11	Meine Zuverlässigkeit wird geschätzt	My reliability is valued	Personality	Colakoglu, Culha and Atay (2010)
	12	Meine Flexibilität wird geschätzt	My flexibility is valued	Personality Monetary Benefits	Colakoglu, Culha and Atay (2010)
Diversity	13	Ich werde für das respektiert, was ich bin	I am respected for who I am	Corporate Culture Job Content Team Spirit Workplace Description Personality	García-Rodríguez, Dorta-Afonso and González-de-la-Rosa (2020); Lee and Madera (2019)
Expectations on employee's behaviour	14	Meine Zielstrebigkeit wird geschätzt	My determination is valued	Corporate Culture Job Content Career Development Workplace Description Personality Team Spirit Training & Development	Colakoglu, Culha and Atay (2010)
	15	Ich darf die Interessen der Gäste an erste Stelle stellen	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work	Job Content Personality Corporate Culture	Lages and Piercy (2012)
	16	Ich kann aktiv an der Unternehmensentwicklung mitarbeiten	I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	Corporate Culture Job Content	Mhlanga (2018)
	17	Ich habe weitreichende Entscheidungsbefugnisse	I am empowered to make extensive decisions	Corporate Culture Job Content Workplace Description	AlKahtani *et al.* (2021); Lee, Back and Chan (2015); Mhlanga (2018)

				Personality	
	18	Unser Teamwork wird gefördert	Our team work is encouraged and supported	Corporate Culture Job Content Team Spirit Personality	Lee, Back and Chan (2015); Mhlanga (2018)
	19	Ich habe kreative Freiheit	I enjoy creative freedom	Career Development Job Content Personality Corporate Culture Team Spirit	Alagarsamy, Mehrolia and Aranha (2023); Bousinakis and Halkos (2021); Jaskyte *et al.* (2020)
Communication culture	20	Meine Kritik wird dankbar aufgenommen	My criticism is received gratefully	Feedback	Kraak *et al.* (2024); Liu-Lastres, Wen and Okumus (2024); Soyalin (2023)
	21	Ich bekomme angemessenes Feedback	I receive appropriate feedback	Feedback	Lee, Back and Chan (2015); Lee and Kim (2021)
	22	Ich kann jederzeit Feedback abgeben	I can provide feedback any time	Feedback Corporate Culture Workplace Description	Kraak *et al.* (2024); Liu-Lastres, Wen and Okumus (2024)
Attention to employee's personal situation	23	Meine private Lebensplanung wird berücksichtigt	My personal life plan is being taken into account	Corporate Culture Career Development Vacation Leave Training & Development Workplace Description	Lee, Back and Chan (2015)
	24	Meine körperlichen Leistungsgrenzen werden berücksichtigt	My physical limits are being taken into account	Corporate Culture	Marshall, Mottier and Lewis (2015)
	25	Ich werde nicht im Stich gelassen	I am not left hanging	Monetary Benefits Vacation Leave Corporate Culture	Jaworski *et al.* (2018); Kraak *et al.* (2024)

				Team Spirit	
Health	26	Ich habe Zugang zu sportlichen Angeboten außerhalb der Arbeit	I have access to athletic activities outside of my working hours	Health	Mercanoğlu and Şimşek (2023)
	27	Ich kann gesundheitsfördernde Maßnahmen im Betrieb wahrnehmen	I can attend health-promoting activities at my workplace	Health Work-Life Integration	Marshall, Mottier and Lewis (2015)
	28	Ich werde gut verpflegt	I receive high-quality meals	Staff Meals	Song (2022)
Recognition	29	Meine guten Leistungen werden belohnt	My good performance is rewarded	Corporate Culture Monetary Benefits Salary	Jaworski *et al.* (2018); Lee, Back and Chan (2015)
	30	Wir feiern gemeinsam als Unternehmen	As a company, we celebrate together	Monetary Benefits Team Building Vacation Leave	Diamond (2006); Tews *et al.* (2023); Zacher (2023)
	31	Meine Treue wird geschätzt	My loyalty is valued	Monetary Benefits Personality Vacation Leave	Colakoglu, Culha and Atay (2010)
	32	Meine Fachkompetenz wird geschätzt	My professional expertise is valued	Corporate Culture Salary Workplace Description Career Development Job Content Personality Training & Development	Marshall, Mottier and Lewis (2015)
	33	Ich werde am unternehmerischen Erfolg beteiligt	I get to participate in the business success	Corporate Culture Monetary Benefits Team Building	Belloc (2022); Chien *et al.* (2020); Dewi, Respati and Sanvenia (2020)
	34	Ich bekomme Wertschätzung	I am being valued	Corporate Culture Job Content	Maroudas, Kyriakidou and Vacharis (2008);

					Marshall, Mottier and Lewis (2015); Mhlanga (2018); Nohria, Groysberg and Lee (2008); Younies and Al-Tawil (2021)
Corporate Vision	35	Ich arbeite in einem Unternehmen, das sich ständig weiterentwickelt	I work in a company which consistently evolves	Corporate Culture Workplace Description	
	36	Ich werde mit einem modernen Stil geführt	I am being managed with modern leadership methods	Corporate Culture Team Spirit Workplace Description Training & Development Work-Life Integration Workplace Description	Lee, Back and Chan (2015)
	37	Ich arbeite in einem nachhaltigen Unternehmen	I work in a sustainable organization	Mobility Corporate Culture	Dixon-Fowler *et al.* (2020); Dögl and Holtbrügge (2014); Kraak *et al.* (2024); Puncheva-Michelotti, Hudson and Jin (2018)
	38	Ich werde wie ein Familienmitglied behandelt	I am treated like a family member	Corporate culture Job Content Team Building Team Spirit	Haugh and Mckee (2003); McIntosh *et al.* (2011)
Career Prospects	39	Ich habe die Möglichkeit zu einer abwechslungsreichen Karriere	I have the opportunity to have a varied career	Career Development Corporate Culture Personality Training & Development Job Content Personality	Mhlanga (2018)

				Workplace Description	
	40	Ich werde dabei unterstützt, schnell Karriere zu machen	I receive support for swift career advancement	Career Development	Chang and Busser (2020)
	41	Ich kann meine Karriere an verschiedenen Orten der Welt fortsetzen	I can continue my career in different places in the world	Career Development Job Content Training & Development Work-Life Integration	Hjalager (2003); Kotrotsiou (2018)
	42	Ich habe eine langfristige Karriereperspektive	I have long-term career prospects	Career Development Job Content Corporate Culture	Chang and Busser (2020); Dashper (2020)
	43	Mein beruflicher Aufstieg wird individuell gefördert	My professional advancement is individually supported	Career Development Corporate Culture Job Content Personality Training & Development Workplace Description	Dashper (2020); Lee, Back and Chan (2015)
Work Environment	44	Ich habe hochwertige Arbeitsmittel zur Verfügung	I have high-quality tools at my disposal	Job Content Personality Uniform Workplace Description	Lee, Back and Chan (2015)
	45	Ich arbeite mit hochwertigen Produkten	I get to work with high-quality products	Workplace Description	Lee, Back and Chan (2015)
	46	Ich arbeite in einem professionellen Umfeld	I work in a professional environment	Corporate Culture Job Content Personality Workplace Description Team Spirit	Kirillova, Fu and Kucukusta (2020); Min and Hong (2021)
Professiona	47	Ich kann mich ständig beruflich weiterentwickeln	I can continuously develop myself professionally	Career Development Training & Development	Budhiraja, Varkkey and McKenna (2022); Chang and Busser (2020);

				Chiang, Back and Canter (2005); Heimerl *et al.* (2020); Lee, Back and Chan (2015)
48	Ich kann durch moderne Weiterbildungsformate lernen	I get to learn through modern training formats	Training & Development	Jaworski *et al.* (2018)
49	Mir werden alle für meinen Job notwendigen Kenntnisse vermittelt	I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	Career Development Training & Development Job Content Career Development	Chiang, Back and Canter (2005); Kraak *et al.* (2024); Lee, Back and Chan (2015)

Table 22: Q Set amended after focus group discussion

Orange: statement deleted, blue: statement amended, green: statement added

Cat.	#	Statement (original German)	Statement (English translation)	Votes
Work-Life-Balance		~~Ich bekomme Zugang zu Freizeitaktivitäten~~	~~I am provided access to leisure activities~~	
	1	Ich habe planbare Arbeitszeiten	I have plannable working times	5
	2	Ich werde dabei unterstützt, die Arbeit und das Privatleben unter einen Hut zu bringen	I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	4
	3	Ich bekomme mehr Zugang zu privaten Reisen	I have better access to leisure travel	0
	4	Ich werde bei der Kinderbetreuung unterstützt	I receive support for taking care of my children	1
Material support	5	Ich werde für meine Zukunft abgesichert	I receive security for my future	0
	6	Ich bekomme Unterstützung dabei, komfortabel zu wohnen	I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay	1

	7	Meine finanziellen Bedürfnisse werden berücksichtigt	My financial needs are being taken into account	2
	8	Ich bekomme Unterstützung beim Pendeln	I receive support for my commute to work	2
Expectations on employee's personal traits	9	Ich darf mich bei der Arbeit von Empathie leiten lassen	I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	3
	10	Die Leidenschaft für meinen Beruf wird am Leben gehalten	My passion for my profession is being kept alive	3
	11	Meine Zuverlässigkeit wird geschätzt	My reliability is valued	4
	12	Meine Flexibilität wird geschätzt	My flexibility is valued	2
Diversity	13	Ich werde für das respektiert, was ich bin	I am respected for who I am	3
	14	Ich kann meine Rolle so ausfüllen, wie es für mich passt	I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me	3
Expecta-	15	Meine Zielstrebigkeit wird geschätzt	My determination is valued	0

	16	Ich darf die Interessen der Gäste an erste Stelle stellen	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work	1
	17	Ich kann aktiv an der Unternehmensentwicklung mitarbeiten	I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	3
		~~Ich habe weitreichende Entscheidungsbefugnisse~~	~~I am empowered to make extensive decisions~~	
	18	Unser Teamwork wird gefördert	Our team work is encouraged and supported	2
	19	Ich habe kreative Freiheit	I enjoy creative freedom	0
Communication culture	20	Meine Kritik wird dankbar aufgenommen	My criticism is received gratefully	4
	21	Ich bekomme angemessenes Feedback	I receive appropriate feedback	3
	22	Ich kann jederzeit Feedback abgeben	I can provide feedback any time	3
Attention to em-	23	Meine private Lebensplanung wird berücksichtigt	My personal life plan is being taken into account	3

	24	Meine körperlichen Leistungsgrenzen werden berücksichtigt	My physical limits are being taken into account	0
	25	Ich werde nicht im Stich gelassen	I am not left hanging	3
Health	26	Ich habe Zugang zu sportlichen Angeboten außerhalb der Arbeit	I have access to athletic activities outside of my working hours	0
	27	Ich kann gesundheitsfördernde Maßnahmen im Betrieb wahrnehmen	I can attend health-promoting activities at my workplace	0
	28	Ich werde gut verpflegt	I receive high-quality meals	2
Recognition	29	Meine guten Leistungen werden belohnt	My good performance is rewarded	3
	30	Wir feiern gemeinsam	We celebrate together	0
	31	Meine Treue wird geschätzt	My loyalty is valued	2
	32	Meine Fachkompetenz wird geschätzt	My professional expertise is valued	4
	33	Ich werde am unternehmerischen Erfolg beteiligt	I get to participate in the business success	1

	34	Ich bekomme Wertschätzung	I am being valued	4
Corporate Vision	35	Ich arbeite in einem Unternehmen, das sich ständig weiterentwickelt	I work in a company which consistently evolves	3
	36	Ich werde mit einem angemessenen Stil geführt	I am being managed with a suitable leadership style	3
	37	Ich arbeite in einem nachhaltigen Unternehmen	I work in a sustainable organization	1
	38	Ich werde wie ein Familienmitglied behandelt	I am treated like a family member	2
Career Prospects	39	Ich habe die Möglichkeit zu einer abwechslungsreichen Karriere	I have the opportunity to have a varied career	3
	40	Ich werde dabei unterstützt, schnell Karriere zu machen	I receive support for swift career advancement	0
	41	Ich kann meine Karriere an verschiedenen Orten fortsetzen	I can continue my career in different places	2
	42	Ich habe eine langfristige Karriereperspektive	I have long-term career prospects	2

	43	Mein beruflicher Aufstieg wird individuell gefördert	My professional advancement is individually supported	4
Work Environment	44	Ich habe hochwertige Arbeitsmittel zur Verfügung	I have high-quality tools at my disposal	3
	45	Ich arbeite mit hochwertigen Produkten	I get to work with high-quality products	2
	46	Ich arbeite in einem professionellen Umfeld	I work in a professional environment	4
Professional Training and Development	47	Ich kann mich ständig beruflich weiterentwickeln	I can continuously develop myself professionally	2
	48	Ich kann durch passende Weiterbildungsformate lernen	I get to learn through suitable training formats	3
	49	Mir werden alle für meinen Job notwendigen Kenntnisse vermittelt	I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	3

Table 23: Statements omitted from the final Q Set

#	Statement

3	I have better access to leisure travel
5	I receive security for my future
15	My determination is valued
19	I enjoy creative freedom
24	My physical limits are being taken into account
26	I have access to athletic activities outside of my working hours
27	I can attend health-promoting activities at my workplace
30	We celebrate together
40	I receive support for swift career advancement

7.2.3 Pre-Sorting Questionnaire

Demographic Questions

1. How old are you? *
2. Do you have a completed vocational training or other professional/academic qualification in hospitality? *
3. What is your relationship status?

Questions about personal background/experience

4. How long have you been working in hospitality?
5. Have you worked in other places, other countries or for other companies before?

Questions about career goals

6. What do you like most about your job?
7. What do you like least about your job?
8. Have your priorities regarding work changed because of the Covid-19 pandemic?
9. Do you plan to leave the hospitality industry someday?
10. Are you planning on advancing your career in hospitality?

Questions about perception of the employment situation

11. What type of location is your hotel in? *
12. What kind of hotel do you work in? *
13. Who owns your hotel? *
14. How do you commute to work?
15. What needs to change about work in hotels?

7.2.4 Recommended and actual P Sets in Q Methodology

Table 24: Recommended number of participants in Q Studies (own work)

Author	Recommended P Set	Implied P Set
Brown (1980)	Enough to establish the creation of factors; highly dependent on the study. Representativeness more important than number	
Brown (2003)	< 40	
Brown, Durning and Selden (1999)	'the largest possible diversity of views'	
Danielson, Webler and Tuler (2009)	1 for each 3-5 Q Statements	9-14
Figueroa *et al.* (2024)	At least four participants per expected perspective	16-28
Previte, Pini and Haslam-Mckenzie (2007)	30-40	
Stainton Rogers (1995)	40-60	
Thompson, Frankiewicz and Ward (1983)	(N/2)-1, where N = no. of statements	20
Watts and Stenner (2012)	Less than the number of Q Statements No more than 1:2	< 41 < 21
Webler *et al.* (2009)	1 for each 2-3 Q Statements	14-21

Table 25: Sample sizes of different Q Studies (own work)

Author	Q Set	P Set
Allan (2010)	69	23
Ayuk (2024)	42	23
Baas, Thomas and Rhoads (2021)	40	26
Baas and Rhoads (2024)	24	112
Bradley *et al.* (2018)	66	33
Brown (1993)	20	10 (simulated)
Cuppen *et al.* (2010)	60	75
Corr (2001)	41	35
Devanathan and Ghosal (2023)	52	44
Figueroa *et al.* (2024)	41	14
Gaukel (2024)	36	3 (3 sorts by 1 participant)
Gilbert, Turner and Holdsworth (2021)	28	43
Kmiotek-Meier, Rossié and Canora (2024)	43	26
Nikraftar and Farahani (2025)	36	30
O'Neill, Halbesleben and Edwards (2007)	16	3
Ortiz, Salonsalmi and Helanterä (2025)	38	101 (72 used)
Pedehour and Gauzente (2024)	37 / 45 / 31 (3 sorts)	21 / 16 / 17 (3 sorts)
Purvis and Cropley (2003)	54	223
Ramlo (2024)	55	36
Reis *et al.* (2025)	33	59
Rendall *et al.* (2025)	24	30
Solfanelli *et al.* (2025)	40	19
Triola and Chanin (2023)	12 / 16 (2 sorts)	64
AVERAGE (ROUNDED)	**38**	**42**

7.2.5 Participation Invitations

Forschungsprojekt „Untersuchung des Psychologischen Vertrages von Hotelmitarbeitern im direkten Kundendienst in Norddeutschland“

Teil der Doktorarbeit von Christian Rebehn
Worcester Business School, University of Worcester

UNIVERSITY of WORCESTER

Warum dieses Projekt?

Ich möchte Empfehlungen für Arbeitgeber in der Hotelbranche zur besseren Mitarbeiterbindung entwickeln. Die Studie untersucht, welche Erwartungen Mitarbeiter an ihre Arbeitgeber haben und ob es Unterschiede zwischen verschiedenen Gruppen gibt. Grundlage ist das Konzept des Psychologischen Vertrages.

Wie wird das Projekt durchgeführt?

- Basierend auf Stellenausschreibungen und einer Vorstudie wurde eine Liste von 41 möglichen **Leistungen von Arbeitgebern** formuliert. Die Teilnehmenden sortieren diese untereinander auf einer Skala danach, wie wichtig ihnen die jeweilige Leistung ist.
- Für die Studie kommt die Q-Methodik zum Einsatz. Dadurch können die Meinungen und Ansichten von ganz verschiedenen Menschen gleichberechtigt dargestellt werden, statt nur Mehrheitsmeinungen wiederzugeben.
- Die Studie findet **online** statt.
- Der individuelle **Zugangslink** kann von jedem Gerät geöffnet werden, die Darstellung ist auf einem PC/Tablet am besten, auf dem Handy ziemlich klein.
- Die Teilnahme dauert ca. **15-20 Minuten**
- Sämtliche Daten sind **anonym**
- Es wird nicht nach einer Bewertung oder der Identität des derzeitigen **Arbeitgebers** gefragt.

Link zur Teilnahme: www.tinyurl.com/Mitarbeiterstudie

Wer führt das Projekt durch?

Die Studie ist der Hauptteil meiner Doktorarbeit, die ich an der University of Worcester (GB) in Kooperation mit der Fachhochschule des Mittelstands in Bielefeld schreibe. Das Projekt wurde von der zuständigen Ethikkommission der Universität streng geprüft und genehmigt. Das Teilnehmerinformationsblatt erklärt die Studie und den Datenschutz im Detail.

Über mich



Ich komme ursprünglich aus Schleswig-Holstein, habe in Singapur Hotelmanagement studiert und danach zehn Jahre lang in verschiedenen Hotels, Restaurants und Fast-Food-Ketten gearbeitet; zuletzt als Front Office Manager in einem großen Lübecker Hotel. Heute bin ich Unternehmensberater für die Hotelbranche in Kiel. An meiner Promotion arbeite ich seit 2021; das Thema liegt mir am Herzen, weil ich damals selbst so unzufrieden mit den Arbeitsbedingungen und der Mitarbeiterführung war, dass ich meinen Beruf aufgegeben habe.

Email: rebc1_21@uni.worc.ac.uk

Link zur Studie:

Einladung zum Forschungsprojekt

„Mitarbeiterbindung in der norddeutschen Hotellerie“

Was?

- Erforschung der **Erwartungen**, die Arbeitnehmer haben
- Kurze Online-Umfrage **(15-20 Minuten)**
- 100 % **anonym**

Warum?

Entwicklung von Maßnahmen, um die Mitarbeiterzufriedenheit zu verbessern und Fachkräfte in der Branche zu halten.

Wer?

Christian Rebehn, gebürtiger Schleswig-Holsteiner, MBA Hospitality Management in Singapur (2014). Manager im Fast Food, gehobener Gastronomie, verschiedenen Hotels. Heute Unternehmensberater für Hotel & Gastro in Kiel.

Doktorand an der University of Worcester zum Thema Mitarbeiterzufriedenheit in der norddeutschen Hotellerie

Teilnehmen:

www.tinyurl.com/Mitarbeiterstudie

oder scannen:

Kontakt

Christian Rebehn
cr@cordes-rieger.de
0431/533 233 17

Das Forschungsprojekt *„Untersuchung des Psychologischen Vertrages von Hotelmitarbeitern im direkten Kundendienst in Norddeutschland“* möchte herausfinden, welche Erwartungen norddeutsche Hotelangestellte an ihre Arbeitgeber haben – und gemeinsam mit Euch die Hotellerie verbessern!

Gesucht werden engagierte Hotelmitarbeiter*innen in Norddeutschland, die Lust haben, in einer kurzen Online-Umfrage ihre Perspektiven zu teilen. Ich möchte erforschen, was Ihr von Arbeitgebern erwartet, damit ich klare Empfehlungen formulieren kann. Als Unternehmensberater für die Gastronomie kann ich die auch direkt zur Umsetzung bringen!

Mit der innovativen „Q-Methode“ macht die Teilnahme richtig Spaß, ist schnell und unkompliziert von jedem internetfähigen Gerät aus möglich. Eure Antworten helfen dabei, Arbeitgeber zu inspirieren, damit sie ihre Mitarbeiterstrategie verbessern und erfüllte, langfristige Karrieren in der Hotellerie fördern.

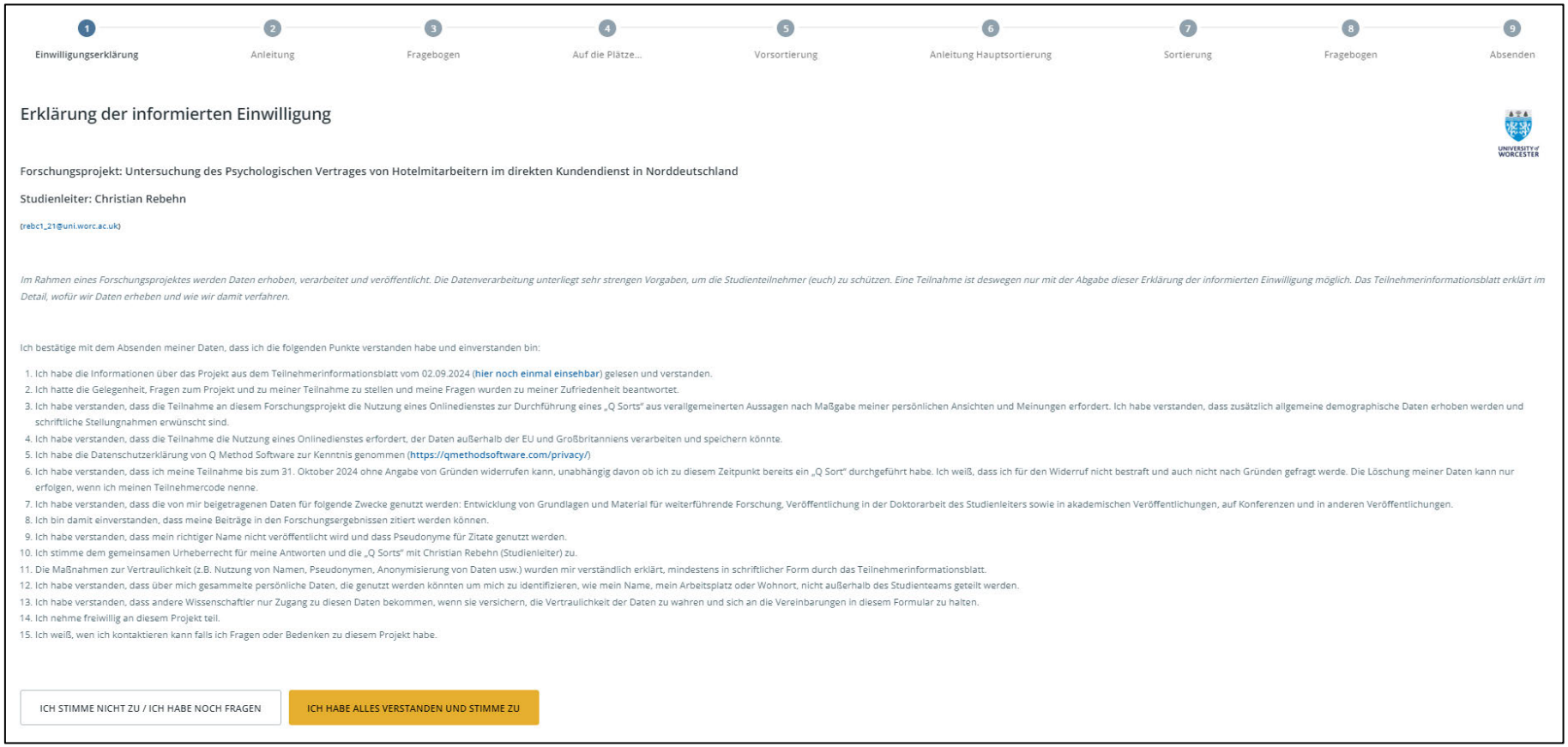
Die Umfrage ist selbstverständlich anonym und ohne Bezug zu Eurem Arbeitgeber. Ich weiß, wie stressig der Hotelalltag sein kann – deshalb ist die Teilnahme bewusst einfach gehalten und in maximal 20 Minuten erledigt.

Das Projekt wurde von der Ethikkommission der Universität Worcester genehmigt. Bei Fragen oder Bedenken könnt Ihr Euch gerne an ethics@worc.ac.uk wenden. Alle wichtigen Infos findet Ihr auch im Teilnahmelink. Dort ist auch die Datenschutzerklärung verlinkt.

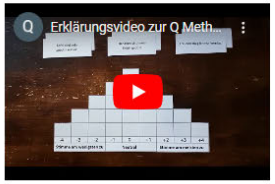
Schreibt mir bei Fragen oder Anregungen gerne auf cr@cordes-rieger.de.
Folgt mir auch gerne auf LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/chris-rebehn/

Ich würde mich riesig freuen, wenn Ihr mitmacht und wir gemeinsam die Arbeit im Hotel noch attraktiver und erfüllender gestalten!

7.2.6 Screenshots of Online Q Study



Einwilligungserklärung 2 Anleitung 3 Fragebogen 4 Auf die Plätze... 5 Vorsortierung 6 Anleitung Hauptsortierung 7 Sortierung 8 Fragebogen 9 Absenden



So läuft eine Q-Studie ab.

Willkommen!

Heute nimmst Du an einer Studie nach der Q-Methode teil. Das ist ein einfacher und aufregender Weg, Deinen Beitrag für die Wissenschaft zu leisten! Die Q-Methode wurde entwickelt, um individuelle Ansichten im Gesamtzusammenhang darzustellen. Du wurdest eingeladen, weil Deine einzigartige Perspektive auf die Arbeitswelt im Hotel einen wichtigen Beitrag zum Gesamtbild leistet. Ich danke Dir herzlich dafür, dass Du Dir die Zeit nimmst.

Was erwartet Dich?

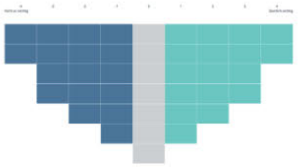
Ich erforsche den "Psychologischen Vertrag" von Hotelmitarbeitern (und natürlich auch Hotelmitarbeiterinnen). Vereinfacht gesagt möchte ich herausfinden, was Ihr von Euren Arbeitgebern erwartet und was die Arbeitgeber tun können / sollten, um Eure Zufriedenheit zu steigern. Es geht nicht darum, Deinen Arbeitgeber zu bewerten oder darum, was Du bisher bekommst - sondern nur, was Du erwartest und was Dir wichtig ist.

Zuerst werden Dir einige allgemeine Fragen zu Deinem Hintergrund gestellt. Das ist ein kurzer, einfacher Fragebogen. Du kannst die Antworten frei formulieren, denn die Q-Methode lebt davon, wie Du die Welt interpretierst. Die Antworten helfen mir später dabei, Unterschiede in den Erwartungen zu erklären (z.B. anhand des Arbeitsortes oder des Alters).

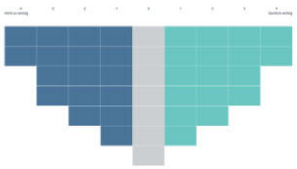
Die eigentliche Studie ist die "Sortierung". Wie so etwas allgemein abläuft, siehst Du im Video oben. In dieser Studie sieht es so aus:

In der Vorsortierung wirst du 41 Karten mit Sätzen über Erwartungen sehen. Jede Aussage repräsentiert eine Leistung bzw. einen Benefit, den Dein Arbeitgeber Dir gegenüber erbringen kann. Sie sind so formuliert, dass Du Dich in die Situation versetzen kannst. Du kannst jeweils wählen, ob Dir die Aussage wichtig oder unwichtig ist, oder ob Du Dir noch nicht sicher bist. Dieser Schritt kann aber auch übersprungen werden.

Im zweiten Schritt siehst Du die Karten wieder, die entsprechend Deiner Vorauswahl auf drei Stapeln sortiert sind. Außerdem siehst Du eine Sortierungsmatrix in Pyramidenform:



Sortiere die Aussagen jeweils danach, wie wichtig sie Dir sind, auf der Matrix. Dafür ziehst Du die Karte per Drag&Drop auf das gewünschte Feld (siehe Video). Du kannst die Karten frei verteilen und musst Dich nicht an die Vorsortierung halten. Du kannst die Karten später auch verschieben. Achtung: wenn Du eine neue Karte auf ein belegtes Feld ziehst, wandert die alte Karte zurück auf den Stapel.



Sortiere die Aussagen jeweils danach, wie wichtig sie Dir sind, auf der Matrix. Dafür ziehst Du die Karte per Drag&Drop auf das gewünschte Feld (siehe Video). Du kannst die Karten frei verteilen und musst Dich nicht an die Vorsortierung halten. Du kannst die Karten später auch verschieben. Achtung: wenn Du eine neue Karte auf ein belegtes Feld ziehst, wandert die alte Karte zurück auf den Stapel.

Der interessante Teil der Q-Methode ist, dass man sich Gedanken darüber macht, was einem wichtiger ist als andere Dinge. Sicher kennst Du klassische Fragebögen, in denen Du von 1-5 ankreuzt, wie wichtig Dir etwas ist oder wie sehr Du zustimmst. Dabei kann man auch alle Aussagen gleich stark bewerten. Bei der Q-Methode geht das nicht - als Teilnehmer musst Du entscheiden, wie wichtig Dir die Dinge im Verhältnis zueinander sind.

Nimm Dir so viel Zeit wie du brauchst, und wenn du mit deiner Sortierung zufrieden bist, schickst Du sie ab.

Zum Abschluss hast Du noch die Möglichkeit, in ein paar Worten zu erklären, warum Du bestimmte Karten ganz rechts und ganz links eingeordnet hast. Das hilft mir dabei, die Entscheidungsprozesse besser zu verstehen. In meiner Ausarbeitung kann ich dann den Arbeitgebern auch erklären, warum gewisse Leistungen für Arbeitnehmende (un-)wichtiger sind als andere.

Was passiert danach?

Dann bist du schon fertig! Deine Sortierung ist einzigartig, und sie bildet mehr ab als Du vielleicht glaubst: denn Du hast hunderte Mikro-Entscheidungen getroffen und jede Aussage ins Verhältnis zu den anderen gesetzt. Mithilfe der Software werde ich dann die Sortierungen nach Übereinstimmung gruppieren und später mit den Antworten aus dem ersten Schritt vergleichen. Dann kommt heraus, wie man Hotelmitarbeitende überhaupt gruppieren kann - nach Arbeitsort, Ausbildung, Alter, Hoteltyp ...? Außerdem wird ersichtlich, welche Gemeinsamkeiten es gibt und in welchen Punkten sich die einzelnen Gruppen unterscheiden.

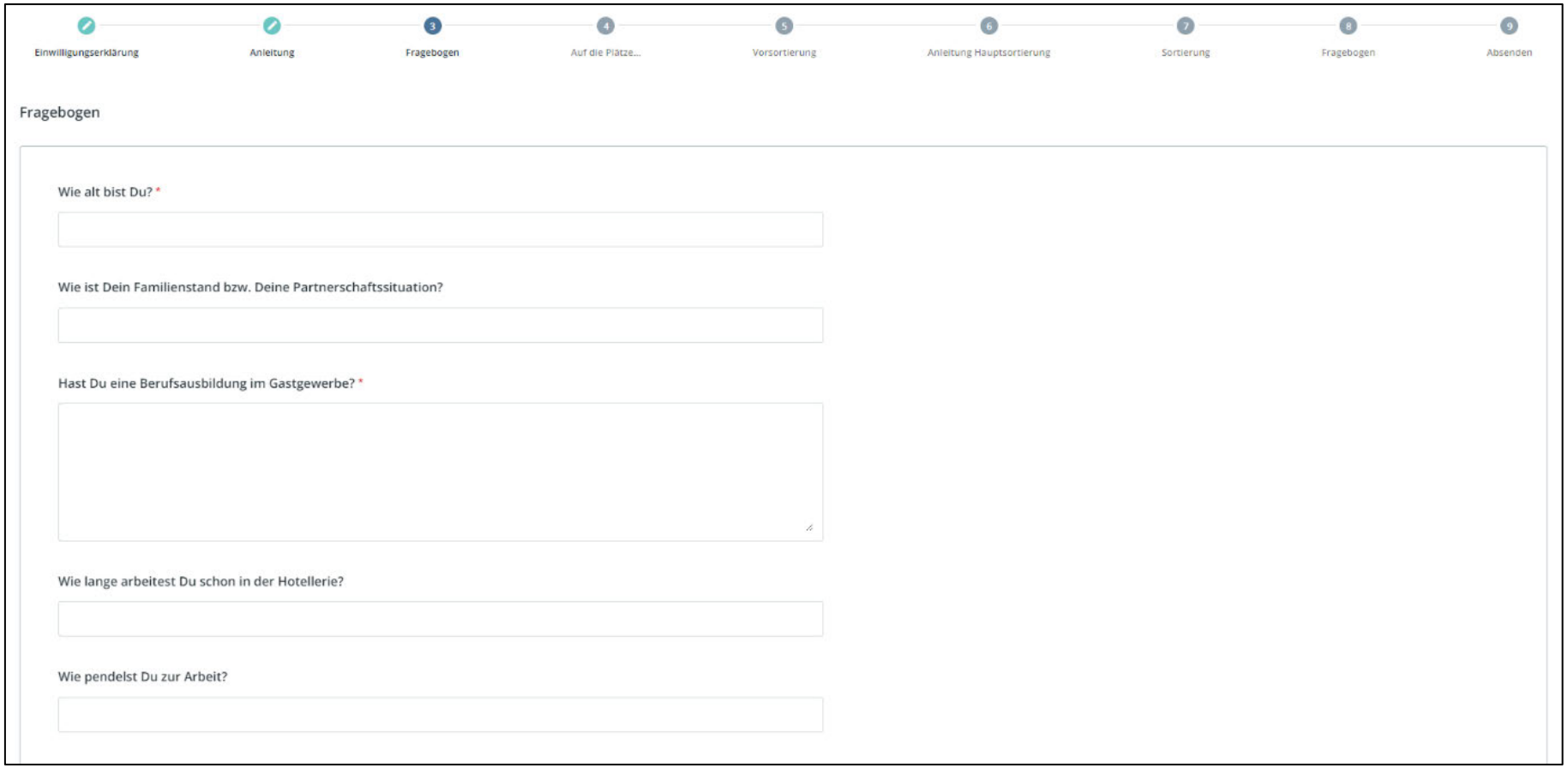
In der Auswertung werden die gruppierten Sortierungen dann präsentiert und interpretiert. Am Ende möchte ich dann unseren Arbeitgebern klare Hinweise darüber geben, welche Mitarbeiter welche Dinge von ihnen erwarten.

Viel Spaß und vielen Dank für Deine Hilfe!

-Chris



LOS GEHT'S!


Einwilligungserklärung
Anleitung
3
Fragebogen
4
Auf die Plätze...
5
Vorsortierung
6
Anleitung Hauptsortierung
7
Sortierung
8
Fragebogen
9
Absenden
Fragebogen
Wie alt bist Du? *
Wie ist Dein Familienstand bzw. Deine Partnerschaftssituation?
Hast Du eine Berufsausbildung im Gastgewerbe? *
Wie lange arbeitest Du schon in der Hotellerie?
Wie pendelst Du zur Arbeit?

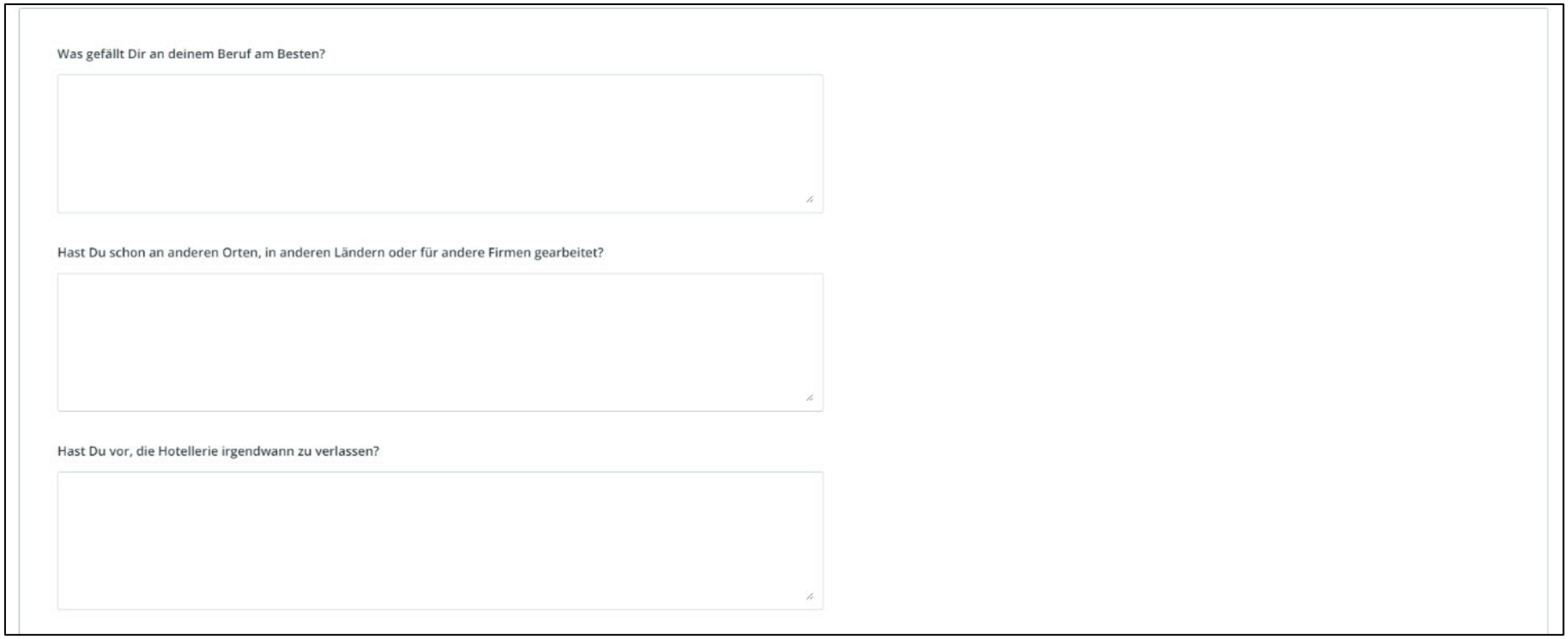
Haben sich Deine Prioritäten bezüglich der Arbeit durch die Corona-Pandemie verändert?

In welcher Lage befindet sich dein Hotel? *

In welcher Art Hotel arbeitest Du? *

Wem gehört Dein Hotel? *

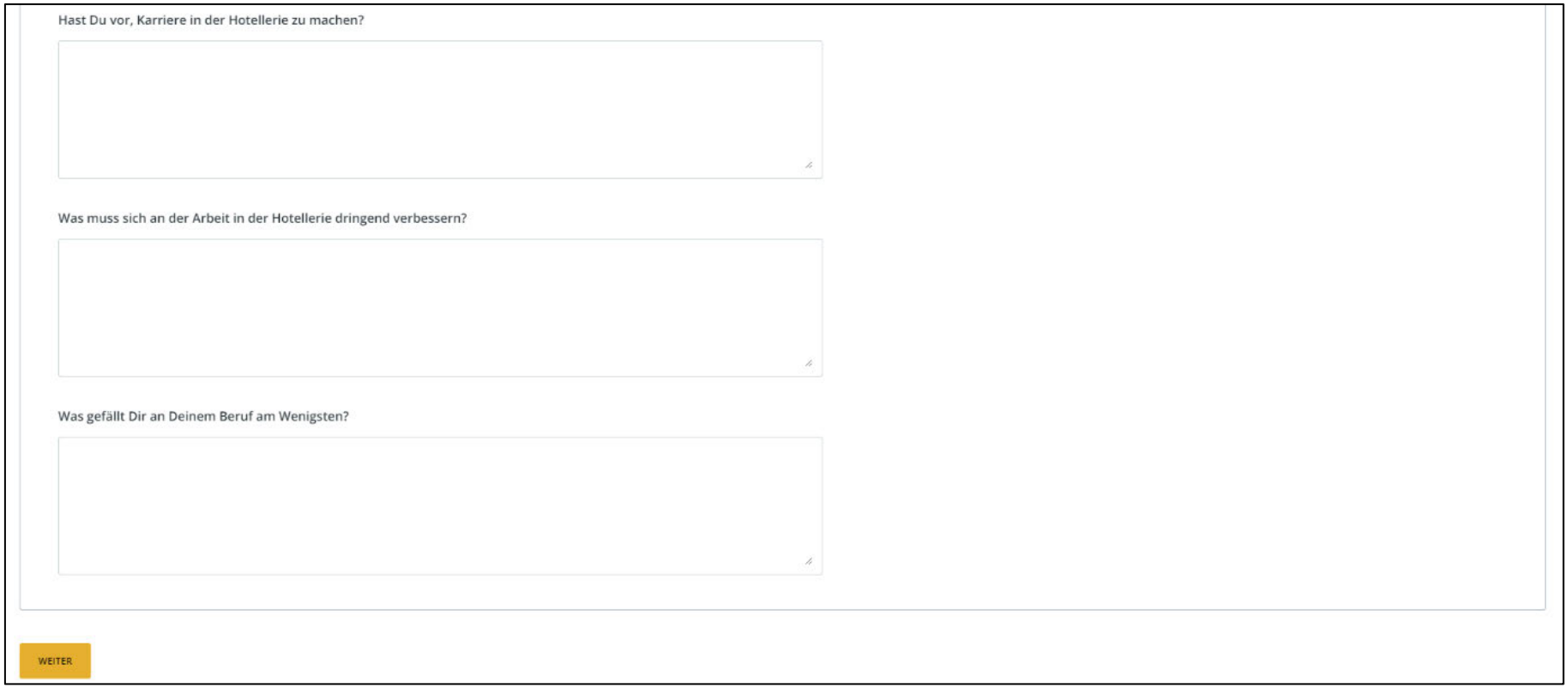
- ◯ Einem Unternehmen/Unternehmensgruppe
- ◯ Einer Hotelkette
- ◯ Privat geführt
- ◯ Institutionell (z.B. Verein)
- ◯ Andere



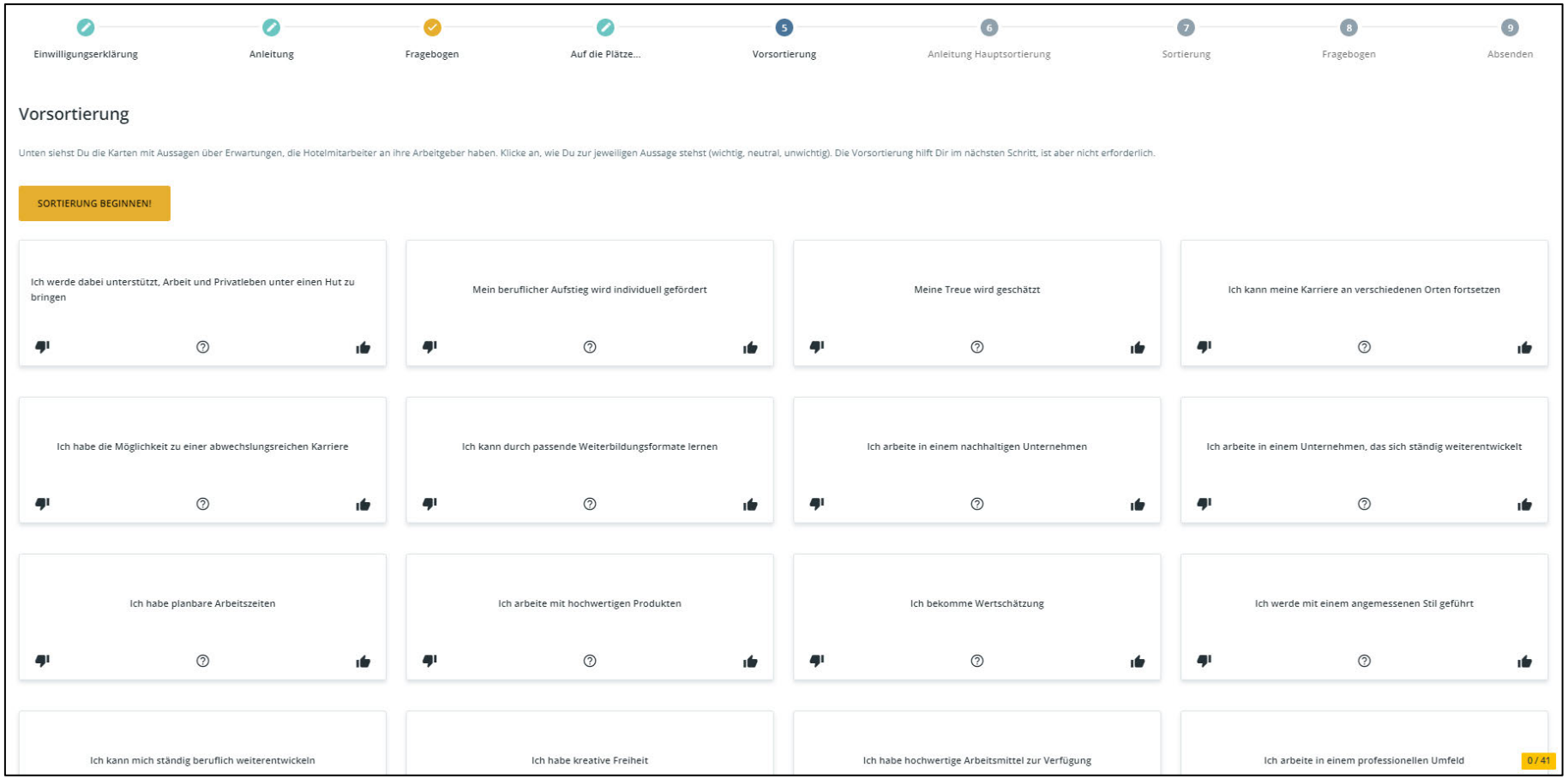
Was gefällt Dir an deinem Beruf am Besten?

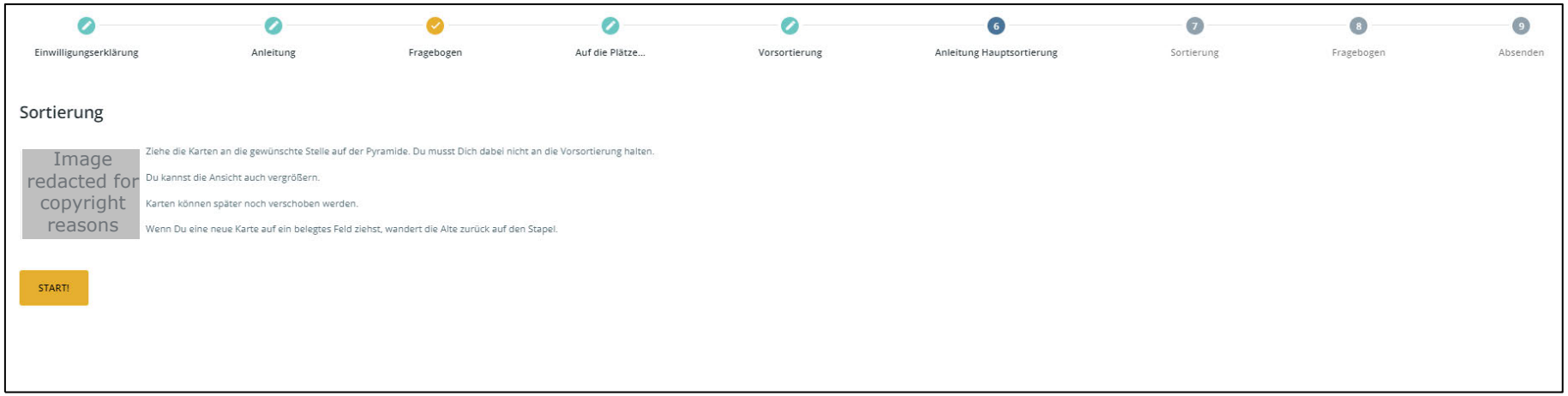
Hast Du schon an anderen Orten, in anderen Ländern oder für andere Firmen gearbeitet?

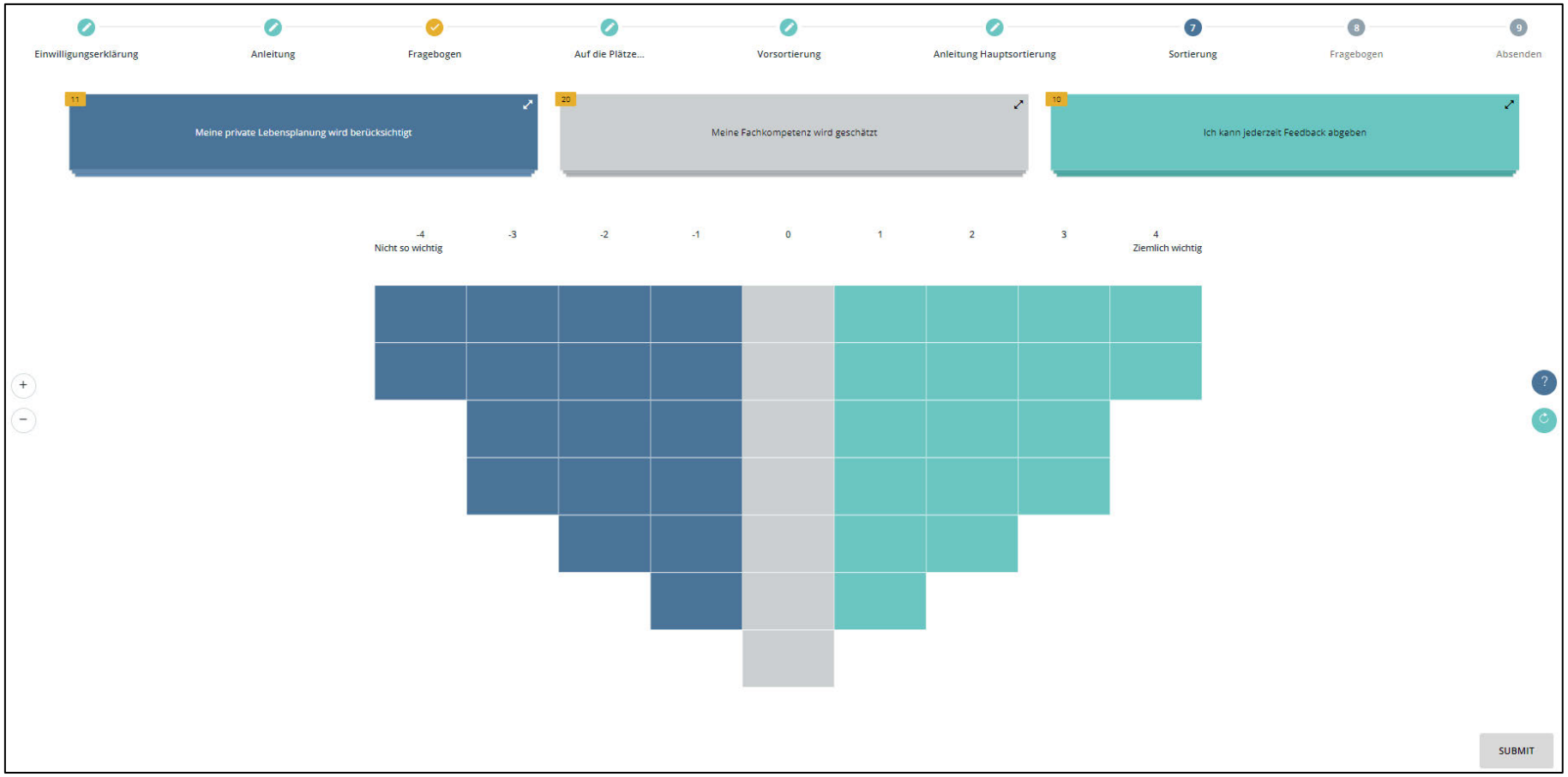
Hast Du vor, die Hotellerie irgendwann zu verlassen?

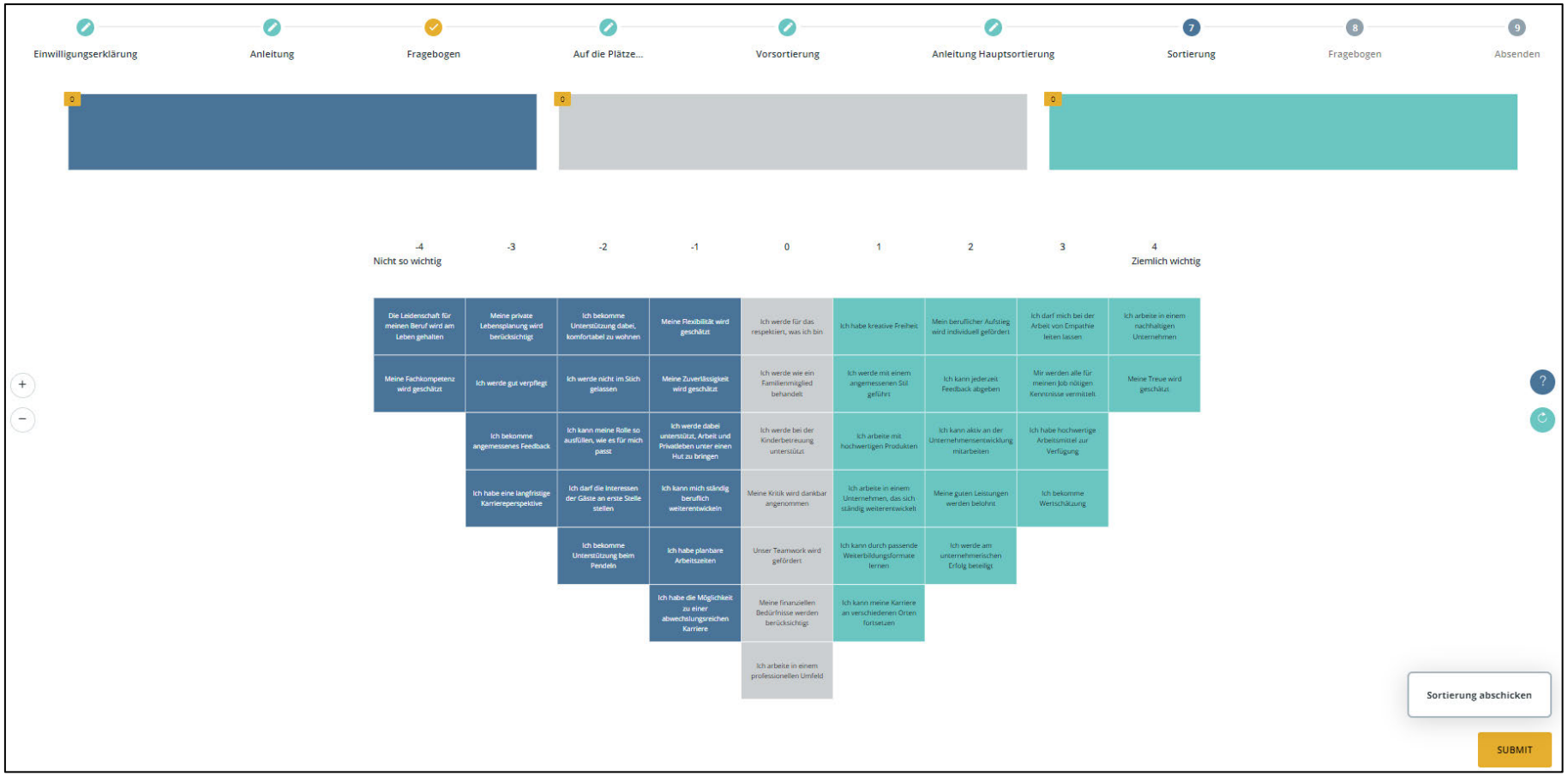

Hast Du vor, Karriere in der Hotellerie zu machen?
Was muss sich an der Arbeit in der Hotellerie dringend verbessern?
Was gefällt Dir an Deinem Beruf am Wenigsten?
WEITER

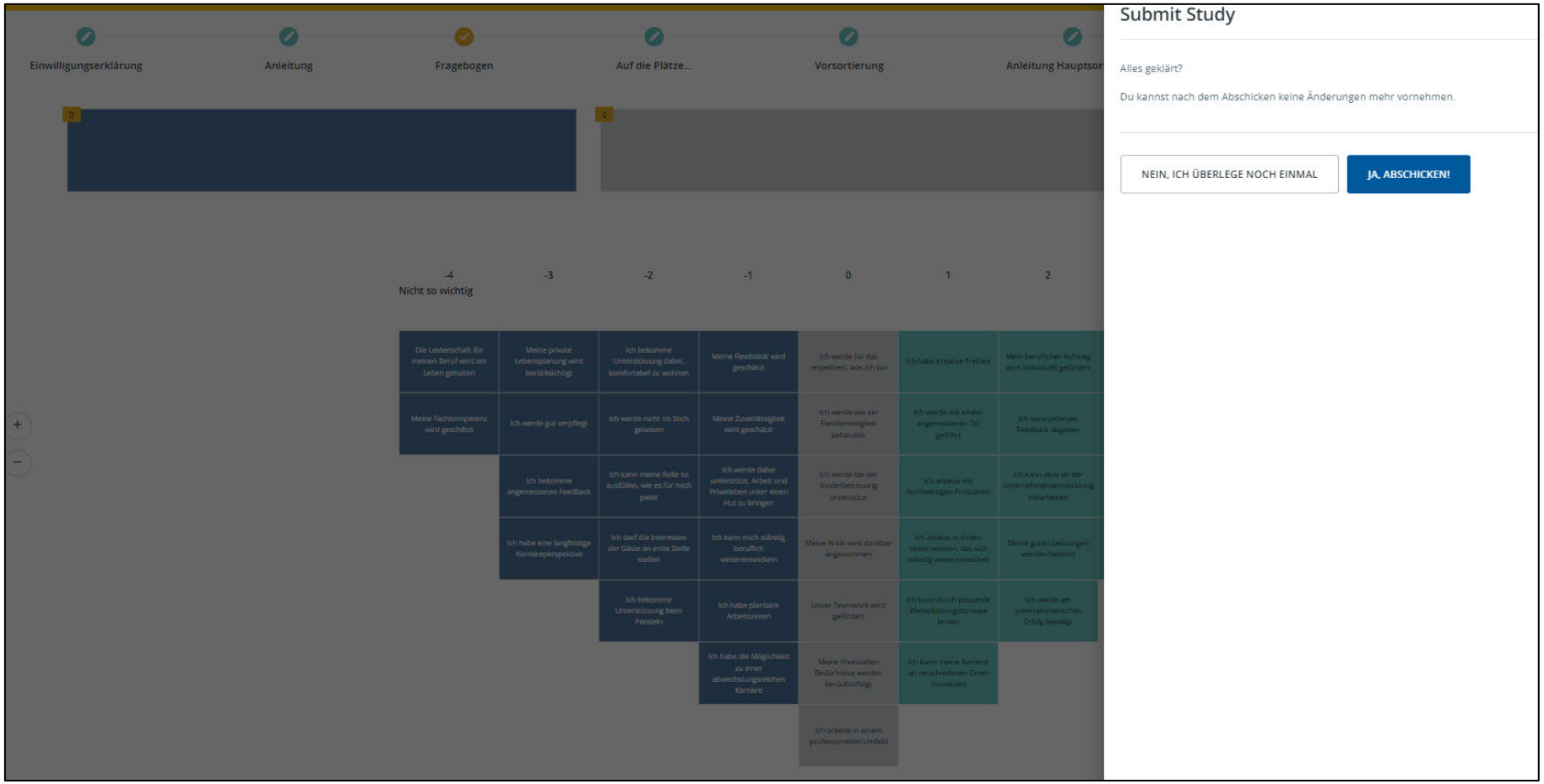

Einwilligungserklärung
Anleitung
Fragebogen
4
Auf die Plätze...
5
Vorsortierung
6
Anleitung Hauptsortierung
7
Sortierung
8
Fragebogen
9
Absenden
Freund: "Glaubst du, das arbeiten in der Gastro hat deine Persönlichkeit beeinflusst?"
Ich:
Image redacted for copyright reasons
BEREIT? BEREIT!

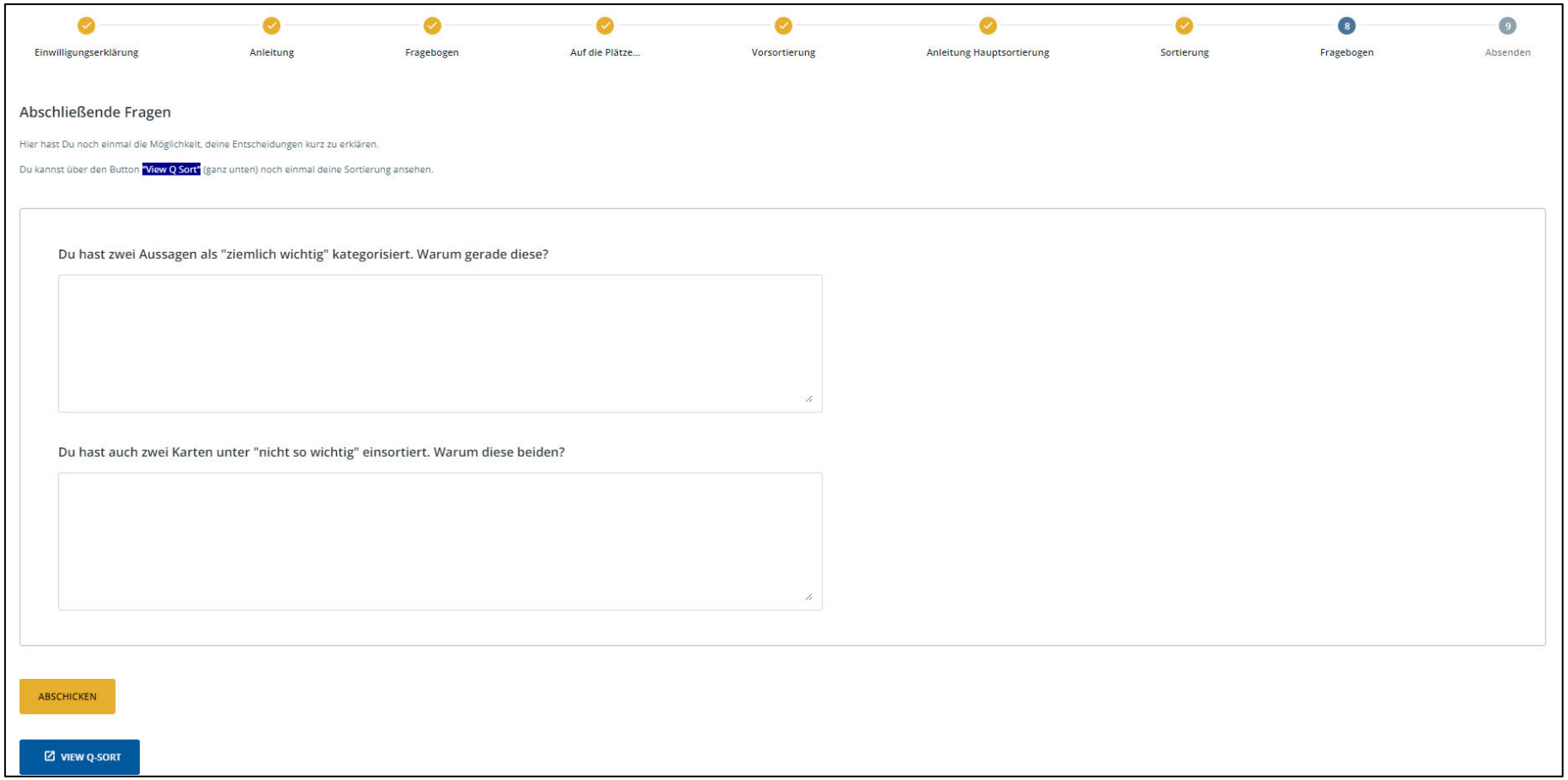

Einwilligungserklärung
Anleitung
Fragebogen
Auf die Plätze...
5
Vorsortierung
6
Anleitung Hauptsortierung
7
Sortierung
8
Fragebogen
9
Absenden
Vorsortierung
Unten siehst Du die Karten mit Aussagen über Erwartungen, die Hotelmitarbeiter an ihre Arbeitgeber haben. Klicke an, wie Du zur jeweiligen Aussage stehst (wichtig, neutral, unwichtig). Die Vorsortierung hilft Dir im nächsten Schritt, ist aber nicht erforderlich.
SORTIERUNG BEGINNEN!
Ich werde dabei unterstützt, Arbeit und Privatleben unter einen Hut zu bringen
Mein beruflicher Aufstieg wird individuell gefördert
Meine Treue wird geschätzt
Ich kann meine Karriere an verschiedenen Orten fortsetzen
Ich habe die Möglichkeit zu einer abwechslungsreichen Karriere
Ich kann durch passende Weiterbildungsformate lernen
Ich arbeite in einem nachhaltigen Unternehmen
Ich arbeite in einem Unternehmen, das sich ständig weiterentwickelt
Ich habe planbare Arbeitszeiten
Ich arbeite mit hochwertigen Produkten
Ich bekomme Wertschätzung
Ich werde mit einem angemessenen Stil geführt
Ich kann mich ständig beruflich weiterentwickeln
Ich habe kreative Freiheit
Ich habe hochwertige Arbeitsmittel zur Verfügung
Ich arbeite in einem professionellen Umfeld
0 / 41

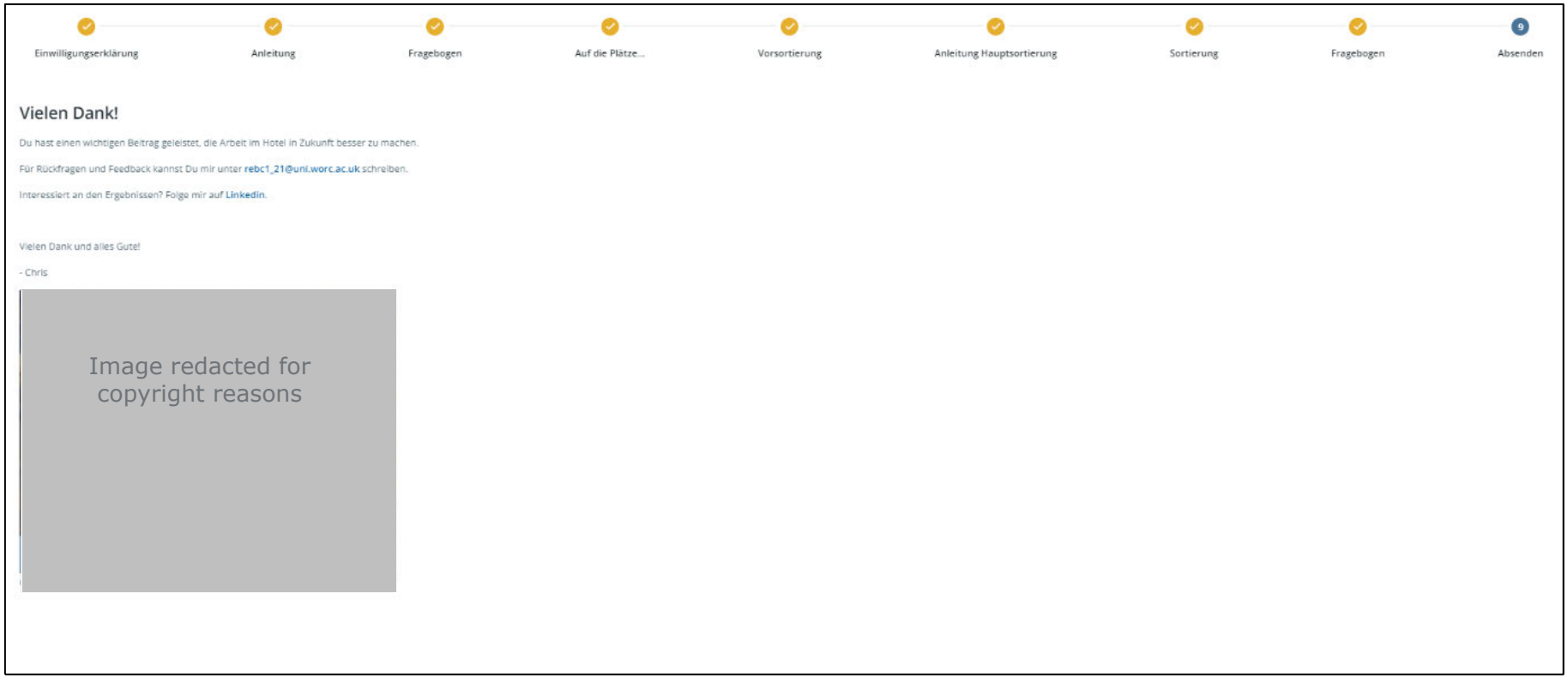

Einwilligungserklärung
Anleitung
Fragebogen
Auf die Plätze...
Vorsortierung
6
Anleitung Hauptsortierung
7
Sortierung
8
Fragebogen
9
Absenden
Sortierung
Image redacted for copyright reasons
Ziehe die Karten an die gewünschte Stelle auf der Pyramide. Du musst Dich dabei nicht an die Vorsortierung halten.
Du kannst die Ansicht auch vergrößern.
Karten können später noch verschoben werden.
Wenn Du eine neue Karte auf ein belegtes Feld ziehst, wandert die Alte zurück auf den Stapel.
START!


Einwilligungserklärung
Anleitung
Fragebogen
Auf die Plätze...
Vorsortierung
Anleitung Hauptsortierung
7
Sortierung
8
Fragebogen
9
Absenden
11
Meine private Lebensplanung wird berücksichtigt
20
Meine Fachkompetenz wird geschätzt
10
Ich kann jederzeit Feedback abgeben
-4
Nicht so wichtig
-3
-2
-1
0
1
2
3
4
Ziemlich wichtig
SUBMIT

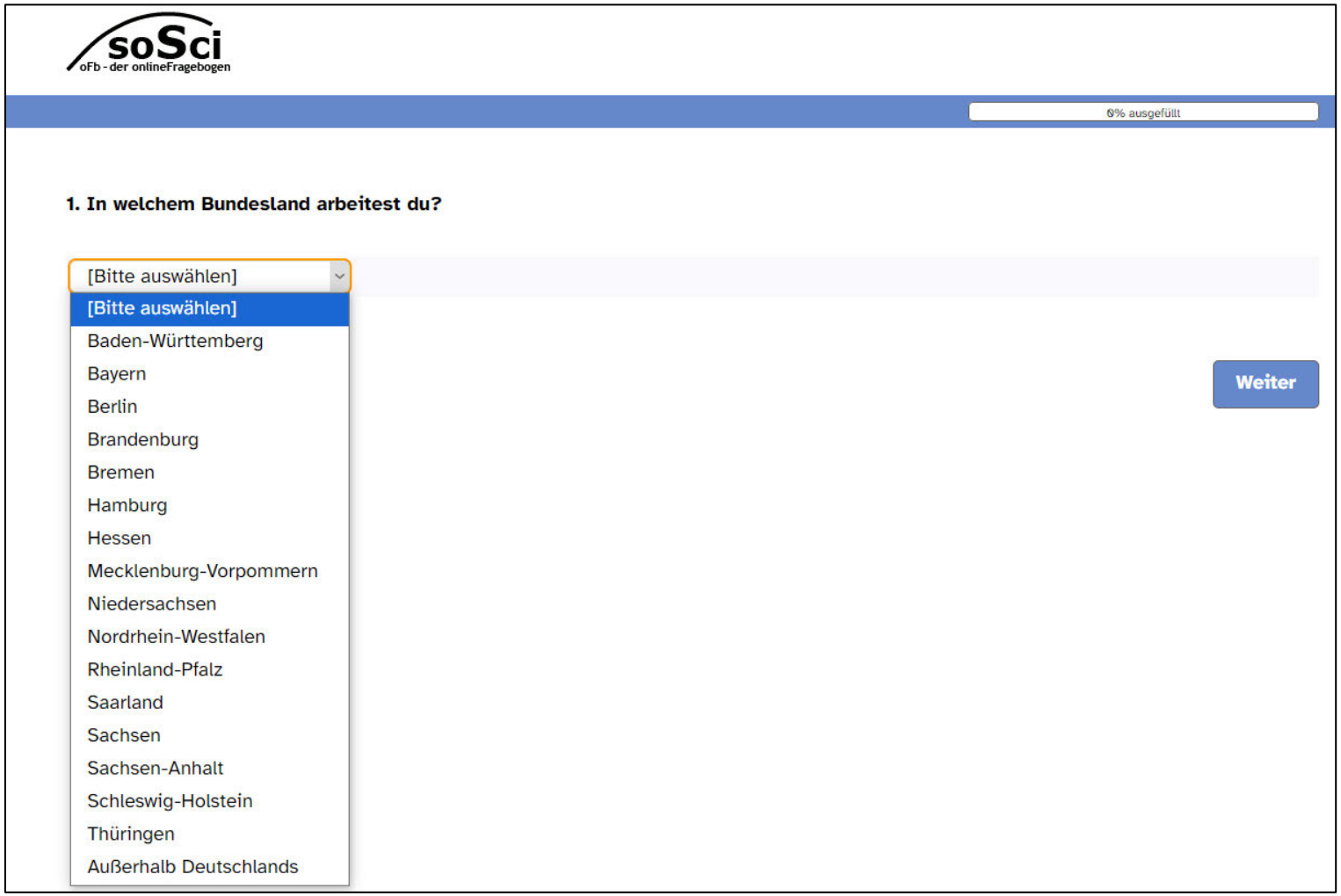

Einwilligungserklärung
Anleitung
Fragebogen
Auf die Plätze...
Vorsortierung
Anleitung Hauptsortierung
7
Sortierung
8
Fragebogen
9
Absenden
-4
Nicht so wichtig
-3
-2
-1
0
1
2
3
4
Ziemlich wichtig
Die Leidenschaft für meinen Beruf wird am Leben gehalten
Meine private Lebensplanung wird berücksichtigt
Ich bekomme Unterstützung dabei, komfortabel zu wohnen
Meine Flexibilität wird geschätzt
Ich werde für das respektiert, was ich bin
Ich habe kreative Freiheit
Mein beruflicher Aufstieg wird individuell gefördert
Ich darf mich bei der Arbeit von Empathie leiten lassen
Ich arbeite in einem nachhaltigen Unternehmen
Meine Fachkompetenz wird geschätzt
Ich werde gut verpflegt
Ich werde nicht im Stich gelassen
Meine Zuverlässigkeit wird geschätzt
Ich werde wie ein Familienmitglied behandelt
Ich werde mit einem angemessenen Stil geführt
Ich kann jederzeit Feedback abgeben
Mir werden alle für meinen Job nötigen Kenntnisse vermittelt
Meine Treue wird geschätzt
Ich bekomme angemessenes Feedback
Ich kann meine Rolle so ausfüllen, wie es für mich passt
Ich werde dabei unterstützt, Arbeit und Privatleben unter einen Hut zu bringen
Ich werde bei der Kinderbetreuung unterstützt
Ich arbeite mit hochwertigen Produkten
Ich kann aktiv an der Unternehmensentwicklung mitarbeiten
Ich habe hochwertige Arbeitsmittel zur Verfügung
Ich habe eine langfristige Karriereperspektive
Ich darf die Interessen der Gäste an erste Stelle stellen
Ich kann mich ständig beruflich weiterentwickeln
Meine Kritik wird dankbar angenommen
Ich arbeite in einem Unternehmen, das sich ständig weiterentwickelt
Meine guten Leistungen werden belohnt
Ich bekomme Wertschätzung
Ich bekomme Unterstützung beim Pendeln
Ich habe planbare Arbeitszeiten
Unser Teamwork wird gefördert
Ich kann durch passende Weiterbildungsformate lernen
Ich werde am unternehmerischen Erfolg beteiligt
Ich habe die Möglichkeit zu einer abwechslungsreichen Karriere
Meine finanziellen Bedürfnisse werden berücksichtigt
Ich kann meine Karriere an verschiedenen Orten fortsetzen
Ich arbeite in einem professionellen Umfeld
Sortierung abschicken
SUBMIT

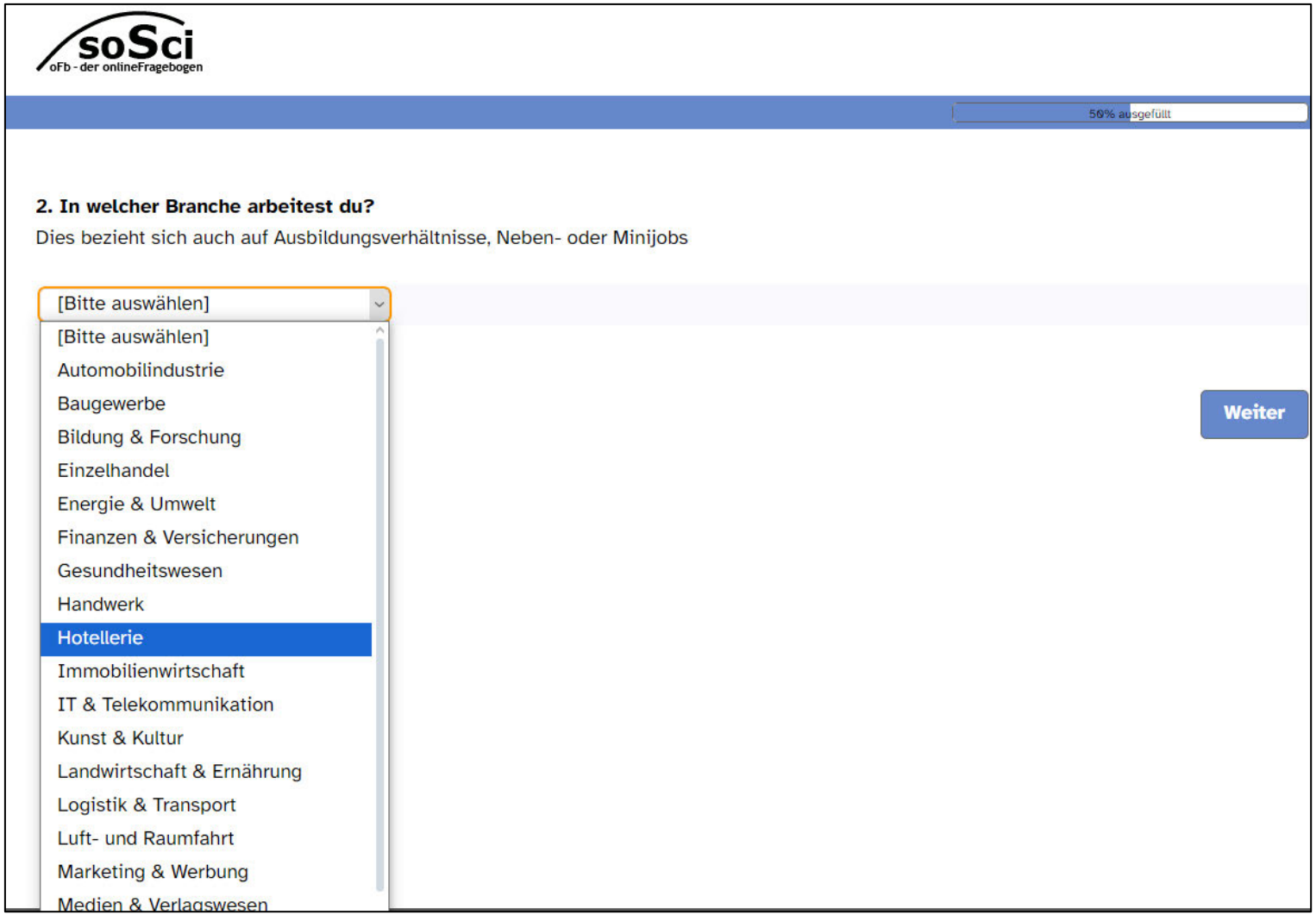

Einwilligungserklärung
Anleitung
Fragebogen
Auf die Plätze...
Vorsortierung
Anleitung Hauptsor
-4
Nicht so wichtig
-3
-2
-1
0
1
2
Die Leidenschaft für meinen Beruf wird am Leben gehalten
Meine private Lebensplanung wird berücksichtigt
Ich bekomme Unterstützung dabei, komfortabel zu wohnen
Meine Flexibilität wird geschätzt
Ich werde für das respektiert, was ich bin
Ich habe kreative Freiheit
Mein beruflicher Aufstieg wird individuell gefördert
Meine Fachkompetenz wird geschätzt
Ich werde gut verpflegt
Ich werde nicht im Stich gelassen
Meine Zuverlässigkeit wird geschätzt
Ich werde wie ein Familienmitglied behandelt
Ich werde mit einem angemessenen Stil geführt
Ich kann jederzeit Feedback abgeben
Ich bekomme angemessenes Feedback
Ich kann meine Rolle so ausfüllen, wie es für mich passt
Ich werde dabei unterstützt, Arbeit und Privatleben unter einen Hut zu bringen
Ich werde bei der Kinderbetreuung unterstützt
Ich arbeite mit hochwertigen Produkten
Ich kann aktiv an der Unternehmensentwicklung mitarbeiten
Ich habe eine langfristige Karriereperspektive
Ich darf die Interessen der Gäste an erste Stelle stellen
Ich kann mich ständig beruflich weiterentwickeln
Meine Kritik wird dankbar angenommen
Ich arbeite in einem Unternehmen, das sich ständig weiterentwickelt
Meine guten Leistungen werden belohnt
Ich bekomme Unterstützung beim Pendeln
Ich habe planbare Arbeitszeiten
Unser Teamwork wird gefördert
Ich kann durch passende Weiterbildungsformate lernen
Ich werde am unternehmerischen Erfolg beteiligt
Ich habe die Möglichkeit zu einer abwechslungsreichen Karriere
Meine finanziellen Bedürfnisse werden berücksichtigt
Ich kann meine Karriere an verschiedenen Orten fortsetzen
Ich arbeite in einem professionellen Umfeld
Submit Study
Alles geklärt?
Du kannst nach dem Abschicken keine Änderungen mehr vornehmen.
NEIN, ICH ÜBERLEGE NOCH EINMAL
JA, ABSCHICKEN!


Einwilligungserklärung
Anleitung
Fragebogen
Auf die Plätze...
Vorsortierung
Anleitung Hauptsortierung
Sortierung
8
Fragebogen
9
Absenden
Abschließende Fragen
Hier hast Du noch einmal die Möglichkeit, deine Entscheidungen kurz zu erklären.
Du kannst über den Button "View Q Sort" (ganz unten) noch einmal deine Sortierung ansehen.
Du hast zwei Aussagen als "ziemlich wichtig" kategorisiert. Warum gerade diese?
Du hast auch zwei Karten unter "nicht so wichtig" einsortiert. Warum diese beiden?
ABSCHICKEN
VIEW Q-SORT

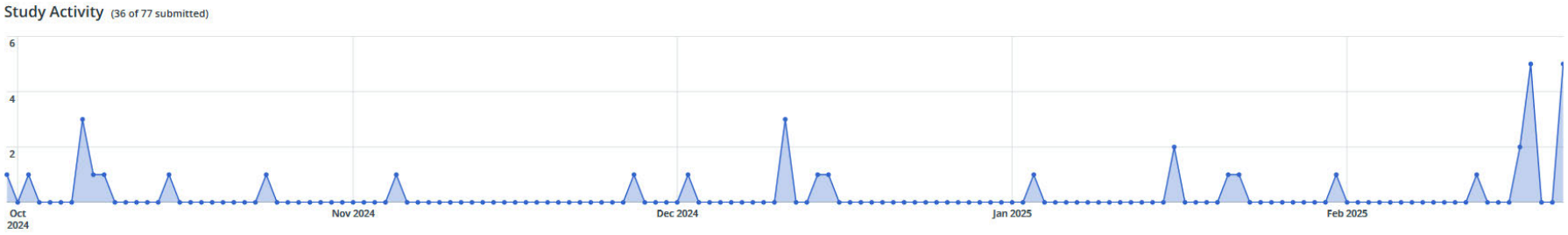

Einwilligungserklärung
Anleitung
Fragebogen
Auf die Plätze...
Vorsortierung
Anleitung Hauptsortierung
Sortierung
Fragebogen
9
Absenden
Vielen Dank!
Du hast einen wichtigen Beitrag geleistet, die Arbeit im Hotel in Zukunft besser zu machen.
Für Rückfragen und Feedback kannst Du mir unter rebc1_21@uni.worc.ac.uk schreiben.
Interessiert an den Ergebnissen? Folge mir auf Linkedin.
Vielen Dank und alles Gute!
- Chris
Image redacted for copyright reasons

7.2.7 Screening Questionnaire




soSci
oFb - der onlineFragebogen
50% ausgefüllt
2. In welcher Branche arbeitest du?
Dies bezieht sich auch auf Ausbildungsverhältnisse, Neben- oder Minijobs
[Bitte auswählen]
[Bitte auswählen]
Automobilindustrie
Baugewerbe
Bildung & Forschung
Einzelhandel
Energie & Umwelt
Finanzen & Versicherungen
Gesundheitswesen
Handwerk
Hotellerie
Immobilienwirtschaft
IT & Telekommunikation
Kunst & Kultur
Landwirtschaft & Ernährung
Logistik & Transport
Luft- und Raumfahrt
Marketing & Werbung
Medien & Verlagswesen
Weiter

7.2.8 Timeline of Q Sort Submissions



7.3 Appendix: Data Analysis

7.3.1 Unrotated Factors

Table 26: Characteristics of unrotated factors

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
Eigenvalue	5.56979	2.17368	2.51579	1.46558	1.94518	1.44573	1.33867
% Explained Variance	15.47164	6.03801	6.9883	4.07104	5.40328	4.01592	3.71853
Cumulative Variance	15.47164	21.50965	28.49795	32.56899	37.97227	41.9882	45.70673
Humphrey's Rule	0.43859	0.24718	0.35184	0.13759	0.22743	0.12921	0.15658
Standard Error	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
Retained	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No

Figure 23: Scree plot of unrotated factors

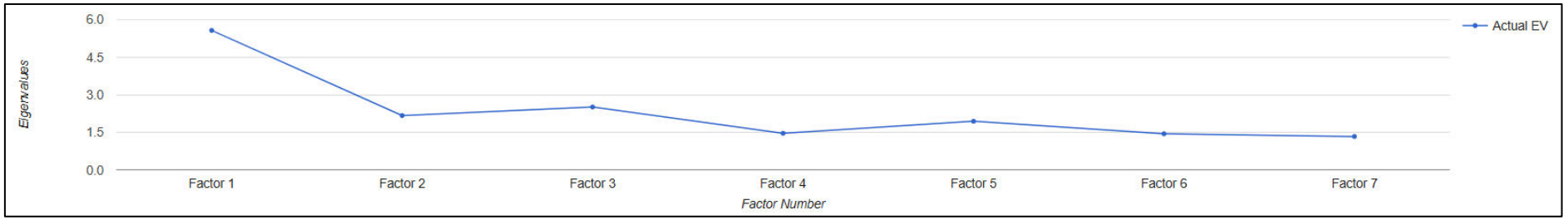


Table 27: Number of significant factor loadings depending on cutoff criteria for significance

Cutoff	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7
0.30	21	9	8	7	6	3	3
0.40	17	3	4	0	3	0	1
0.50	10	1	2	0	1	0	0
Weighted Average	0.38	0.34	0.36	0.30	0.35	0.30	0.33

7.3.2 Factor 1

Table 28: Questionnaire responses of flagged participants for factor 1

Participant	89IZ	3IPE	Z4CF
Factor loading	0.52384	-0.42751	0.55374
How old are you?	35	21	26
Do you have a completed vocational training or other professional/academic qualification in hospitality?	Yes	Yes	No
What is your relationship status?	In a relationship	Single	Single
How long have you been working in hospitality?	2 years	3 years	1 year
Have you worked in other places, other countries or for other companies before?	Unfortunately not yet	Not yet	No
What do you like most about your job?	The human contact	The variety of tasks	The routine, I always know exactly what to expect
What do you like least about your job?	The working times	The many annoying guests	Remuneration
Have your priorities regarding work changed because of	No	No	No

the Covid-19 pandemic?			
Do you plan to leave the hospitality industry someday?	No plan to do so	Not at the moment	Yes
Are you planning on advancing your career in hospitality?	Yes that would be my dream	yes	No
What type of location is your hotel in?	City Centre	City Centre	Train Station (City Centre)
What kind of hotel do you work in?	4 star hotel, B&B	Normal hotel (mid range)	3 Star
Who owns your hotel?	chain	private	Private
How do you commute to work?	Bicycle	Car	Train
What needs to change about work in hotels?	<no answer>	remuneration	remuneration

Table 29: Distinguishing statements for factor 1

#	Statement
4	My criticism is received gratefully
5	My professional expertise is valued
8	I work in a professional environment
14	I receive appropriate feedback
21	I have the opportunity to have a varied career
35	I can continuously develop myself professionally
36	I receive support for taking care of my children

Table 30: Crib Sheet for factor 1

Items ranked at +4	
8	I work in a professional environment
31	I am treated like a family member
Items ranked higher than in other factors	
8	I work in a professional environment
9	I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy
13	I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development
29	I receive high-quality meals
31	I am treated like a family member
34	I get to work with high-quality products
36	I receive support for taking care of my children
41	I enjoy creative freedom
Items ranked lower than in other factors	
4	My criticism is received gratefully
5	My professional expertise is valued
6	I am being valued
10	My passion for my profession is being kept alive
11	I am respected for who I am
14	I receive appropriate feedback
17	I am not left hanging
18	My good performance is rewarded
20	I am being managed with a suitable leadership style
26	I receive support for my commute to work
27	My flexibility is valued
30	My loyalty is valued
32	I can continue my career in different places
35	I can continuously develop myself professionally
Items ranked at -4	
32	I can continue my career in different places
35	I can continuously develop myself professionally

7.3.3 Factor 2

Table 31: Questionnaire responses of flagged participants for factor 2

Participant	0Q40	DBMN	DEL3	F5U9	KR2D
Factor loading	0.75608	0.59017	0.59802	0.41768	0.6679
How old are you?	38	21	27	57	58
Do you have a completed vocational training or other professional/academic qualification in hospitality?	No	Vocational	Vocational	Yes	Vocational, but different industry
What is your relationship status?	"Parto" <unclear>	Single	In a relationship	married	Single
How long have you been working in hospitality?	3 years	4 years	7 years	5 years	26 years
Have you worked in other places, other countries or for other companies before?	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
What do you like most about your job?	Working with people	The interaction with many different people	Variety and opportunities	Contact with people	Variety of challenges
What do you like least about your job?	Too little free time	Working times	Bad leadership	Working on weekends	Handling problems that could be avoided by being proactive

Have your priorities regarding work changed because of the Covid-19 pandemic?	No	No	No	No	Concern about job security during crisis
Do you plan to leave the hospitality industry someday?	Unsure	Yes	Unsure	No	Probably, depends on whether the working conditions improve
Are you planning on advancing your career in hospitality?	Unsure	Unsure	Yes	No	Yes, given the opportunity
What type of location is your hotel in?	Forest (rural)	In a marina (coastal/island)	Coastal	Rural	City Centre
What kind of hotel do you work in?	Hotel near a lake (leisure)	Resort	Lifestyle resort	Family hotel	5 Star luxury hotel
Who owns your hotel?	private	chain	corporate	private	Chain
How do you commute to work?	Bicycle	Car	Car	Car	Car
What needs to change about work in hotels?	Remuneration	Remuneration in accordance to workload	Remuneration and plannable working times	Less bureaucracy	Recognition, which leads to better work performance

Table 32: Distinguishing statements for factor 2

#	Statement
2	I receive support for reconciling work and personal life
22	I have high-quality tools at my disposal
33	I have long-term career prospects

Table 33: Crib Sheet for factor 2

Items ranked at +4	
6	I am being valued
24	I am being taught all skills necessary for my job
Items ranked higher than in other factors	
2	I receive support for reconciling work and personal life
3	My reliability is valued
6	I am being valued
15	I can provide feedback any time
22	I have high-quality tools at my disposal
24	I am being taught all skills necessary for my job
29	I receive high-quality meals
30	My loyalty is valued
Items ranked lower than in other factors	
12	I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me
21	I have the opportunity to have a varied career
23	I get to learn through suitable training formats
31	I am treated like a family member
33	I have long-term career prospects
38	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work
Items ranked at -4	
31	I am treated like a family member
33	I have long-term career prospects

7.3.4 Factor 3

Table 34: Questionnaire responses of flagged participants for factor 3

Participant	5GL4	94H3	9FL1	KLEL	O74M	YZA0
Factor loading	0.50211	0.50156	0.56519	0.36289	0.57975	0.55213
How old are you?	45	40	37	41	24	44
Do you have a completed vocational training or other professional/academic qualification in hospitality?	Yes, advanced vocational	Yes	Yes	Advanced vocational	Academic	No
What is your relationship status?	Married	In a committed relationship	Married	Single	Single	Committed relationship with child
How long have you been working in hospitality?	14 years	24 years	21 years	15 years	10 years	3 years
Have you worked in other places, other countries or for other companies before?	Yes, two years in England	Yes	Yes	Yes in various companies and in Switzerland	Yes, internships and part-time work	Yes
What do you like most about your job?	Everyday is different and I get to meet people	Variety and hospitality	Everything	Teamwork	Teamwork and delivering memorable holidays	Working with guests
What do you like least about your job?	Unfriendly and arrogant guests	Being expected to expend everything for profit	Nothing	Poor onboarding and bad leadership	Nothing	Lack of flexibility due to permanent

		but not receiving fair rewards in return				staffing shortage
Have your priorities regarding work changed because of the Covid-19 pandemic?	No	Yes	No	More awareness for taking personal time (WLB), would like to work remotely more	No	Wishes for less administrative (desk) work
Do you plan to leave the hospitality industry someday?	No	Yes	No	Yes, wants to be self-employed as a service provider for hotels	No	Yes, if things do not improve
Are you planning on advancing your career in hospitality?	No, happy with current position	Not anymore	Yes	No, but wants international experience	Yes!	Yes
What type of location is your hotel in?	Small town (rural)	B location (rural)	Coastal	Coastal	City	Coastal
What kind of hotel do you work in?	Small family hotel	3 Stars	Leisure Hotel	Conference and leisure hotel	Multi brand operator	4 Star leisure hotel
Who owns your hotel?	Private	Private	Private	Corporate	Other	Corporate
How do you commute to work?	Bus	Car	Car	Car and Train	Car	Car or Bicycle
What needs to change about work in hotels?	More staff, less work	Working times and remuneration	Working times and remuneration	Good onboarding, recognition,	Recognition and remuneration	More targeted recruiting leading to

	load, better pay	respect for break times, healthy food and professional development	better perspectives for all

Table 35: Distinguishing statements for factor 3

#	Statement
25	My financial needs are being taken into account

Table 36: Crib Sheet for factor 3

Items ranked at +4	
7	My professional advancement is individually supported
18	My good performance is rewarded
Items ranked higher than in other factors	
1	I have plannable working times
7	My professional advancement is individually supported
16	My personal life plan is being taken into account
18	My good performance is rewarded
19	I work in a company which consistently evolves
25	My financial needs are being taken into account
39	I get to participate in the business success
Items ranked lower than in other factors	
3	My reliability is valued
9	I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy
12	I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me
15	I can provide feedback any time
21	I have the opportunity to have a varied career
24	I am being taught all skills necessary for my job
31	I am treated like a family member
38	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work
40	I work in a sustainable organization
Items ranked at -4	
31	I am treated like a family member
40	I work in a sustainable organization

7.3.5 Factor 4a

Table 37: Questionnaire responses of flagged participants for factor 4a

Participant	AM0C	V0XG	Ro5Z
Factor loading	0.42583	0.44701	0.48111
How old are you?	25	46	55
Do you have a completed vocational training or other professional/academic qualification in hospitality?	Yes, vocational	Vocational	No
What is your relationship status?	Single	In a relationship	Married
How long have you been working in hospitality?	6 years	3 years	2 months
Have you worked in other places, other countries or for other companies before?	Yes	Yes, but not other countries	Yes
What do you like most about your job?	The opportunity to work freely	Creatively implementing own ideas	The variety of tasks
What do you like least about your job?	Remuneration	Nothing	The guests one is unable to satisfy
Have your priorities regarding work changed because of	No	No	No

the Covid-19 pandemic?			
Do you plan to leave the hospitality industry someday?	No	No	No
Are you planning on advancing your career in hospitality?	Yes	No	No, satisfied with how things are
What type of location is your hotel in?	Coastal	Coastal	Central (City)
What kind of hotel do you work in?	Lifestyle/Spa hotel	Bio hotel	3 Star garni
Who owns your hotel?	Corporate	Private	Private
How do you commute to work?	Car	Bicycle	Car
What needs to change about work in hotels?	Remuneration and recognition	Nothing at the moment	Unable to comment

Table 38: Distinguishing statements for factor 4a

#	Statement
4	My criticism is received gratefully
14	I receive appropriate feedback
16	My personal life plan is being taken into account
25	My financial needs are being taken into account
38	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work

Table 39: Crib Sheet for factor 4a

Items ranked at +4	
4	My criticism is received gratefully
14	I receive appropriate feedback
Items ranked higher than in other factors	
4	My criticism is received gratefully
5	My professional expertise is valued
9	I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy
14	I receive appropriate feedback
17	I am not left hanging
20	I am being managed with a suitable leadership style
26	I receive support for my commute to work
37	I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay
38	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work
39	I get to participate in the business success
41	I enjoy creative freedom
Items ranked lower than in other factors	
1	I have plannable working times
3	My reliability is valued
7	My professional advancement is individually supported
8	I work in a professional environment
21	I have the opportunity to have a varied career
22	I have high-quality tools at my disposal
25	My financial needs are being taken into account
27	My flexibility is valued
32	I can continue my career in different places
34	I get to work with high-quality products
Items ranked at -4	
22	I have high-quality tools at my disposal
32	I can continue my career in different places

7.3.6 Factor 4b

Table 40: Questionnaire responses of flagged participants for factor 4b

Participant	TF1G	VHB5	YUFQ
Factor loading	0.66143	0.43519	0.64817
How old are you?	27	52	20
Do you have a completed vocational training or other professional/academic qualification in hospitality?	Academic	Vocational	Currently in vocational training
What is your relationship status?	Single	In a relationship	In a relationship
How long have you been working in hospitality?	5 years	28 years	1 year
Have you worked in other places, other countries or for other companies before?	Yes	Yes	No
What do you like most about your job?	The variety and the development opportunities	Variety, guest contact, flexibility	Flexibility
What do you like least about your job?	Shift work and stress	Nothing basic	Working times and remuneration
Have your priorities regarding work	< no answer >	Not noteworthily	< no answer >

changed because of the Covid-19 pandemic?			
Do you plan to leave the hospitality industry someday?	No	Not noteworthily	No
Are you planning on advancing your career in hospitality?	Yes, wants to advance quickly	Yes	Yes, wants to experience a lot
What type of location is your hotel in?	City Centre	Rural, village	Rural, village
What kind of hotel do you work in?	International chain limited-service hotel	3 Stars	Small hotel garni
Who owns your hotel?	Corporate	Private	Private
How do you commute to work?	Municipal train	Bicycle	Car
What needs to change about work in hotels?	Empowerment	Remuneration must improve, the union should be more active, a vocational master's degree should become requirement for holding leadership positions	Leadership is not good

Table 41: Distinguishing statements for factor 4b

#	Statement
2	I receive support for reconciling work and personal life
21	I have the opportunity to have a varied career
28	Our team work is encouraged and supported
32	I can continue my career in different places
35	I can continuously develop myself professionally

Table 42: Crib Sheet for factor 4b

Items ranked at +4	
7	My professional advancement is individually supported
21	I have the opportunity to have a varied career
Items ranked higher than in other factors	
5	My professional expertise is valued
7	My professional advancement is individually supported
10	My passion for my profession is being kept alive
21	I have the opportunity to have a varied career
23	I get to learn through suitable training formats
32	I can continue my career in different places
33	I have long-term career prospects
35	I can continuously develop myself professionally
40	I work in a sustainable organization
Items ranked lower than in other factors	
2	I receive support for reconciling work and personal life
12	I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me
26	I receive support for my commute to work
28	Our team work is encouraged and supported
29	I receive high-quality meals
36	I receive support for taking care of my children
37	I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay
38	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work
41	I enjoy creative freedom
Items ranked at -4	
36	I receive support for taking care of my children
37	I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay

7.3.7 Factor 5

Table 43: Questionnaire responses of flagged participants for factor 5

Participant	1Z0R	E6BN	GN59	ZA8F
Factor loading	0.57379	0.38986	0.56552	0.41712
How old are you?	24	19	35	24
Do you have a completed vocational training or other professional/academic qualification in hospitality?	Academic	Currently in vocational apprenticeship	Yes	Yes
What is your relationship status?	Single	Single	Single	Partnership
How long have you been working in hospitality?	8 years	1 year	17 years	3.5 years
Have you worked in other places, other countries or for other companies before?	Yes, including cruise ships	No	Yes	Yes
What do you like most about your job?	Guest contact and variety	Contact with people	International opportunities	Travelling and guest contact
What do you like least about your job?	Remuneration	Working times	Increased workload	Working times
Have your priorities regarding work changed because of the Covid-19 pandemic?	No	No	Yes, increasingly striving for work-life-balance	No

Do you plan to leave the hospitality industry someday?	No	Yes	Yes, because of the changed working conditions	Yes
Are you planning on advancing your career in hospitality?	Yes	Yes	No steps planned at the moment	Yes
What type of location is your hotel in?	City Centre	City	< did not answer question >	City
What kind of hotel do you work in?	Premium chain	Conference hotel	Premium business hotel	Lifestyle 4 Star superior
Who owns your hotel?	Chain	Private	Other	Chain
How do you commute to work?	Subway	Car	Public Transport	Public Transport
What needs to change about work in hotels?	Remuneration, digitalization, flexibility	The interaction and demeanour between colleagues	Working times, and fixing the labour shortage	No more short-notice changes of working times

Table 44: Distinguishing statements for factor 5

#	Statement
13	I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development
16	My personal life plan is taken into account
21	I have the opportunity to have a varied career
32	I can continue my career in different places

Table 45: Crib Sheet for factor 5

Items ranked at +4	
12	I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me
28	Our team work is encouraged and supported
Items ranked higher than in other factors	
1	I have plannable working times
3	My reliability is valued
11	I am respected for who I am
12	I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me
20	I am being managed with a suitable leadership style
27	My flexibility is valued
28	Our team work is encouraged and supported
33	I have long-term career prospects
Items ranked lower than in other factors	
10	My passion for my profession is being kept alive
13	I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development
15	I can provide feedback any time
16	My personal life plan is being taken into account
18	My good performance is rewarded
19	I work in a company which consistently evolves
30	My loyalty is valued
36	I receive support for taking care of my children
38	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work
Items ranked at -4	
19	I work in a company which consistently evolves
36	I receive support for taking care of my children

7.3.8 Affiliation of all Participants by Viewpoint

Table 46: Affiliation of all participants by viewpoint

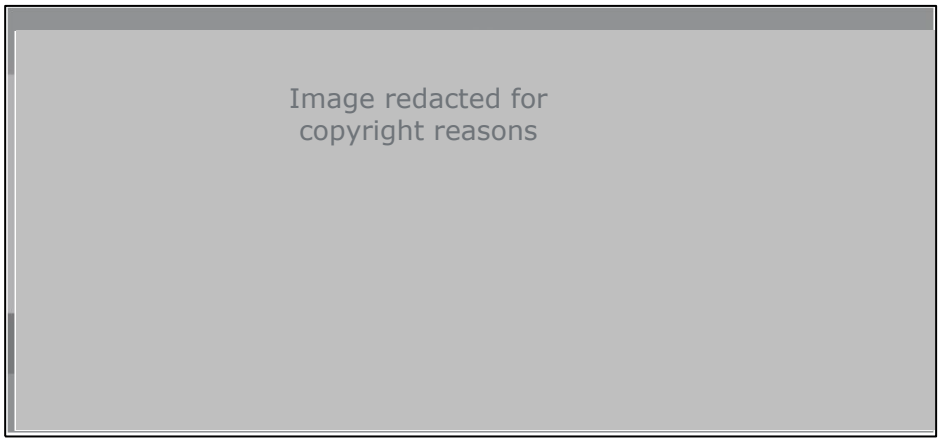
Participant	Primary Viewpoint (flagged or highest loading)	Secondary VP	Age (yrs)	Tenure (yrs)	Qualification	Marital Status
89IZ	1	/	35	2	Yes	In relationship
Z4CF	1	/	26	1	No	Single
3IPE	2	8	21	3	Yes	Single
0Q40	3	/	38	3	No	"Parto"
DBMN	3	/	21	4	Yes	Single
DEL3	3	/	27	7	Yes	In relationship
DXFX	3	/	33	14	Yes	Single
F5U9	3	/	57	5	Yes	Married
KR2D	3	/	58	26	Yes, other profession	Single
5GL4	4	3	45	14	Advanced vocational	Married
94H3	4	3	40	24	Yes	In relationship
9FL1	4	6	37	21	Yes	Married
FTN0	4	/	41	24	Yes	Married
HIUV	4	/	26	8	Yes	Single
JRJA	4	3	34	1	Yes	In relationship
KLEL	4	/	41	15	Yes	Single
O74M	4	/	24	10	Dual university education	Single
YZA0	4	/	44	> 3	No	Relationship with child

Participant	Primary Viewpoint	Secondary VP	Age (yrs)	Tenure (yrs)	Qualification	Marital Status
AM0C	5	/	25	6	Yes	Single
V0XG	5	4/8	46	3	Yes	In relationship
RO5Z	5	7	55	0.17	No	Married
SY2N	5	/	28	10	Yes	Single
TMUK	5	7	55	0.17	No	Married
TF1G	6	/	27	5	University	Single
UHF3	6	4	31	10	University – Master	Single
VHB5	6	/	52	28	Yes	In relationship
YUFQ	6	4/8	20	1	In apprenticeship	In relationship
0U5C	7	4	53	0.5	No	Married
1Z0R	7	/	24	8	Dual university education	Single
E6BN	7	/	19	1	In apprenticeship	Single
GKQP	7	3	46	ca. 20	University education	Married
GN59	7	/	35	17	Yes	Single
UC7W	7	3	21	5	In university	Single
ZA8F	7	4	24	3.5	Yes	In relationship
707B	8	/	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
SH22	/	8	42	7	Management	Single

7.4 Appendix: Findings

7.4.1 Sample AI prompt for archetype images

Images were created with *ChatGPT-4-turbo* (OpenAI, 2025). The model was instructed to generate cartoon illustrations based on the descriptions provided and average demographic data for the viewpoint. The conversation between the researcher (user) and the language model (*ChatGPT*) is reproduced below:

User	"I would now like to generate images of the characters I have developed and described. Are you able to generate cartoon figures in the style of the attached image?"
	Attached image (Rose, 2022): 
ChatGPT	"Yes, I can generate cartoon-style figures inspired by the visual style of the image you've uploaded (thick outlines, exaggerated features, alternative fashion, etc.). To proceed, please do the following: 1. **Upload a description** of each character you'd like illustrated — including their **appearance**, **clothing**, **personality**, and any **props** or **gestures** that suit them. 2. Specify if you want: ○ All characters in a **group image**, or ○ **Individual images** per character

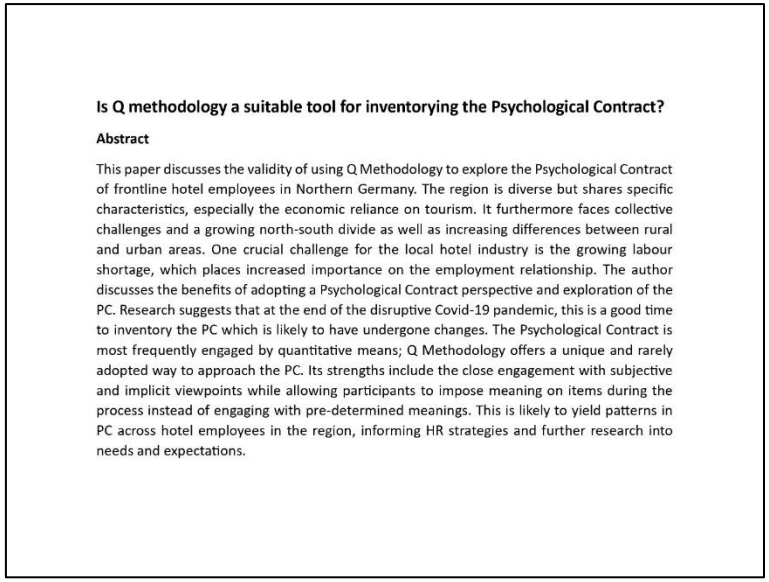
	3. Let me know if you want a **specific background** (or just a neutral/striped one like the reference image). Once I have that, I'll generate cartoon figures in a similar style!"
User	"Great. For all of them, the background should be blank (white) and the picture show only the person with their props, if any. All of these characters will be hotel employees so they should be dressed and groomed accordingly (i will specify that for each). They will all be working in **northern germany** and should look the part, i.e. caucasian."
ChatGPT	"Perfect — thanks for the clarification! To get started, please send the **first character's description**, including: • **Name** (optional) • **Gender and age range** • **Job role in the hotel** • **Clothing and grooming** (realistic for hotel staff, based on their role) • **Personality traits** (e.g. cheerful, meticulous, reserved) • **Any notable props or accessories** (e.g. keys, clipboard, cleaning tools) • **Pose or facial expression** you'd like (if any preference) Once I have that, I'll generate the first image for you. We can adjust the style as needed before doing the rest of the characters."
User	"Okay, so the first image will be of our first viewpoint representative (V1), Alex. **Name:** Alex **Gender:** male **Age:** 30 **Job:** front desk agent in a mid-range city hotel **Clothing:** a simple uniform consisting of a white or lightly blue shirt, black trousers, and black shoes. On his shirt - on the left side of the chest - should be a small, simple name tag **Grooming:** clean shaven and short blonde hair.

	Personality: friendly, open-minded, extroverted **Props:** he should be shown standing next to a simple reception desk (show part of the desk only, and the back of a computer screen looking over the edge). Alex should be shown looking past the computer at the viewer, with a coy grin, and clicking a pen in his right hand. Here is, for further reference, the description we generated of Alex: *'''5.2.2 Alex (V 1)* *Alex just turned 30 and has worked at his hotel for about two years now. After finishing his vocational training, he has explored other things, but now found his calling as a front desk agent in a city hotel. It isn't a fancy hotel, but it provides solid, quality service. Being located in the city centre means that plenty of interesting people come along that make every day an adventure. It also means that he can take the bicycle to work and have access to activities with friends and nightlife after his shifts. He loves to meet people both at work and outside, and cherishes his friendships. But he dislikes chaos, which is why he cherishes that his boss has crafted a team of dedicated professionals. Together, they uphold a high-quality service throughout the hotel and pride themselves in high guest satisfaction. That way, the daily adventure is easily manageable. Alex appreciates that his boss listens for feedback and trusts him with a variety of new tasks to develop his professional knowledge. He knows that the boss is grateful for the team's dedication and hard work, and considers them his extended family. He sees that his colleagues with children can take care of their family at home despite the irregular shift schedules. Alex is happy to pick up the unpopular late shifts – he meets his girlfriend and friends afterwards to party, and he is glad that his colleagues in turn volunteer for the morning shifts. Everyone works together, and the boss knows everybody well enough to be able to accommodate. Alex wants to stay here longer – he knows that if he decides to settle down with his girlfriend, his hotel family will be there all the way. Maybe he can someday become department head and continue making the hotel better. The international allure of the hospitality career has never interested him much; everything he needs is right here in his city. '''* Please generate the image now."

ChatGPT	Image output: 
	<Repetition of last step for subsequent viewpoints>

7.5 Appendix: Presentations and Papers

7.5.1 PGR Conference, Worcester, June 2023



Is Q methodology a suitable tool for inventorying the Psychological Contract?

Abstract

This paper discusses the validity of using Q Methodology to explore the Psychological Contract of frontline hotel employees in Northern Germany. The region is diverse but shares specific characteristics, especially the economic reliance on tourism. It furthermore faces collective challenges and a growing north-south divide as well as increasing differences between rural and urban areas. One crucial challenge for the local hotel industry is the growing labour shortage, which places increased importance on the employment relationship. The author discusses the benefits of adopting a Psychological Contract perspective and exploration of the PC. Research suggests that at the end of the disruptive Covid-19 pandemic, this is a good time to inventory the PC which is likely to have undergone changes. The Psychological Contract is most frequently engaged by quantitative means; Q Methodology offers a unique and rarely adopted way to approach the PC. Its strengths include the close engagement with subjective and implicit viewpoints while allowing participants to impose meaning on items during the process instead of engaging with pre-determined meanings. This is likely to yield patterns in PC across hotel employees in the region, informing HR strategies and further research into needs and expectations.

Purpose of this paper

This paper aims to establish the reasoning for using Q Methodology as a tool to inventory the Psychological Contract.

The topic of the researcher's developing doctoral thesis is to explore the Psychological Contract of frontline hotel employees in Northern Germany. Northern Germany is defined as the states Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, Bremen, and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (Dormann 2017) and was chosen for its strong economic reliance on tourism (von Berg 2019; IHK Nord 2017). The region is also economically and structurally diverse, with coastal and inland regions, large urban centres, and very rural areas (Küpper 2016), regions with strong economic growth and good development potential and those considered 'at risk' (Prognos AG 2022). At the same time, the northern part of the country is distinct from the rest and is at risk of being permanently left behind in economic development as the historic east-west divide (owed to the historical separation of the country between 1945 and 1990) is replaced by a north-south disparity (Wolf 2016).

The hotel industry in general faces a catastrophic lack of labour (Hwang et al. 2014; Ma, Ren and Zhao 2021; Salama et al. 2022). In Germany, this has been a development long in the making (Maack et al. 2013; Peichl, Sauer and Wohlrabe 2022) which was catalysed by the fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic (Demirović Bajrami et al. 2021; Horgan 2021; Manoharan et al. 2021). No other industry lost more employees during the lockdown years as workers flocked to more secure jobs, often finding better pay and conditions and thus not returning (Jansen and Risius 2022). This has caused businesses to reduce their service portfolio and a decline in customer satisfaction – while binding existing employees is the primary task for businesses (dwif consulting 2022) as the demographic change and a steady decrease in apprentices has depleted the pool of available employees (Graefe 2022a; Guhlemann and Best 2021). The author proposes that this task can be helped significantly by strengthening the understanding of these employees' Psychological Contracts as contract fulfilment and breach have been proven to affect job satisfaction (Bandyopadhyay and Srivastava 2022), organizational commitment (Ampofo et al. 2022) and organizational citizenship behaviour (Noble-Nkrumah, Anyigba and Mensah 2022), trust in the organization (Abdalla et al. 2021) and turnover intention (Sheehan et al. 2019). It also affects desired on-the-job behaviours (Kaya and Karatepe 2020).

Given that the Psychological Contract is altered in times of significant change (Bellou 2007; Morrison 1994), some researchers believe that it has very likely changed during the pandemic (Lopez and Fuiks 2021). Wong et al. (2021) were able to demonstrate that hotel employees' perception of certain stressors had changed compared to their pre-pandemic views. It is therefore proposed that this is a good time to take stock of the Psychological Contract to inform the strategies employed by hotel businesses to settle into the 'new normal'.

Most researchers agree that findings on studies about the Psychological Contract can not be generalized across geographic and cultural boundaries (Abdalla et al. 2021; Jung, Yoon and Aldieri 2021; Kang et al. 2021; Saleem et al. 2021; Wu, Lin and Wang 2021). This makes it necessary to assess the PC in specific contexts. Furthermore, what is common in most studies is that they research factors leading to, or results of Psychological Contract breach, or the role of the Psychological Contract in the formation of other symptoms. A study exploring the contents of workers' PC – let alone in the Northern German hotel industry – is therefore a novel undertaking with unique contributions to practice and HR theory.

Approach/Design

The Psychological Contract has primarily received attention from quantitative researchers who often build questionnaires designed around scales or questionnaires developed by previous researchers; one frequently used template is that of Robinson and Morrison (2000). Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000) developed a list of nine items of employer obligations, Rousseau (2000, 2008) developed an inventory checklist for the Psychological Contract which many subsequent researchers have utilized in building their individual sets of measurements (e.g. Smith 2021).

Qualitative research accounts for a minority share in Psychological Contract Literature (e.g. Bavik 2020; Herriot, Manning and Kidd 1997; Lau 2022; Manning 1992; Nichol 2011; Sherman and Morley 2020; Wu, Lin and Wang 2021) despite qualitative methods' declared usefulness for 'emic' research seeking to describe in rich detail the unique contributions of individuals to their specific organization (Rousseau and Tijoriwala 1998). This leaves the majority of literature to represent deductive research designs conceptualizing the Psychological Contract in terms of scales and measurements, as an "overarching idea" (Nichol 2011) or a factor in larger relationships

The unique benefits of Q Methodology

Watts and Stenner (2012) state that one crucial benefit of Q methodology over questionnaires is that it leaves it to the participants to attribute meaning to the items provided. Brown (1980) claims that Q methodology attributes meaning 'a posteriori through interpretation rather than through a priori postulation.'

Traditional measures and scales serve as a method of expressing preconceived meanings with which the participants have to engage, while the items in a Q set are presented 'in a malleable state' and are given individual meaning by the participants through their engagement with them in the sorting process (Watts and Stenner 2012).

Consequently, Watts and Stenner (2012) maintain that Q methodology is a research design which is able to establish individual viewpoints on complex topics, giving voice also to those minority views which are otherwise suppressed by statistics. Brown (1993) lauds the ability of Q to reveal the thought and meaning-making processes behind pre-defined assumptions and categories. Using Q Methodology, connections between individually perceived realities can be uncovered and patters discerned (Brown 1993; Gao and Soranzo 2020; Zabala and Pascual 2016) while context and underlying structures become visible (Previte, Pini and Haslam-Mckenzie 2007). As such, Q Methodology lends itself to a Postmodernist philosophy, as several authors have stated (Brown 1993; Goldman 1999; Hutchinson 2012; Previte, Pini and Haslam-Mckenzie 2007). Postmodernist research in turn enables researchers to uncover 'subterranean' habits and processes shaping participants' identities and assumptions (Chia 2003).

Postmodernist research operates with awareness for subjectivity and unspoken truths (Chia 2003; Foucault 1979; Gergen and Gergen 2008; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2019: p.149f.; Saussure 1966). In Q methodology, intuitive decisions are made which provide insight into subconscious beliefs; the postmodernist epistemology seeks to deconstruct social and conscious structures of understanding and knowledge.

In practical terms, 'the Q-sorting procedure is less time-consuming, more engaging for participants and more natural than assigning abstract scores using questionnaires with Likert scales' (Gao and Soranzo 2020) and considered better suited for exploratory studies as it proves to be 'a cost- and time-effective means for detailed exploratory or targeted image research' (Ten Klooster, Visser and De Jong 2008). Nowadays, Q sorts can be conducted remotely with the help of online solutions (Bradley et al. 2018; Meehan, Ginart and Ormerod 2022) which is a particular benefit when researching a sample of irregularly-scheduled employees across a large geographical region.

Using Q Methodology to Explore the Psychological Contract

Purvis and Cropley (2003) conducted an inventory of the Psychological Contract using Q methodology. Their reason was Q's inherent ability to assess people's understanding of an issue from their unique standpoint while still allowing for a very structured and systematic approach. They asked participants to sort 54 items guided by the question how happy they felt about what they got from their employer. The researchers were able to generate 'normative profiles' of nurses according to their psychological contracts. Without establishing which profile was most prominent among the sample, these were made comparable (although a subsequent step in the study established which profiles more or less nurses belonged to). It is precisely this unweighted comparison which is a strength of Q methodology (Watts and Stenner 2012).

Originality and value

Very few researchers have adopted Q methodology to access the Psychological Contract (Purvis and Cropley 2003) as the concern is often with the outcomes or antecedents of Psychological Contracts, or with mechanics of breach and violation rather than their distinct description. A study with the clear focus to describe the Psychological Contract of hotel employees in Northern Germany does not exist. The author nonetheless argues that this exploration of the Psychological Contract will inform further research into the needs and expectations of hotel employees and assist practitioners in creating strategies to improve their employees' job and career satisfaction, subsequently improving loyalty and alleviating the pressure that labour shortage has on the industry in the region.

Limitations/Implications

As most authors engaged with the Psychological Contract agree, results can not be generalized and transferred to other contexts (Abdalla et al. 2021; Jung, Yoon and Aldieri 2021; Kang et al. 2021; Saleem et al. 2021; Wu, Lin and Wang 2021). Another limitation arises as the flip side of the strengths of Q methodology outlined above: as the purpose of Q methodology is to establish different view points and ideally would yield a set of stereotypical profiles as the research of Purvis and Cropley (2003) did, it allows no conclusion about the frequency of occurrence of these biographies or types of Psychological Contract. Purvis and Cropley (2003) solved this issue by incorporating a further stage of data collection using Likert scales. In this case, this would likely be left to further research; making statistical statements across hotel employees in a large and diverse region (by the end of 2021, 186,900 people were employed in hotels nationwide (Graefe 2022b)) would require an accordingly large sample size. However, the number of participants in Q methodological studies is recommended to be relatively low (Watts and Stenner 2012). The study will also follow the unilateral view of the Psychological Contract which assumes that PCs are formed and held subjectively by individuals (Freese and Schalk 2008; Rousseau 1989; Shore and Tetrick 1994), which has been criticized especially by authors in the German context (Raeder 2007; Raeder and Grote 2004).

Practical Implications

Exploring and subsequently describing the Psychological Contract of frontline hotel employees in Northern Germany will aid employers in more closely aligning their HR initiatives and contributions towards their employees with the actual expectations held by the latter. Better understanding will likely also aid increased congruence of Psychological Contracts of employers/supervisors and employees, improving the leader-member exchange.

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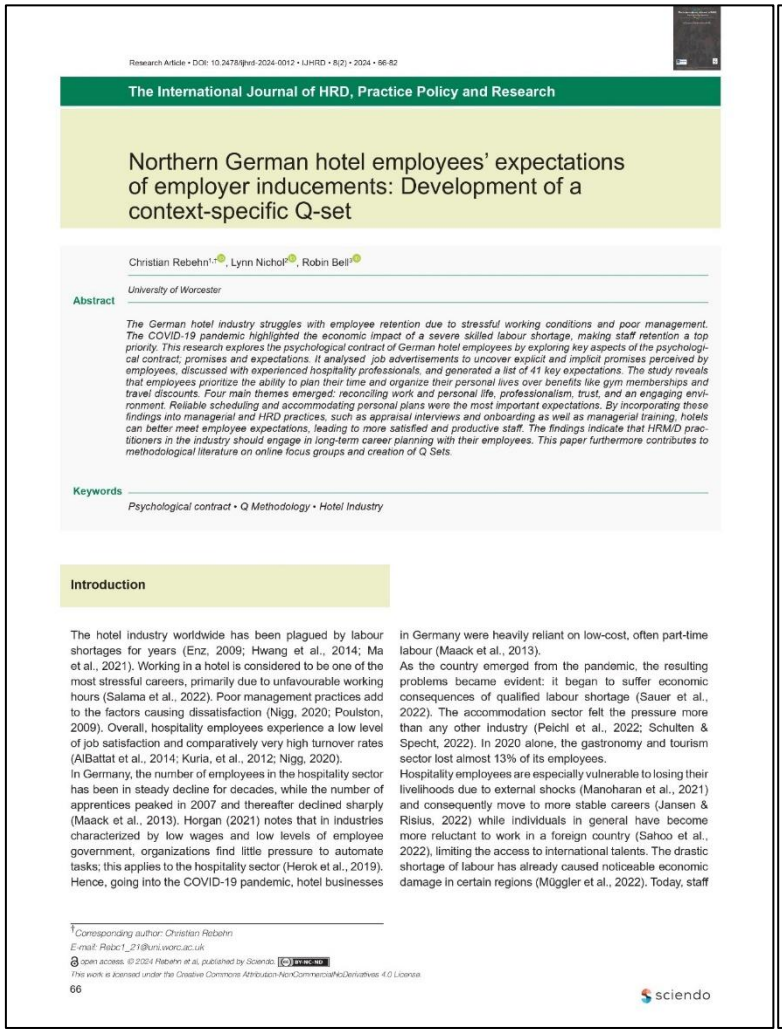
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7.5.2 IJHRD publication, December 2024



Research Article • DOI: 10.2478/ijhrd-2024-0012 • IJHRD • 8(2) • 2024 • 66-82

The International Journal of HRD, Practice Policy and Research

Northern German hotel employees' expectations of employer inducements: Development of a context-specific Q-set

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Abstract

The German hotel industry struggles with employee retention due to stressful working conditions and poor management. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the economic impact of a severe skilled labour shortage, making staff retention a top priority. This research explores the psychological contract of German hotel employees by exploring key aspects of the psychological contract, promises and expectations. It analysed job advertisements to uncover explicit and implicit promises perceived by employees, discussed with experienced hospitality professionals, and generated a list of 41 key expectations. The study reveals that employees prioritize the ability to plan their time and organize their personal lives over benefits like gym memberships and travel discounts. Four main themes emerged: reconciling work and personal life, professionalism, trust, and an engaging environment. Reliable scheduling and accommodating personal plans were the most important expectations. By incorporating these findings into managerial and HRD practices, such as appraisal interviews and onboarding as well as managerial training, hotels can better meet employee expectations, leading to more satisfied and productive staff. The findings indicate that HRM/D practitioners in the industry should engage in long-term career planning with their employees. This paper furthermore contributes to methodological literature on online focus groups and creation of Q Sets.

Keywords

Psychological contract • Q Methodology • Hotel Industry

Introduction

The hotel industry worldwide has been plagued by labour shortages for years (Enz, 2009; Hwang et al., 2014; Ma et al., 2021). Working in a hotel is considered to be one of the most stressful careers, primarily due to unfavourable working hours (Salama et al., 2022). Poor management practices add to the factors causing dissatisfaction (Nigg, 2020; Poulston, 2009). Overall, hospitality employees experience a low level of job satisfaction and comparatively very high turnover rates (AlBattat et al., 2014; Kuria, et al., 2012; Nigg, 2020).

In Germany, the number of employees in the hospitality sector has been in steady decline for decades, while the number of apprentices peaked in 2007 and thereafter declined sharply (Maack et al., 2013). Horgan (2021) notes that in industries characterized by low wages and low levels of employee government, organizations find little pressure to automate tasks; this applies to the hospitality sector (Herok et al., 2019). Hence, going into the COVID-19 pandemic, hotel businesses in Germany were heavily reliant on low-cost, often part-time labour (Maack et al., 2013).

As the country emerged from the pandemic, the resulting problems became evident: it began to suffer economic consequences of qualified labour shortage (Sauer et al., 2022). The accommodation sector felt the pressure more than any other industry (Peichl et al., 2022; Schulten & Specht, 2022). In 2020 alone, the gastronomy and tourism sector lost almost 13% of its employees.

Hospitality employees are especially vulnerable to losing their livelihoods due to external shocks (Manoharan et al., 2021) and consequently move to more stable careers (Jansen & Risius, 2022) while individuals in general have become more reluctant to work in a foreign country (Sahoo et al., 2022), limiting the access to international talents. The drastic shortage of labour has already caused noticeable economic damage in certain regions (Müggler et al., 2022). Today, staff

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retention is an action priority for practitioners in the industry in Germany (dwif consulting, 2022; Salama et al., 2022). Previous research on the relationship between retention and career development by Dassanayake & Kularathne (2021) led to the recommendation for employers in the hotel industry to align their career development strategies with the employees' plans in order to improve employee retention. Employers appear to be following these recommendations with job adverts promising a wide range of inducements.

We adopt a psychological contract perspective on job satisfaction, a suggested prerequisite for employee loyalty (Noble-Nkrumah et al., 2022). A psychological contract is the promises and expectations, or set of "individual beliefs in a reciprocal obligation between the individual and the organization" (Rousseau, 1989). In this study, we have considered the promises made by employers to the workforce and positioned them as the inducements – benefits, services and circumstances – that employees expect the employers to provide on the basis of these (perceived) promises. Kraak et al. (2024) emphasize that psychological contract research should aim at solving specific problems in a regional, or sector-related context. They urge academia to improve the relationship with local stakeholders and have a meaningful impact on communities suggesting that wider-context approaches incur the risk of organizations implementing solutions which may not be suitable for the local context.

This research responds to calls for psychological contract research to aim to solve context-related problems (Kraak et al., 2024), by identifying the employer inducements which frontline hotel employees in Northern Germany expect and determining which of these inducements are most prevalent. The identification of these inducements offers a Q set to explore the psychological contract of hotel workers in a further in-depth study. Our findings will demonstrate methodologically how future researchers can develop context specific Q Methodology approaches to explore the psychological contract within specific contexts. Meanwhile, the findings themselves can inform HRD and HRM practice.

Theoretical background

To achieve their business goals, hotels rely heavily on employees' performance (Hwang et al., 2014; Salama et al., 2022). This performance hinges on hospitality and the entertainment of visitors and delivering an experience to guests (Hemmington, 2007; Sørensen & Jensen, 2015). Services meanwhile also have a social component (Nerdinger, 2007). Service-oriented businesses require a strong work culture which necessitates low turnover rates (Rousseau, 1990). Good job performance of hotel employees is directly influenced by job satisfaction and loyalty, which itself is positively affected by job satisfaction (Tran & Tran, 2020). Well-performing hospitality employees directly contribute to business success (Karatepe et al., 2020).

The working conditions in hotels have been characterized as particularly stressful (Ma et al., 2021; Salama et al., 2022). Antisocial working hours (Salama et al., 2022) high workload, overall working conditions, and increasing demands to flexibility (Maack et al., 2013) are named in particular; along with role ambiguity (Üngüren & Arslan, 2021) and emotional labour (Lee & Madera, 2019; Ma et al., 2021; Shi et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2020). Considerations of employee health and life phases have been secondary to demands for business performance (Budhiraja et al., 2022) and hospitality employees have been known to leave the industry at the transition to a different life phase, for instance when they found a partner working outside the industry or when becoming parents (Guhlemann & Krüger, 2018). Hotel employees consistently report low job satisfaction which leads to high turnover rates (AlBattat et al., 2014; Kuria et al., 2012; Nigg, 2020).

Hospitality employees are especially vulnerable to losing their livelihoods due to external shocks like the pandemic (Manoharan et al. 2021), the industry being highly susceptible to the effects of a crisis (Hao et al, 2020). Post-pandemic, some researchers consider the time right for re-assessing psychological contracts (Lopez & Fuiks, 2021; Mehta et al., 2022) and for a new approach to managing people in general (Butterick & Charlwood, 2021). Adekoya et al. (2022) demonstrated that expectations in work flexibility had increased generally during the pandemic, when remote working spread widely; a different sense of self-discipline, the role of leadership in the working environment and smart working practices took hold and have shaped expectations of both employees and employers with the consequent desire to review traditional working practice (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020).

Given the difficulties in adopting such practices for the hotel sector it is an appropriate time for further research on the current psychological contract of hotel workers. Retaining talent requires consideration of what prompts hotel employees to leave or stay. Rousseau (1990) argues that an individual's psychological contract hinges on their career aspirations, whether they intend to advance within the organization or use it as a stepping stone requiring employers to offer incentives aligned with individual employees' career plans. Therefore, regularly assessing the different employee needs (Mhlanga, 2018) is crucial. For example, Guhlemann & Best (2021) and Guhlemann & Krüger (2018) note challenges for aging hospitality employees faced with tensions, particularly during family-building or career qualification stages, due to insufficient employer flexibility. With many hotel employees being comparatively young (Guhlemann & Best, 2021), attention may need to be paid to the motivation and needs

of Generation Z entering the workforce. Members of this generation have been motivated to work in hotels. During the pandemic young individuals made themselves available to work in quarantine hotels, motivated by the idea of doing something meaningful, while they otherwise shied away from hospitality work on account of working conditions and the requirement for emotional labour (Goh & Baum, 2021). Lau (2022) and Klaffke (2021) show that members of Gen Z wish for recognition and validation of their work and development. While some research suggests that psychological contracts do not differ significantly across generations, they do appear to be influenced by life stage (Egerová et al., 2021; Magni & Manzoni, 2020), suggesting the requirement to not only design jobs and working conditions to cater to different needs, but also to assess the needs of individual employees regularly and make adjustments to their employment conditions accordingly.

The above literature suggests the answer to the question of what motivates hotel employees is located in job design and working conditions and changes appear to be in order to prevent further loss of employees and enable the attraction of more talent.

The role of the psychological contract in work outcomes has been accepted by many scholars (Bal et al., 2010; Chen et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2014; Restubog et al., 2006; Suazo & Mai, 2005). Mehta et al. (2022) confirmed previous findings that fulfilment of the psychological contract positively affected work performance, but also life satisfaction and well-being. As the quality of the psychological contract improves, the expectations of employee and organization increasingly converge (Raeder, 2007; Tekleab & Taylor, 2003), leading to higher productivity and improving the career advancement of the employee (Dabos & Rousseau, 2004). This process can be sped up by verbalizing the psychological contract and implementing HRM measures to ensure optimal information flow between both parties (Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2018). Bandyopadhyay & Srivastava (2022) and Hammouri et al. (2022) confirm that fulfilling the psychological contract is an antecedent to job satisfaction and lower turnover. Failing to fulfil psychological contracts, meanwhile, leads to reduced contributions by employees in the wake of perceived organizational injustice (Estreder et al., 2021). Meanwhile, where HRD is being delegated and fragmented, expectations are being met less and frustration grows; organizations need to clearly understand their employees' expectations (Dainty et al., 2000). In the context of hotel employees, Rousseau's (1990) two types of psychological contracts - transactional and relational contracts - provide a useful lens and contrasting views. Transactional psychological contracts describe those of shorter duration and characterized by quid-pro-quo exchanges and an economic orientation, while relational contracts are socio-emotional and more robust, characterized by loyalty and security (Rousseau 2000). In the context of hotel workers, the transactional factors directly motivating employees, particularly highly educated employees, to stay are salary and career opportunities (Blomme et al., 2010). However, Bandyopadhyay & Srivastava (2022) claim that managers need to pay more attention to relational than to transactional elements of the psychological contract.

In a post-COVID-19 survey of what motivated hotel employees, Choi et al. (2022) found that on top of the list were financial benefits, followed by teamwork, training, career and growth opportunities, and recognition. In order to keep employees engaged and motivated, Mhlanga (2018) suggests interesting job design and job rotation. Similarly, Sheehan et al. (2019) found job design to be a factor in turnover intention.

D'Annunzio-Green & Francis (2005) demonstrated that employees actively monitor company behaviour and evaluate it against the expectations they hold; furthermore, that management behaviour – rather than organizational reasons – has a much stronger effect on psychological contract breaches. This suggests the need for HRD professionals to give attention to the personal situation of team members, develop trusting relationships, and engage with team members on eye level, i.e., respecting them as professionals (Patel and Hamlin, 2012), to enable them to constantly develop strategies and measures to manage the expectations that constitute psychological contracts.

Methods

This paper is the first element of a longer Q Methodology research project. Q Methodology concerns itself with 'the systematic study of subjectivity' by presenting a participant with a set of statements about a given topic, asking them to rank-order them based on their personal view (Brown, 1993). This methodology utilizes the relative sorting of statements regarding a topic by the participant (*Q Sort*). These statements – collectively called the *Q Set* – are synthesized from the *concourse*, which is the complete universe of knowledge and opinions about the topic in question. The Q Set thus represents part of the concourse, analogous to how a participant sample relates to the whole population (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In this paper, we present the process of this Q Set creation for the research project. Q methodology has been used in psychological contract research only infrequently (e.g. Purvis & Cropley, 2003). It is considered a suitable tool for individual psychology (Watts & Stenner, 2012), for grouping people viewing the world similarly (Giles, 2013), and for understanding subjectivity (Stephenson, 1953). Psychological contracts can differ among people employed under identical conditions (Allan, 2010; Rousseau & McLean Parks, 1993; Rousseau & Schalk, 2000) and their exploration therefore requires a methodological approach tailored to highlighting individual voices, identifying similarities, and explaining differences. A strength of Q in this regard is that it leaves the creation of meaning to the participant, minimizing the forcing of external categories, thus allowing for the influence of the participant's individual context (Adams, 1965; Brown, 1980, 2019; Müller & Kals, 2004; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Q Methodology also lends itself to the work with hotel employees over a larger geographical area due to its practicability: it is considered less time-consuming and more engaging than questionnaires using Likert scales (Gao & Soranzo, 2020) as well as a cost- and time-effective tool for exploratory research (ten Klooster et al., 2008). Purvis & Cropley (2003) conducted a Q Sort as part of psychological contract research on the grounds of its ability to allow for a structured and systematic approach in understanding individuals' unique standpoints on an issue.

Our paper identifies and develops a list of statements detailing expected employer inducements of hotel employees in Northern Germany, which underpin the psychological contract. This represents the creation of a Q Set, consisting of statements about expected employer inducements, which can be used as part of Q Methodology to further research the difference viewpoints in existence (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Q allows researchers to interpret commonalities and differences in opinion based on circumstantial factors – in this case, the participants' workplace location and type as well as basic demographic characteristics like age and education. It allows the participant to let their individual experiences and biography inform their responses; Watson (2002, cited by D'Annunzio-Green & Francis, 2005) considers the employee's biography, identity, values, and feelings to be important things they bring into the employment relationship besides their skills and working capacities. Q Methodology allows these to influence and enrich the research of the psychological contract.

The set of statements to be rank-ordered is called the Q set. It is required to cover the entirety of the relevant ground as thoroughly as possible in order to be broadly representative of the concourse (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Stephenson (1952) argues that there are several ways of creating a Q sample required in the particular experiment at hand, while Brown (1980) likens the process to an art rather than a science. Watts & Stenner (2012) make the case for rigour in developing Q samples in order to avoid criticism.

Many psychological contract scholars (Kraak et al., 2024) argue that context is underrepresented in research design and that the specific context of the research setting should receive greater attention. Context, according to Johns (2006), includes the location, occupation, and demographics of participants.

To produce context-relevant results, we decided to source the concourse from which the expressions of expectations are formulated directly from the context itself. Hence, a survey was conducted of job advertisements published on the industry-specific employment portal Hotelcareer.de (Hotelcareer, 2023) on 21 September 2023. A total of 141 individual job advertisements from the German states of Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Bremen, and the northern part of Lower Saxony were extracted. The survey was conducted using the 'location +20km' filter, with subsequent searches of accordingly spaced locations. No further filters were applied, so that all available job advertisements were displayed. The relevant ones (for frontline roles) were then manually selected and logged on a grid according to location type (island, coastal, rural, city), hotel ownership (family-run, private, corporate), chain affiliation (independent, loose co-operation, local chain, or international chain), hotel type (budget, mid-range, luxury), department (front office, food and beverage, others or multi-role) and level (line staff, supervisor, manager, or apprentice). To further enrich the data, we surveyed the online career portals of large hotel companies and chains active in the region and extracted relevant promises.

The information gathered was analysed and categorized using NVivo version 12 (Lumivero, 2017), where 20 nodes were identified which are displayed in Table 1: "Topics mentioned by job adverts".

Table 1. Topics Mentioned by Job Adverts

Node	Mentions
Corporate culture	248
Personality	243
Job content	189
Career development	163
Monetary benefits	137
Discounts (staff rates)	130
Workplace description	112
Training & development	109
Team spirit	100
Mobility	94
Staff meals	87
Health	78
Discounts (external partners)	74
Salary	73
Team building	67
Staff housing	62
Work-life integration	57
Uniforms	41
Vacation leave	41
Feedback	31

Paige & Morin (2016) provide a step-by-step instruction on developing a Q Set. After population of the concourse (this being the job adverts) and development of the preliminary Q Sample (Q Set), evaluation and piloting of the set is required to refine the items. We presented the 49 statements deduced from employer promises to a focus group of six seasoned hospitality employees. The members of the group were purposefully chosen for their wealth of diverse experience within the industry and their demographic diversity: participant age ranged from 25 to 57 years, participants were living in different family situations (e.g. with young children, single, married without children etc.) and had distinctly different career paths under their belt. Natives of different parts of Germany were as much part of the group as foreign-born participants. The participants were members of a WhatsApp group chat, where they were presented with the statements (sorted by category) and asked to comment on and discuss the validity and relevance of the individual statements.

WhatsApp was the chosen medium as it allows for asynchronous discussion revolving around the participants' availability (Colom, 2022). Group discussions on WhatsApp (and similar messaging applications) have yielded positive results for researchers in the past (Neo et al., 2022; Singer et al., 2020) and shown results on-par with offline discussions, though the richness and quantity of the output lagged behind those of in-person discussions (Chen & Neo, 2019; Richard et al., 2021). Dos Santos Marques et al. (2021) contrast disadvantages of virtual focus groups like smaller group sizes, greater responsibility on the part of the participant, and technological access issues with positive effects such as increased participation and greater flexibility and an expanded, more diverse participant pool due to the asynchronous and geographically flexible setup. In general, they too find the results generated by smaller, virtual focus groups satisfactory.

As research on the viability and quality of focus group discussions conducted via messenger apps is still scarce (and almost exhausted by the sources presented above) this step offered a methodological innovation.

Stahl & King (2020) provide a comprehensive guide to ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative data based on Lincoln & Guba (1985). Three of their principles have been applied: Firstly, using several sources of information. This has been ensured through the two-step process of extracting information from a wide range of job adverts and subsequently interrogating a focus group of industry experts to validate and amend it. The focus group members also served as informants verifying the researcher's interpretation, after which each statement (save one) was cross-referenced with published academic findings. Secondly, the authors consider a prolonged engagement in the field of study to be desirable. The lead author has spent over a decade in various functions and locations in the hospitality industry, adding to undergraduate and graduate degrees with a specialization in hospitality management. Lastly, peer debriefing was conducted through discussion between the authors and the presentation of the working paper at an international conference for HRD.

Findings

The topics most frequently covered by the job adverts were: corporate (workplace) culture, aspects of the applicant's personality (i.e. soft skills and matters of motivation), contents of the job, career development, and monetary benefits. The latter included measures such as night or weekend premiums, bonus systems, employer contributions to retirement funds, or Christmas presents, but also profit sharing.

Discounting items which would be formalized explicitly in work or union contracts in Germany, the individual and differently worded promises, descriptions, and employer-side expectations were rephrased in accordance with the expectations that they would induce among the applicants. An initial 97 statements in 20 categories were reduced to 49 statements in 13 categories by combination of similar statements and omission of obsolete or duplicate ones. Each statement was verified by cross-referencing it with previous research findings.

Despite inconsistent participation, the focus group shared extensive and valuable personal insights in addition to validating the statements. At the participants' consensual suggestion, some items were rephrased, omitted, or added. The total number remained at 49 statements. The statements "I am provided access to leisure activities" and "I am empowered to make extensive decisions" were omitted as the consensus was that they were irrelevant. At the same time, participants wished to add "I receive support for taking care of my children" to distinguish between enabling care work and overall work-life balance. Equally, a distinction was desired between the general statement on diversity: "I am respected for who I am" and "I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me" as one participant explained that one does not necessarily display one's entire personality at work and is instead expected to play a role.

At the end of the focus group discussion, a poll was conducted on these statements. The poll question was "Which of these statements constitute expectations you have of your employer?", participants were able to cast a vote for each item they considered part of their set of expectations. In this poll, nine statements received no support, eight of which were consequently eliminated from the final Q Set.

Table 2: "Validated Q Set" lists the statements generated through the process described. They are ranked from most to least supported in the final poll.

Table 2. Inducements Identified

#	Statement of expectation	Votes	Theoretical Foundation
1	I have plannable working times	5	Heimerl et al. (2020); Rohita et al. (2022); Wanger (2017)
2	I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	4	Heimerl et al. (2020); Rohita et al. (2022); Wanger (2017)
3	My reliability is valued	4	Heimerl et al. (2020); Rohita et al. (2022); Wanger (2017)
4	My criticism is received gratefully	4	Heimerl et al. (2020); Rohita et al. (2022); Wanger (2017)
5	My professional expertise is valued	4	Marshall et al. (2015)
6	I am being valued	4	Maroudas et al. (2008); Marshall et al. (2015); Mhlanga (2018); Nohria et al. (2008); Younies & Al-Tawil (2021)
7	My professional advancement is individually supported	4	Dashper (2020); Lee et al. (2015)
8	I work in a professional environment	4	Kirillova et al. (2020); Min & Hong (2021)
9	I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	3	Bahadur et al. (2020); Kraak et al. (2024)
10	My passion for my profession is being kept alive	3	Crawford et al. (2022)
11	I am respected for who I am	3	García-Rodríguez et al. (2020); Lee & Madera (2019)
12	I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me	3	Alagarsamy et al. (2023); Jin et al. (2021); Shi et al. (2022)
13	I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	3	Mhlanga (2018)
14	I receive appropriate feedback	3	Lee et al. (2015); Lee & Kim (2021)
15	I can provide feedback any time	3	Kraak et al. (2024); Liu-Lastres et al. (2024)
16	My personal life plan is being taken into account	3	Lee et al. (2015)
17	I am not left hanging	3	Jaworski et al. (2018); Kraak et al. (2024)
18	My good performance is rewarded	3	Jaworski et al. (2018); Lee et al. (2015)
19	I work in a company which consistently evolves	3	
20	I am being managed with a suitable leadership style	3	Lee et al. (2015)
21	I have the opportunity to have a varied career	3	Mhlanga (2018)
22	I have high-quality tools at my disposal	3	Lee et al. (2015)
23	I get to learn through suitable training formats	3	Jaworski et al. (2018)
24	I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	3	Chiang et al. (2005); Kraak et al. (2024); Lee et al. (2015)
25	My financial needs are being taken into account	2	Mhlanga (2018)
26	I receive support for my commute to work	2	von Elsenhart Rothe (2021)
27	My flexibility is valued	2	Colakoglu et al. (2010)
28	Our team work is encouraged and supported	2	Lee et al. (2015); Mhlanga (2018)
29	I receive high-quality meals	2	Song (2022)
30	My loyalty is valued	2	Colakoglu et al. (2010)
31	I am treated like a family member	2	Haugh & Mckee (2003); McIntosh et al. (2011)
32	I can continue my career in different places	2	Hjalager (2003); Kotrotsiou (2018)
33	I have long-term career prospects	2	Chang & Busser (2020); Dashper (2020)
34	I get to work with high-quality products	2	Lee et al. (2015)
35	I can continuously develop myself professionally	2	Budhiraja et al. (2022); Chang & Busser (2020); Chiang et al. (2005); Heimerl et al. (2020); Lee et al. (2015); Tamminga & de Boer (2018)
36	I receive support for taking care of my children	1	Bainbridge & Townsend (2020); Henle et al. (2020)
37	I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay	1	Fink (2020); Neukirch (2023)
38	I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work	1	Lages & Piercy (2012)
39	I get to participate in the business success	1	Belloc (2022); Chien et al. (2020); Dewi et al. (2020)
40	I work in a sustainable organization	1	Dixon-Fowler et al. (2020); Dögl & Holtbrügge (2014); Kraak et al. (2024); Puncheva-Michelotti et al. (2018)
41	I enjoy creative freedom	0	Alagarsamy et al. (2023); Bousinakis & Halkos (2021); Jaskyte et al. (2020)

Table 3. Omitted Statements

I have better access to leisure travel
I receive security for my future
My determination is valued
My physical limits are being taken into account
I have access to athletic activities outside of my working hours
I can attend health-promoting activities at my workplace
We celebrate together
I receive support for swift career advancement

Note: "Omitted Statements" lists the statements which were included in the original set but omitted following the poll taken of the focus group members. The discussion showed that these were disregarded by the participants for different reasons. The verdict on "creative freedom" was inconclusive; while the statement received no votes in the poll, several participants had acknowledged its importance during the discussion, while noting that they saw generally little space for creative activities in operational roles. The inducement was thus retained in the Q Set.

Discussion

The results of the focus group discussion showed that transactional inducements appear of lesser importance to hotel employees than expected; the popular enabling of leisure travel through staff rates and discount programmes was not considered an important expectation by a single participant. The inducement of providing support for one's future, the expression of which was mostly developed from employers offering tax-advantaged corporate retirement schemes (Conrad, 2022), was heavily discussed in the group but unanimously rejected since short tenures in companies completely diminish the benefit, leading to negligible payout sums. Offering additional retirement support was also not considered a motivator for staying with an employer longer. Similarly, other transactional inducements like support for one's residence (through corporate housing or support in searching for a home to rent at the location), sharing into the company's (primarily financial) success, and support for commuting by way of discounted tickets or allowances, rank low in the poll. Employees in the focus group are prepared to handle these matters of finance and personal life themselves and rather expect their employer to provide for the necessary circumstances, primarily by sufficient pay, reliable planning, and availability of leisure time, to do so. Contrary to indications from previous research (Marshall et al., 2015), health-promotion and access to sports – a very popular inducement offered is a tax-advantaged subsidy to gym club memberships (Hausen, n.d.) - are not expected either. This finding supports those of the survey by Balogh and Bába (2020).

On the other hand, group members consented that a plannable and reliable working schedule was the most important inducement, which is a prerequisite for the expectation in statement #2. Further expectations in the top ten surround being valued and professionally respected (#3-#6), individually tailored support for career-building (#7), overall professionalism in the workplace (#8) and the freedom to be guided by empathy and passion (#9-#10).

The most prevalent expectations can thus be grouped in four themes:

1. Reconciling work and personal life. Employers achieve this primarily by providing equitable, reliable schedules and posting them ahead of time. Considering the individual's needs in scheduling and career development was considered an important management activity.
2. Professionalism. This not only includes the appreciation of the employee's expertise, but also extends to the conduct of management and the working environment including tools and materials provided.
3. Trust. Allowing front-line employees to be guided by their best judgement and empathy, filling their role in a manner they feel comfortable in rather than prescribing rules of conduct. An open two-way exchange of feedback is important to the participants. It also extends to the employer being trustworthy, exemplified e.g. in statement #17.
4. Engaging Environment. Employees expect their workplaces and superiors to provide them with a stimulating environment and opportunities for upskilling and participation in organizational development.

Implications for theory

COVID-19 showed that the hotel industry needs to build better strategic resilience (Hao et al., 2020). For the German hotel industry, COVID-19 was immediately followed by a human resource crisis. In contributing to the understanding of contemporary, local, and industry-specific psychological contracts, this paper provides knowledge on which a new framework of Human Resource strategies can be built. A previous study by Hassanein & Özgit (2022) has identified areas of improvement in both managerial and strategic scopes in the Middle Eastern context.

This study furthermore contributes to methodological knowledge in psychological contract research. Firstly, Q Methodology has seldom been used by psychological contract researchers (e.g. Purvis & Cropley, 2003). This paper demonstrates how a Q Set can be developed for research conducted under the theoretical framework of the psychological contract. Especially as the field has turned its attention to the importance of considering context (Kraak et al., 2024), we demonstrate how elements of the

psychological contract can be extracted from context-specific sources and verified with the help of experts in the context at hand. Utilizing a group chat in a messaging application (WhatsApp) is a relatively novel approach that researchers have been evaluating in the previous years during and following the COVID-19 pandemic (Colom, 2022; Neo et al., 2022; Singer et al., 2020). This paper presents results of and evaluates the use of a WhatsApp group for focus group discussions and thus contributes to the young and small set of knowledge regarding this medium.

We present a ranked set of expected employer inducements, showing that certain themes are more prevalent than others among the hotel and hospitality workforce in Germany. The results suggest that work-life balance is most important to the workforce, followed by professional and engaging work environments and mutual trust. Surprisingly, members of the focus group generally did not give much weight to inducements of financial or material nature. It is these inducements that are often supported through tax breaks. HRD researchers and policymakers may take this into consideration as it may indicate that it is necessary to develop new support schemes more closely aligned with changed expectations.

Implications for practitioners

While the findings presented in this paper serve the primary purpose of being the basis for further research, practitioners can draw on the statements as verbalizations of common expectations their existing and prospective employees have. The statements can be utilized in the development of appraisal interview structures, onboarding processes or job interviews to learn about an individual's psychological contract, and design more satisfactory employment relationships as well as cost-efficient benefit structures. Uraon (2018) demonstrated that it is beneficial for employers to formulate clear, targeted HRD strategies and measure their effectiveness. Practitioners should actively seek understanding for the individual needs and priorities of their employees in order to deliver on theme #1: Reconciling work with personal life. On the strategic HRM level, this means gaining and constantly updating one's understanding of the individual employee's immediate needs and long-term personal plans, in order for employees to smoothly transition into new roles or functions better suited to changed circumstances, and to find replacements. Personal Development Plans (PDP) can help foster successful long-term relationships and reduce turnover (Beckert & Walsh, 1991), and outlining a new employee's learning and career journey should be part of onboarding practice. Strategic and trusting co-operation on long-term development may also include the abandonment of insular thinking, expecting individuals to remain in one's organization for extended periods even if this may not suit their personal life plan. Communicating openly about an employee's strategic exit from the organization and developing replacements must be part of a sustainable HR strategy. This open communication requires trust (theme #3: Trust), as employees must not fear repercussions for being open about eventually planning to leave.

This deep understanding of individual needs and the proposed individualization of the exchange relationship indicates that employers in the hotel industry should shift from a model of attempting to create the same experience for everyone to I-Deals: conditions of employment which are negotiated between the individual and the employer (Rousseau, 2005). I-Deals allow for terms and conditions of employment to be tailored to the needs of the individual and have been shown to be helpful in career development and managing job insecurity (Davis & van der Heijden, 2018).

The results show that learning and career development are important expectations which employers need to effectively respond to. Engaging in transformational leadership eventually fosters an HRD-oriented organizational culture with positive effects on job satisfaction (Akdere & Egan, 2020). Another important function of HRD is the creation of a performance management system, which has been found to help align employee and employer expectations, reducing turnover intention (Sharma et al., 2022). On a day-to-day managerial basis, reliable scheduling is a crucial expectation. The nature of the industry dictates that unforeseen circumstances may warrant schedule changes from time to time, yet employees would like to feel appreciated for being flexible (statement #27). Schedule adjustments must be reduced to a minimum, however, which requires robust planning on the part of immediate supervisors. Hotel employees do not mind shift work, but they expect to be able to make personal plans and arrangements ahead of time and to trust that the schedule posted is reliable. Communication, planning ahead, and simple tools like a shift request procedure can significantly improve planning security for individuals.

Several statements concern feedback channels. Organizations promise open feedback culture in many different ways, and the focus group discussion showed that employees expect this to be put into practice. Experienced employees expect to be able to share feedback and suggestions, thus participating in the organization's improvement. Having the required resources to perform well is another element of theme #2: Professionalism; it is therefore vital to be aware of the resource needs of frontline staff. Organizations should hold regular feedback sessions in the form of formal and informal individual performance reviews as well as department or townhall meetings. Individual review meetings should not be a performance evaluation but foremost an opportunity to learn about the employee's goals, plans, and needs through open-ended questions.

The results of the focus group discussion show that popular inducements offered, usually where they are supported by tax incentives, rank low or are completely rejected by the employees surveyed. HRD and HRM practitioners are instead cautioned to enable work-life balance not through parties or subsidizing gym memberships, but by reliable scheduling enabling their employees to reconcile work with their personal lives, taking into account individual needs. Meeting expectations of respect and validation should be high on the agenda as well.

The findings of our research should also inform future management development and training, as they identify important managerial skills of robust planning (i.e. predictable duty rosters), open communication and trust-building; they underscore the importance of developing transformational leaders. For the planning and implementation of career development, the findings highlight the benefits of I-Deals and personal development plans as well as regular feedback sessions with employees.

Limitations

The initial statements were developed from information provided by employers to prospective new hires; to utilize them in the study of existing employees as intended, the perspective was changed from the employer to the employee view on a particular topic. This leaves room for interpretation: to verify that the statements represent possible employee views, a focus group discussion was conducted with a diverse group of experienced hospitality professionals.

The job advertisements used were randomly sampled at one point in time. Balancing between types of hotel, location, or job advertised was not a priority. Rather, it was important to gather as many different job adverts as possible. Furthermore, companies not currently looking for employees at the time, or doing so through different channels, are not represented. A comprehensive overview of promised inducements may be subject to a separate study.

The focus group discussion revealed a pattern among participants to – despite being cautioned not to – relate the hypothesized expectations to their personal experience. Hotel employees tend to experience many different workplaces through their career (Guhlemann & Best, 2021; Guhlemann & Krüger, 2018) and may adjust their expectations in accordance with these experiences: ten Brink (2004) argues that the psychological contract is consistently influenced by prior experiences. This indicates that certain expectations may have been removed from the list by participants because they had not been fulfilled in the past, and that their omission from the psychological contract does not necessarily translate to them being unimportant to employees.

It is consensus that any research on the psychological contract is not generalizable globally and calls for further research in other contexts and locations are common (Abdalla et al., 2021; Jung et al., 2021; Kang et al., 2021; Saleem et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2021). Sia (2013) even doubts the applicability of measures developed for previous studies in other contexts, and Kraak et al. (2024) heavily emphasize the importance of conducting psychological contract research with respect to local context. Thus, while this paper presents a Q Set for exploration of the psychological contract of hotel employees, to our knowledge the first of its kind, it is important to verify the statements' applicability to other contexts and adapt them to the local one if they are used in Q Sorts. Independent from the methodological perusal, this list of employee expectations must be reevaluated in different contexts and at different points in time.

Further research

The survey of promised inducements and subsequent deduction of verbalized expectations provides the basis for further research into the psychological contract of hotel employees, specifically the investigation of the prevalence as well as relevant and absolute importance of the individual inducements in the psychological contracts. The list of expectations presented in the paper will be used in a subsequent Q methodological study to identify possible different types of psychological contracts among Northern German hotel employees. The subsequent study will examine which of the statements presented are of higher or lower importance when ranked relative to each other.

The statements presented were intentionally phrased to represent subjective feelings and opinions. In accordance with the philosophy of Q methodology, the attachment of meaning to them is left to each individual participant (Watts & Stenner, 2012). We believe that these statements can be utilized as a blueprint for similar research projects in other geographic regions, allowing researchers to establish an understanding of hotel employees' psychological contracts in a range of environments and the development of effective practices in each. Q Sorts conducted in different areas are expected to lead to dissimilar results based on the sample region's economic and legal circumstances, potentially providing for a basis of comparison across sample areas and subsequent interpretation. Likewise, a similar approach can be adopted to develop context-specific, relevant Q Sets.

HRD researchers may take the results of this study and investigate whether inducement expectations have changed dramatically across industries and whether attention needs to be redirected from the support measures, benefits and tax benefits currently popular and towards suitable measures that

align with workforce expectations. The results of this small and very specific sample suggest that contemporary policies may be misdirected and inefficient.

It is crucial to note that the communication of promises towards new entrants into the exchange relationship – as is the case with job adverts, which were our primary source of material for this study – entails a high level of expectations for these promises to be delivered on. D'Annunzio-Green and Francis (2005) demonstrated well how employees look out for signals regarding the inducements made. Future research may investigate whether the relatively short tenures in the hotel professions may be related to psychological contract breach during the 'wait and see period' (D'Annunzio-Green & Francis, 2005).

Conclusion

In accordance with recent calls for more research into psychological contracts of different backgrounds (Jung et al., 2021; Kraak et al., 2024; Lopez & Fulks, 2021), we present a list of formulated expectations held by hotel employees in Northern Germany. This forms a solid basis for different avenues of further research and can be adopted into specific human resource procedures by practitioners. The methodology presented here can be adopted to synthesize context-specific sets of employee expectations to further the understanding of psychological contracts in different industries, regions, and at different times. It also demonstrates a procedure to create a relevant Q Set for psychological contract research.

Hotel managers and HR professionals in the industry may adopt the findings of this research project into their daily work and strategies: the findings show that reliable shift scheduling, accounting for individual needs in the short and long term, and upholding professionalism in the workplace can help fulfil expectations and potentially improve employee loyalty. These changes can be implemented quickly and at low cost by line and middle managers. The findings can furthermore help inform HRD strategy as they demonstrate the need for long-term co-operative career planning centred on the employee's needs and personal plans. Researchers may build on these findings to determine whether HR policies across the economy require a re-alignment to changed attitudes and needs.

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7.5.3 PC Small Group, April 2025

Germany, the Psychological Contract is Calling:
A long Pathway to Sustainable HRM

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GERMANY, THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT IS CALLING:

A LONG PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE HRM

PURPOSE

This conceptual paper explores the underrepresentation of the psychological contract (PC) in German Human Resource Management (HRM) research, education, and practice to identify cultural, organizational, and academic barriers to the concept's adoption. In response to global calls for more sustainable employment and the benefits of understanding the PC (United Nations, 2015; Griep, Kraak and Beekman, 2023; Wojtczuk-Turek *et al.*, 2024), we propose a framework for integrating sustainable PCs to bridge research and practice (Guest, 2024). This framework emphasizes attentiveness, responsibility, and responsiveness to foster mutually beneficial and long-term employment relationships.

RATIONALE

A psychological contract (PC) is a cognitive schema through which employees interpret workplace interactions, obligations, and expectations (Rousseau, 1989). They are highly subjective, shaped by personal perceptions, social exchanges, organizational culture, and communication. Kraak et al. (2024) highlight that in the wake of historical changes, the employee-employer relationship is being redefined. Research on working from home (Gong and Sims, 2023), artificial intelligence (Braganza et al., 2021), and multiparty employment in a global context (Schuster *et al.*, 2022) have increased.

These emerging trends in the workplace are linked to broader shifts in organizational priorities such as social responsibility and long-term economic benefits. The role of human resources (HR) becomes central to align workplace practices with evolved employee values to

create and maintain high-quality PCs that meet the sustainability goals of an organization. By offering sustainable PC terms[1], HR departments can realize the desired outcomes of employee well-being, growing environmental awareness, and building sustainable career ecosystems (Donald, Van der Heijden and Baruch, 2024).

While interest in sustainable HRM is growing (Aust *et al.*, 2024), the concept of PC remains underutilized in research, education and practice in Germany (Braekkan, 2012). Although the vast majority of German employees report being affected by PC breaches or violations (Reimann and Guzy, 2017), PC has not been of great interest to the practitioner and scholarly community and is rarely an explicit element of consideration in HRM practice (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

DESIGN/METHODOLOGY/APPROACH

This paper employs a conceptual approach, drawing on a comprehensive review of literature on PC theory, HRM practices, and sustainability in Germany. It synthesizes insights from global and German contexts to develop a framework that adapts the PC to Germany's specific cultural, legal, and organizational environment. The study integrates relational HRM perspectives with sustainability goals, building on construct definitions such as sustainable PCs (Kraak et al., 2024).

[1] According to Kraak et al. (2024, p. 1434) we refer to high-quality PCs as sustainable PCs which emphasize long-term viability and resilience in the face of changing organizational and societal dynamics.

A FRAMEWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTSIN GERMANY

Though prominent in Anglo-American HR literature, the PC has not gained significant traction in German HRM departments. We suggest this underrepresentation is due to five key factors: legal, educational, organizational, cultural, and research. We discuss these five factors by drawing on Kraak et al.'s (2024) construct definition of a sustainable PC, which requires both parties – the employee and the employer - to be *attentive* (listening to and understanding each other's needs), *responsible* (acting on those needs ethically and fairly), and *responsive* (adapting quickly and constructively to changes). Meeting these conditions paves the way for a sustainable employment relationship that benefits both sides while being strong enough to withstand future changes in society and the workplace (Cooke, Dickmann and Parry, 2020).

First, Germany's HRM practices are strongly influenced by *legal* chains (i.e. codified labor laws and collective bargaining agreements), which prioritize employee protection through mechanisms like dismissal protection, regulated working hours, and mandatory social insurance (Giardini, Kabst and Müller-Camen, 2005). Works councils, present in companies with more than five employees, significantly impact workplace decisions, representing 43% of employees in 2023 (Destatis, 2024). While these legal frameworks ensure employee rights, they overshadow the nuanced informal, mutual expectations that characterize the PC (Braekkan, 2012). By introducing the idea of a sustainable PC, HRM professionals can go beyond legal obligations to focus on human aspects like understanding needs *(attentive)*.

Second, the limited integration of relational frameworks like the PC within HRM *education* exacerbates this issue. German HRM curricula predominantly focus on strategic and operational HR concepts, sidelining relational dimensions. The most commonly used HRM textbooks in Germany (cf. Jung, 2017; Scholz and Scholz, 2019; Stock-Homburg and Groß, 2019; Berthel and Becker, 2022; Holtbrügge, 2022) hardly mention the PC. Only Huf (2022) dedicates

a partial chapter to legal and psychological contracts. The PC is rarely addressed in practitioner-oriented outlets (see Table 1). As a result, HR professionals are less equipped to recognize and effectively use the PC in practice. Teaching business and HRM students relational aspects is vital for developing adaptability to evolving workplace dynamics *(responsive)*.

Third, Germanys emphasis on standardized *organizational* practices, particularly high-performance work systems (Brodbeck, Frese and Javidan, 2002), prioritize collective outcomes and formalized procedures, often overlooking the individualized, perception-driven nature of PC (Braekkan, 2012). Training HR professionals to think about employee-employer relationships in context of sustainability *(attentive, responsible* and *responsive)*, could help in building deeper, non-standardized connections with employees. Broadening expertise will ultimately create more sustainable PCs, allowing organizations to tailor relationships while maintaining structure.

Fourth, Germany's *cultural* preference for formal structures reinforces this disconnect (Giardini, Kabst and Müller-Camen, 2005). The focus on structured processes and formal agreements often minimizes the value of informal, unwritten commitments central to the PC. Raeder (2018) notes that particularly the American term “psychological contract” leads to a negative reaction in Germany, where psychology is associated with private or pathological matters rather than the workplace. However, adopting a sustainable PC in Germany could foster open communication about mutual expectations, reduce misunderstandings, build trust, and enable constructive adaptation to a volatile work environment *(responsive)*.

Finally, this neglect is compounded by limited *research* and awareness-building efforts. With fewer empirical studies and limited emphasis on psychological contracts in HRM discourse, the concept remains underutilized and less accessible to HR professionals. Current German research focuses on how PCs were affected by organizational changes (e.g. flexibility, downsizing), the role of leadership in managing PCs, and turnover intentions or health implications. It rarely utilizes the PC to understand positive developments or attempts to generate

deeper knowledge about the creation or maintenance of PC (see Table 1). Sustainable PCs emphasize building and maintaining strong relationships, addressing dissatisfaction's root causes while fostering satisfaction and preventing breaches *(responsible)*.

Together, these factors create a systemic underrepresentation of psychological contracts in German HRM research and practice. A more balanced approach that integrates both formal and relational frameworks is needed to enhance workplace dynamics. While the underrepresentation has long been noted (Raeder, 2018), little has happened in practice, education and research to change this. We present a framework for a sustainable PC that considers contextual, organizational and individual factors and adds the perspectives of research and practice.

Insert Figure 1 about here

LIMITATIONS

This paper's conceptual nature limits empirical validation. The framework requires testing in varied organizational settings to evaluate its applicability and effectiveness. The findings, focused on Germany, may need adaptation for wider use.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

We show that the PC requires and deserves more attention by German scholars. While it has been of constant interest, the circle of scholars engaging with it remains very small and apparently fails to attract mainstream attention. We answer recent calls for context-specific PC research by presenting a conceptual framework of the sustainable PC with credit to the specific circumstances and realities of the German working world. Empirical researchers may utilize our framework to structure their research and interpret their findings. Meanwhile, our framework can

be introduced into university and professional HR curricula and in continuing professional development programmes, raising awareness for sustainability in HRM and explaining the reciprocal employee-employer relationship. Raising awareness of PCs among employees and employers, including small business owners, can make their active management a staple in business and employment relations.

The concept of sustainable PC can and should be directly applied to HRM practice. By creating awareness for the concept and its mechanics, scholars can aid practitioners to utilize the framework in hiring and onboarding processes and negotiations, allowing for comprehensive and explicit discussion to align PCs and thus reduce the risk of breach. In regular conversations between parties to the exchange relationship, the changing nature of PC can be actively acknowledged and expectations readjusted. We believe that greater awareness of the sustainable PC, its subjectivity and volatility can contribute greatly to the installation of communication channels and modes of conversation that allow employees and employers (or agents thereof) to freely voice their expectations and interpretations. It would provide a forum for more open and honest communication which in turn leads to better aligned PCs, fewer breaches, and decreased turnover and create a further and unexplored dimension to HR practice in Germany.

Insert Table 2 about here

Table 2 summarizes concrete actions that the stakeholders – scholars and practitioners – can take to promote sustainable PC in Germany and develop context-specific knowledge.

ORIGINALITY AND VALUE

We argue that the psychological contract (PC) is underutilized in German HRM due to five factors: focus on labor laws, limited HRM education integration, reliance on

standardized practices, preference for formal structures, and lack of research. A framework for sustainable PCs tailored to Germany can address these issues by encouraging open communication, going beyond legal obligations, and adapting to workplace changes. Our framework offers a starting point for integrating PCs into German HRM practice to inspire a culture of sustainable workplace relationships.

Figure 1

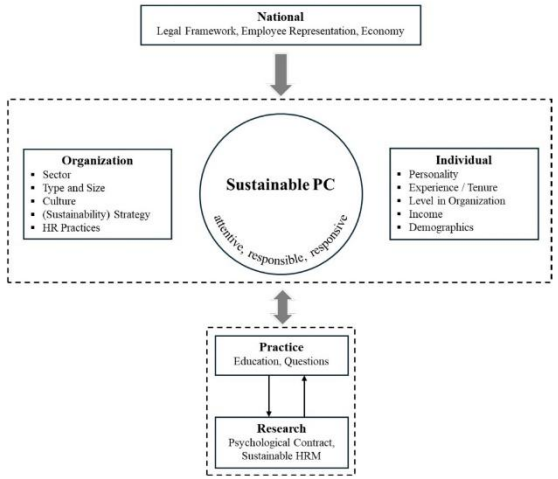


Figure 1: Framework for Sustainable Psychological Contracts in Germany

8

Table 1

Focus Area	Author(s)	Year	Title	Publisher	Audience	German scholars	Data Collection in Germany
CAREER	Festing, M.	2018	Career trajectories and psychological contracts of women in multinational contexts	European J. of International Management	Scholars	x	
CHANGE	Hauff, S.	2007	Flexibilisierung von Beschäftigung und die Erosion psychologischer Verträge aus Sicht der ArbeitnehmerInnen	Arbeit	Practitioners	x	x
	Werth C.	2016	Der Einfluss organisationaler Faktoren und spezifischer Persönlichkeitseigenschaften auf psychologische Verträge im Zeitverlauf: Eine Analyse psychologischer Verträge am Beispiel wissenschaftlicher Hochschulmitarbeiter	PhD Thesis	Scholars	x	x
	Kraus, K. & Raeder, S.	2008	Flexibilisierung von Beschäftigung – Funktion und Wandel der Vermittlungsformen „Beruf“ und „psychologischer Vertrag“	Psychologie der Arbeit	Scholars & Practitioners	x	
	Raeder, S.	2023	Sustaining psychological contracts during organizational change	Gruppe. Interaktion. Organisation. Zeitschrift für Angewandte Organisationspsychologie	Scholars	x	

9

	Raeder, S. & Grote, G.	2003	Psychologische Verträge im Zeichen zunehmender Flexibilität	Wirtschaftspsychologie	Scholars	x	x
	Stahlmann, M., Wendt-Kleinberg, W. & Weyrather, I.	2006	Psychologische Verträge und Arbeitsbeziehungen im Downsizing	Gruppe. Interaktion. Organisation. Zeitschrift für Angewandte Organisationspsychologie (GIO)	Scholars	x	x
	Daser, B.	2009	Mensch oder Kostenfaktor? Über die Haltbarkeit psychologischer Verträge im Outsourcing-Prozess	Springer	Scholars & Practitioners	x	
	Raeder, S. & Grote, G.	2001	Flexibilität ersetzt Kontinuität. Veränderte psychologische Kontrakte und neue Formen persönlicher Identität	Arbeit	Scholars & Practitioners	x	
EXPATRIATES	Minssen, H. & Wehling, P.	2011	Psychologischer Vertrag und Anerkennung. Das Beispiel Expatriates	Personalforschung	Scholars	x	x
	Schuster, T., Bader, B., Bader A. K. & Rousseau, D. M.	2022	When foreign waves hit home shores: Organizational identification in psychological contract breach–violation relationships during international assignments	Journal of Organizational Behavior	Scholars		
	Andresen, M. & Göbel, M.	2009	Reziprozitätsformen in psychologischen Verträgen. Eine empirische Untersuchung am Beispiel von Auslandsentsandten	Personalforschung	Scholars	x	x

10

FAIRNESS	Raeder, S. & Grote, G.	2004	Fairness als Voraussetzung für die Tragfähigkeit psychologischer Verträge in Gerechtigkeit und Management	Managementforschung	Scholars	x	
	Scheel, T. & Otto, K.	2012	Freiwillig arbeiten! Freiwillig aufhören? Ehrenamt, Gerechtigkeit und Psychologische Verträge	Wirtschaftspsychologie	Scholars	x	x
GENERAL PC	Raeder, S.	2009	Der Psychologische Vertrag: Was kann ein gutes Human Resource Management bewirken?	Jahrbuch Human Resource Management	Practitioners	x	
	Kern, S., Hertel-Waszak, A. & Deller, J.	2005	Psychologische Verträge: wahrgenommene Gegenseitigkeit und Reziprozität im Austauschverhältnis zwischen Arbeitgeber und Arbeitnehmer	Blickle, G. & Witzki, A. (eds.) Psychologie im Arbeitsleben: Menschen verstehen, Organisationen erklären, Arbeit human gestalten ; 19. - 21. September 2005	Scholars	x	
	Raeder, S.	2019	Der Psychologische Vertrag	Handbuch der Arbeits- und Organisations-psychologie	Scholars	x	
	Behrens, B.	2023	Starke "Psychologische Verträge": Arbeitgeberattraktivität etwas anders betrachtet	Behörden Spiegel	Practitioners	x	
	Huf, S.	2011	HRM als „Erwartungsmanagement“: Der psychologische Vertrag	Personal Führung	Practitioners		

11

HEALTH	Rigotti, T.	2017	Psychological contracts and their implications for occupational health	Psychosociological Issues in HRM	Scholars	x	
	Reimann, M. & Guzy, J.	2017	Psychological contract breach and employee health: The relevance of unmet obligations for mental and physical health	Journal of work and Organizational Psychology	Scholars	x	x
	Lehr, D.	2010	Der Psychologische Vertrag und seine Relevanz für die Gesundheit von Beschäftigten	Springer	Scholars & Practitioners	x	
LEADERSHIP	Raeder, S.	2019	Antecedents of psychological contracts: Organizational support and leadership	Journal of Change Management	Scholars	x	
	Kels, P.	2022	Psychologische Verträge gestalten	Leadership und People Management	Practitioners	x	
	Brink, A.	2010	Netzwerkgovernance und psychologische Verträge: Making and Keeping Promises	Metropolis-Verlag	Scholars	x	
	Brink, A.	2012	Unternehmensethik und Psychologische Verträge	Die Betriebswirtschaft	Scholars	x	

12

	Solga, M.	2015	Führen als Gestalten psychologischer Kontrakte	Führung und Organisation	Practitioners	x	
OUTCOME	Hauff, S.	2010	Psychologische Verträge und die Konsequenzen ihres Bruchs	WiSt - Wirtschaftswissenschaftliches Studium	Scholars	x	
	Richter, G.	2003	Innere Kündigung. Über Verträge, die brechen können, ohne dass sie je zustande gekommen sind	Personal	Practitioners		
	Grote, G.	2013	Trust and psychological contract breach: A meta-analytical approach	European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	Scholars	x	
	Zacher, H. & Rudolph, C. W.	2020	Relationships between Psychological Contract Breach and Employee Well-Being and Career-Related Behavior: The role of occupational future time perspective	Journal of Organizational Behavior	Scholars	x	
	Reimann, M., Pausch, S. & Diewald, M.	2017	Work–Family Conflict in Germany: Psychological Contracts as Part of Employment Relationships in work-family research	Psychological Issues in Human Resource Management	Scholars	x	

13

Table 2

	SCHOLARS	PRACTITIONERS	REFERENCE EXAMPLE	IMPACT ON SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYMENT
Legal Framework	Translate academic research into practical tools, such as sustainable psychological contract frameworks, which guide organizations in aligning employee needs with company goals beyond legal compliance.	Incorporate HRM tools that discuss career aspirations, workload expectations, and well-being considering both legal entitlements and personal employee goals.	Powell, E. *et al.* (2018) 'Collaboration Between Practitioners and Academics: Defining the Pracademic Experience', *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*, 8(1), pp. 62–79. Available at: https://doi.org/10.18666/jnel-2018-v8-i1-8295.	Address gaps in formal policies and use the legal infrastructure as a foundation for innovative practices to promote inclusivity and transparency in the workplace. *(attentive)*
Educational Priorities	Set up "regulatory sandboxes" in student programs to explore the interplay between psychological contracts and sustainability and invite practitioners and experts to the discussion. Introduce the concept of PC early into HR and management curricula to promote self-reflection and awareness. Develop a German-language and context-specific handbook for PC knowledge and management.	Test innovative solutions in real-world conditions, reducing risks and accelerating practical implementation. Incorporate PC knowledge into ongoing education for practitioners and develop tools for active management and exploration of PC.	Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz (2023) *Reallabore – Testräume für Innovation und Regulierung*. Available at: https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Dossier/reallabore-testraeume-fuer-innovation-und-regulierung.html (Accessed: 25 August 2024).	Promote self-reflection on PC for students and practitioners. Engage in real-world projects that foster a practical understanding of the sustainability challenges of managing PCs through collaborative problem solving. *(responsive)*

14

Organizational Practices	Facilitate the training and education of HR professionals and regularly update them on the management of the employee-employer relationship through their training.	Understand shifts in employee expectations due to external and internal changes and learn how to negotiate new stages that involve different ways of operating.	Hailey, V.H. and Jacobs, K. (2023) *The new rules of work: How the psychological contract is evolving, CIPD*. Available at: https://www.cipd.org/en/policy-and-insights/thought-leadership/insight/new-rules-of-work/ (Accessed: 28 December 2024).	Create environments where people can thrive and make connections with the organization to facilitate healthy employment relationships. *(attentive, responsible and responsive)*
Cultural Norms	Conduct a national survey for Germany using the PC. Focus on sustainability and identify trends for HRM.	Use national, regional and industry trends as orientation to make evidence-based decision for HR practices and organizations in general.	Grote, G. and Staffelbach, B. (2022) *Schweizer HR-Barometer 2022 Schwerpunktthema Innovation und Scheitern*. Available at: https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/main/news/eth-news/2022/10/20221005-hr-barometer-2022/HRBarometer2022_final.pdf (Accessed: 18 January 2025).	Raise public awareness to increase job satisfaction and employability over time. *(responsive)*
Research Focus	Investigate new obligations arising from sustainable PCs in different regional and industry contexts to understand what's common, what's different, and how this affects HR.	Apply recommendations for internal and external sustainability initiatives that positively enhance employee's perceptions of PC fulfillment.	Dixon-Fowler, H. *et al.* (2020) 'Sustainability and ideology-infused psychological contracts: An organizational- and employee-level perspective', *Human Resource Management Review*, 30(3), p. 100690. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/J.HRMR.2019.100690.	Understand inducements with the aim to provide stable and fulfilling work over the long term to increase organizational commitment and maintain a positive public reputation. *(responsible)*

15

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18

7.5.4 UFHRD Conference, June 2025

Working Paper: Advocating relational HRD in academia and practice:

The Psychological Contract in Germany

Abstract

The psychological contract (PC) has long been recognised as a concept for understanding the dynamic relationship between employees and employers. Yet, despite substantial international attention, its integration into German academia, professional education, and practice remains notably limited. This conceptual paper examines the cultural, organisational, educational, and legal barriers that have hindered the broader adoption of the PC in Germany. We argue that Human Resource Development (HRD) must play a pivotal role in advancing a more relational approach to employment relationships, especially in light of demographic changes, the intensifying competition for talent, and shifting employee expectations. Building on existing models and recent literature, we propose a framework designed to advocate for the PC's relevance and practical integration into the development of Germany's workforce and organisational capacities. In addition, we propose targeted activities and actionable recommendations for both research and practice to raise awareness of the PC and to support its broader adoption across German HRD contexts.

Key Word

Psychological Contract, Germany, Professional Education, Human Resource Development

1. Introduction and Paper's Importance

The psychological contract (PC) is a well-established and extensively researched concept, both in academic literature and organisational practice. Initially developed by Argyris (1960), Schein (1970), and Kotter (1973), and later reconceptualised by Rousseau (1989), the PC refers to the unwritten set of mutual expectations between employees and employers (Rousseau, 1995). It has been used to explain outcomes such as job satisfaction and employee contributions (Robinson, 1996), organisational commitment (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau, 1994; Robinson and Morrison, 2000), and responses like neglect or exit (Turnley and Feldman, 1999). Over time, the concept has evolved to address contemporary HR developments such as idiosyncratic deals (i-deals)—customised work arrangements negotiated between employees and employers—which shape individual perceptions of fairness and reciprocity within the PC (Rousseau, 2001; Ng and Feldman, 2012). Additionally, there is growing scholarly interest in linking the PC to sustainable HRM practices, highlighting how mutual expectations can contribute to the long-term well-being, engagement, and sustainability of the employment relationship (Kraak and Griep, 2022; Griep, Kraak and Beekman, 2023).

From the practitioner's perspective, the influence of regular feedback mechanisms on employees' PCs has been recognised and widely accepted among HR practitioners in Anglo-American countries (Joo and Park, 2010). Human resources associations, for example the The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in the UK (CIPD, 2024), continue to highlight the value of the PC for modern HR management: the concept informs HR strategies in areas such as onboarding, change management and turnover.

Interestingly, despite its relevance, the PC remains relatively underutilised in the German context. Given the increasing complexity and individualisation of modern careers, especially in knowledge-driven and hybrid work settings (Cooke, Dickmann and Parry, 2022), applying the PC lens in Germany could provide critical insights into how employment relationships can be made more resilient, human-centred, and sustainable. We argue that developing a relational understanding of employment relationships through the lens of the PC is vital for the future of German HRD. With an aging workforce, shrinking talent pools (Destatis, 2022), and increasing demands for meaningful employment (Bailey *et al.*, 2019; Berg *et al.*, 2024), German organisations must move beyond formal structures. Emphasising the PC would allow HRD professionals to foster trust, commitment, and organisational agility, thereby enhancing employer attractiveness and employee retention.

2. Theoretical Background and Context

2.1 Understanding the PC

The term PC refers to the unwritten, subjective expectations and obligations perceived by employees and employers regarding their mutual relationship (Rousseau, 1989). Unlike formal employment contracts, which define explicit terms and conditions, PCs capture the relational, emotional, and ethical dimensions of work. They are shaped by individual perceptions, organisational culture, communication patterns, and social norms (Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019). PCs define the terms of an exchange relationship between, in this case, employee and employer, and are interrelated with the concepts of leader-member exchange (LMX) and perceived organisational support (POS) (Dulac *et al.*, 2008). Two defining characteristics of PCs are their implicitness (O'Neill and Adya, 2007) and variability (Rogozińska-Pawełczyk, 2018), which means that the parties to the exchange relationship (employees and employers) may hold different PCs that cause disagreement over the perceived terms of the relationship (Herriot, Manning and Kidd, 1997). Without knowledge of PCs, the implicit, subjective expectations are often only taken note of when they remain unfulfilled, strong reactions even hostility and aggression are possible (Rousseau, 1990; Freese and Schalk, 1996).

Crucially, while the legal contract establishes the "what" of employment (e.g., salary, working hours) in explicit terms that remain unchanged until overridden by explicit consensus, the PC more importantly defines the "how" (e.g., fairness, respect, recognition) of the employment relationship. In light of ongoing transformations in the world of work — driven by digitalisation, globalisation, demographic shifts, and evolving employee expectations — effectively managing PCs has become increasingly important for sustaining employee engagement, well-

being, and organisational resilience (Alcover *et al.*, 2017; Griep *et al.*, 2019; Bankins, Griep and Hansen, 2020). According to the OECD (2019), the rise of non-standard forms of employment, remote work, and automation is reshaping job quality and the nature of employment relationships. These changes amplify uncertainty for employees and underscore the importance of mutual trust and transparency in their reciprocal employment relationship. The PC provides this valuable lens for understanding how employees interpret and respond to such changes. When employees subjectively created expectations are fulfilled, they are more likely to feel valued, committed, and supported; outcomes that contribute to individual well-being and organisational effectiveness (Guest, 2004).

PC research has been evolving with ongoing trends in the employment landscape. Particularly, the rise of the gig economy and precarious work have realigned priorities and realities in the employment relationship and labour market, heightening the relevance of PCs as the reliability and complexity of explicit agreements diminish (Griep *et al.*, 2023).

With regard to these trends, PC researchers also recognise the importance of context (Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019; Kraak *et al.*, 2024). Context – societal, organisational, environmental, and personal – shapes how we behave and interpret the world around us. Consequently, a holistic approach to PC research is warranted that takes the various dimensions of context into consideration (Kraak *et al.*, 2024).

2.2 The German Context

Our paper focuses on the geographical (location) dimension of context (Johns, 2006), arguing that the specific characteristics of the German context shape the formation, evaluation, and interpretation of PCs.

Despite the growing body of international research on the PC, its integration into German HRD practice remains limited. One explanation lies in Germany's institutional landscape, such as the Betriebsverfassungsgesetz (Works Constitution Act), collective bargaining agreements, and codetermination rights, dominate organisational life (Giardini, Kabst and Müller-Camen, 2005). Works councils, which represent approximately 43% of the workforce (Destatis, 2024), are crucial mechanisms for protecting employees' rights. While ensuring employee protection, these structures leave comparatively little room for the informal and perceptual dimensions of employment relationships that the PC encompasses. Examples from other countries demonstrate that even in contexts with strong institutional or collectivist traditions, the PC can be meaningfully integrated — provided it aligns with broader cultural values and is strategically embedded in HR practice. This highlights the need to explore how Germany's distinct institutional and cultural features have shaped a specific PC logic and how this might be expanded to better support relational, sustainable employment practices.

Furthermore, German HRM education largely focuses on strategic HRM concepts, operational efficiency, and regulatory compliance (Berg *et al.*, 2024), leaving little room for the incorporation of relational frameworks and education on implicit expectations and their management. Consequently, many practitioners remain unaware of the PC's relevance as a tool for fostering engagement, trust, and sustainable employment relationships. Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to explore the contextual barriers to the adoption of the PC in Germany and to propose pathways — both conceptual and practical — for integrating it more effectively into research, education, and HRD practice.

3. Research purpose

This paper aims to:

- Enhance our understanding of the factors contributing to the limited engagement with the PC among German academics, professionals, and educators.
- Develop a framework based on the existing literature to advocate the value and integration of the PC within German HRD practice.
- Provide preliminary recommendations for both HRD research and practice

In the first step, we conducted a literature review to develop an understanding of the widespread neglect of the PC theory in Germany. By synthesising the reasons and crucial factors that influence this outcome, we can develop concrete recommendations for scholars and practitioners that help better incorporate the concept into education, practice and research.

The second step consisted of developing a theoretical framework for the PC in Germany; by considering the context-specific influences and circumstances, this framework allows for the development of educational curricula, research design, and practical HRM strategies that cater to the circumstances and specific needs of the stakeholders in German employment contexts. In doing so, the framework serves as the basis for a distinct German brand of PC scholarship that has a maximum impact on German organisations and employees.

4. Methods

We adopted a conceptual synthesis approach, drawing on:

- Literature reviews of PC theory (Guest, 2004; Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018; Hansen, 2019).
- Studies examining German labour relations, organisational culture, and HRM education (Brodbeck, Frese and Javidan, 2002; Braekkan, 2012; Raeder, 2023).
- Practitioner-oriented publications to assess the translation of PC knowledge into practice.

German and international sources were considered if applicable to the German context (Snyder, 2019; Juntunen and Lehenkari, 2021).

In surveying specifically German publications and studies conducted in Germany, we found that most were concerned with the role of the PC in change management, leadership, and PC outcomes (see Table 1: German PC publications by topic).

Table 1: German PC publications by topic

Focus Area	Author(s)	Year	Title	Publisher	Audience	German scholars	Data Collection in Germany
CAREER	Festing, M. and Schäfer, L.	2014	Generational challenges to talent management: A framework for talent retention based on the psychological-contract perspective	Journal of World Business	Scholars	x	
	Gerber et al.	2012	Managing psychological contracts in the era of the "new" career	European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	Scholars	x	
CHANGE	Hauff, S.	2007	Flexibilisierung von Beschäftigung und die Erosion psychologischer Verträge aus Sicht der ArbeitnehmerInnen	Arbeit	Practitioners	x	x
	Werth, C.	2016	Der Einfluss organisationaler Faktoren und spezifischer Persönlichkeitseigenschaften auf psychologische Verträge im Zeitverlauf: Eine Analyse psychologischer Verträge am Beispiel wissenschaftlicher Hochschulmitarbeiter	PhD Thesis	Scholars	x	x
	Kraus, K. & Raeder, S.	2008	Flexibilisierung von Beschäftigung – Funktion und Wandel der Vermittlungsformen „Beruf" und „psychologischer Vertrag"	Psychologie der Arbeit	Scholars & Practitioners	x	
	Raeder, S.	2023	Sustaining psychological contracts during organizational change	Gruppe. Interaktion. Organisation. Zeitschrift fur Angewandte Organisationspsychologie	Scholars	x	
	Raeder, S. & Grote, G.	2003	Psychologische Verträge im Zeichen zunehmender Flexibilität	Wirtschaftspsychologie	Scholars	x	x
	Stahlmann, M., Wendt-Kleinberg, W. & Weyrather, I.	2006	Psychologische Verträge und Arbeitsbeziehungen im Downsizing	Gruppe. Interaktion. Organisation. Zeitschrift für Angewandte Organisationspsychologie (GIO)	Scholars	x	x
	Daser, B.	2009	Mensch oder Kostenfaktor? Über die Haltbarkeit psychologischer Verträge im Outsourcing-Prozess	Springer	Scholars & Practitioners	x	
	Raeder, S. & Grote, G.	2001	Flexibilität ersetzt Kontinuität. Veränderte psychologische Kontrakte und neue Formen persönlicher Identität	Arbeit	Scholars & Practitioners	x	

EXPAT-RIATES	Minssen, H. & Wehling, P.	2011	Psychologischer Vertrag und Anerkennung. Das Beispiel Expatriates	Personalforschung	Scholars	x	x
	Schuster, T., Bader, B., Bader, A K. & Rousseau, D. M.	2022	When foreign waves hit home shores: Organizational identification in psychological contract breach–violation relationships during international assignments	Journal of Organizational Behavior	Scholars	x	x
	Andresen, M. & Göbel, M.	2009	Reziprozitätsformen in psychologischen Verträgen. Eine empirische Untersuchung am Beispiel von Auslandsentsandten	Personalforschung	Scholars	x	x
FAIRNESS	Raeder, S. & Grote, G.	2004	Fairness als Voraussetzung für die Tragfähigkeit psychologischer Verträge in Gerechtigkeit und Management	Managementforschung	Scholars	x	
	Scheel, T. & Otto, K.	2012	Freiwillig arbeiten! Freiwillig aufhören? Ehrenamt, Gerechtigkeit und Psychologische Verträge	Wirtschaftspsychologie	Scholars	x	x

GENERAL PC	Raeder, S.	2009	Der Psychologische Vertrag: Was kann ein gutes Human Resource Management bewirken?	Jahrbuch Human Resource Management	Practitioners	x	
	Blickle, G. Witzki, A.	2005	Psychologische Verträge: wahrgenommene Gegenseitigkeit und Reziprozität im Austauschverhältnis zwischen Arbeitgeber und Arbeitnehmer	Konferenz: Psychologie im Arbeitsleben; Menschen verstehen, Organisationen erklären, Arbeit human gestalten 19. - 21. September 2005	Scholars	x	
	Raeder, S.	2019	Der Psychologische Vertrag	Handbuch der Arbeits- und Organisations-psychologie	Scholars	x	
	Behrens, B.	2023	Starke "Psychologische Verträge": Arbeitgeberattraktivität etwas anders betrachtet	Behörden Spiegel	Practitioners	x	
	Huf, S.	2011	Personalmanagement als Erwartungsmanagement - Der psychologische Vertrag	Personal Führung	Practitioners		
	Behrens, M.	2009	Der psychologische Vertrag: Arbeit-Erwartungen-Anerkennung; eine betriebliche Fallstudie zu Erwartungen von Beschäftigten in	Working paper	Scholars	x	x

			reziproken Austauschbeziehungen				
HEALTH	Rigotti, T	2010	Der psychologische Vertrag und seine Relevanz für die Gesundheit von Beschäftigten	Psychosociological Issues in HRM	Scholars	x	
	Reimann, M. & Guzy, J.	2017	Psychological contract breach and employee health: The relevance of unmet obligations for mental and physical health	Journal of work and Organizational Psychology	Scholars	x	x
	Müller, S.	2017	Die Pandemie als Wende für die Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf? Auswirkungen auf den psychologischen Vertrag zwischen angestellten Eltern und Unternehmen	Dissertation; Universität Hamburg	Scholars	x	x
LEADERSHIP	Raeder, S. and Lamoey, F. R.	2022	Psychological Contracts and Leadership: A Meta-analytic Investigation of Contextual Predictors	Academy of Management Proceedings	Scholars	x	
	Kels, P.	2022	Psychologische Verträge gestalten	Leadership und People Management	Practitioners	x	

	Brink, A.	2010	Netzwerkgovernance und psychologische Verträge: Making and Keeping Promises	Metropolis-Verlag	Scholars	x	
	Brink, A.	2012	Unternehmensethik und Psychologische Verträge	Die Betriebswirtschaft	Scholars	x	
	Solga, M. 2015	2015	Führen als Gestalten psychologischer Kontrakte	Führung und Organisation	Practitioners	x	
OUTCOME	Hauff, S.	2010	Psychologische Verträge und die Konsequenzen ihres Bruchs	WiSt - Wirtschaftswissenschaftliches Studium	Scholars	x	
	Richter, G.	2003	Innere Kündigung – Über Verträge, die brechen können, ohne dass sie je zustande gekommen sind.	Personal	Practitioners		
	Zacher, H. & Rudolph, C. W.	2020	Relationships between Psychological Contract Breach and Employee Well-Being and Career-Related Behavior: The role of occupational future time perspective	Journal of Organizational Behavior	Scholars	x	

Reimann, M., Pausch, S. & Diewald, M.	2017	Work–Family Conflict in Germany: Psychological Contracts as Part of Employment Relationships in work-family research	Psychological Issues in Human Resource Management	Scholars	x	
Rigotti, T.	2009	Enough is enough? Threshold models for the relationship between psychological contract breach and job-related attitudes	European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	Scholars	x	x

5. Findings

5.1 Legal Dominance

Similar to France, German employment relations are highly regulated with a strong emphasis on formal agreements. While safeguarding employee rights, this environment leaves little space for recognising and managing the informal, subjective expectations captured by the PC (Schalk and Soeters, 2008). We argue that HRD in Germany must align legal compliance with relational management practices that build mutual trust and commitment beyond codified rights. Crucially, legal compliance and relational management do not contradict one another (Rousseau, 2000). Rather, as relational management has always been practiced subliminally, it is important to recognise its role in interpersonal relationships, including employment and relations. A singular focus on formal legal constraints and provisions hinders the development of relational PCs. In the highly codified German labour context, relational aspects and PCs play a smaller role than they do in less formalised cultures (Giardini, Kabst and Müller-Camen, 2005). Therefore, it is paramount to conduct research in the German context to synthesise the areas that are regulated by PCs and how these contracts are structured.

5.2 Educational Gaps

German human resource management education primarily focuses on technical and operational aspects, rarely integrating relational frameworks such as the PC into curricula. The most commonly used HRM textbooks in Germany (cf. Jung, 2017; Scholz and Scholz, 2019; Stock-Homburg and Groß, 2019; Berthel and Becker, 2022; Holtbrügge, 2022) hardly mention the PC. Only Huf (2022) dedicates a partial chapter to legal and PCs. The concept is rarely addressed in practitioner-oriented outlets as well (cf. Gurtner et al., 2017; Huf, 2011; Raeder, 2018; Scholz and Weth, 2015; Solga, 2016). As a result, HR professionals are less equipped to recognise and effectively utilise PCs in practice. We argue for curricular reform to include the PC early in business and HR education, fostering relational awareness among emerging professionals. Awareness of the existence and mechanics of PCs allows all parties to exchange relationships to vocalise expectations and remain receptive to such vocalisations or implicit signs of expectations, as well as impending breaches. Only through the comprehensive provision of knowledge about the concept can it be widely used and leveraged to create better employment relationships.

5.3 Organisational Standardisation

Germany's emphasis on standardised high-performance work systems (Brodbeck, Frese and Javidan, 2002) often leads to procedural rigidity, undermining the flexible and individualised management of PCs. We argue that HRD practitioners must learn to balance structure with individual relationship management, promoting agile and tailored approaches to employee engagement. Meanwhile, I-Deals, which are based on PC theory, have long been common in Germany (Hornung, Rousseau and Glaser, 2008), although their manifestation as such and their relationship with PCs are barely recognised or understood. Through the lens of I-Deals, the broader theory of PCs can be introduced into organisational practice and learning. Standardised frameworks for the development, negotiation, and implementation of I-Deals allow relational management practices to be inserted in otherwise rigid, standardisation-oriented structures and cultures.

Although themes such as flexible work arrangements, remote work, employee experience, and agile HR have gained traction in recent years, the deeper relational dimension of the employment relationship — as conceptualised by the PC — has not been widely acknowledged. Germany's labour market is shaped by a highly institutionalised framework of codified laws, collective agreements, and works councils (Giardini, Kabst and Müller-Camen, 2005; Braekkan, 2012), which leaves comparatively little room for informal or individually negotiated expectations. While mechanisms for worker participation are well established, the PC offers a complementary perspective — one that addresses not only structural but also relational dimensions of work.

5.4 Cultural Preferences for Formality & Labelling of the concept

Culturally, Germany values formal and explicit agreements and prescribed behavioural guides. These are comprehensive and detailed, leading to the assumption that nearly every aspect of a relationship can be defined and organised in this way. For instance, occupational health and safety have long been considered integral parts of the system (Hauss and Rosenbrock, 1984; Kleeberg, 2003) and are extensively codified and strict. This assumption meanwhile causes neglect for the subjective, fluid, sometimes inexpressible, aspects of life and thought. We argue that the idea of such aspects being explainable in the form of a structured framework may be culturally appealing and allow for increased readiness to discuss PCs in formal settings.

However, there is evidence that the term itself may so far have prevented its acceptance in Germany: The American-derived term "Psychological Contract" sometimes triggers scepticism due to the cultural connotations of the term 'psychology', which is commonly associated with private or pathological matters rather than the workplace (Raeder, 2018). However, we believe that the prevailing scepticism and resistance can be overcome if the term "PC" is reworded in a language tailored to the respective country, while keeping the continued focus on mutual understanding, trust and commitment. Meanwhile, the increased application of psychology to research on employment has been criticised in principle, leading to the proposal of the alternative term "social contract of work" based on the assumption that workers' understanding of mutual obligations tend to be collective rather than individual (Korczynski, 2023).

5.5 Gaps in Research

PC research has in recent years branched out into different contexts beyond Western, educated, industrialized, democratic (WEIRD) societies, recognizing the importance of context to the formation, content, and management of PCs (Kraak *et al.*, 2024). Despite PC research having been conducted worldwide, only few actual studies have been conducted in Germany. While the PC is regularly addressed by German scholars (see Table 1: German PC publications by topic), the concept has never gained traction in mainstream HRD literature. While some German studies have addressed PC breaches and their consequences (Reimann and Guzy, 2017; Schuster *et al.*, 2022), there has been little focus on the proactive management of the PC or its strategic potential. Thus, a comprehensive, dedicated research effort on the PC is still missing. PC scholars argue that systematic investigation of PCs can "make the work-world a better place" (Kraak *et al.*, 2024) and showed that PCs have profound influence on employees, their behaviours, and performance (Topa, Aranda-Carmena and De-Maria, 2022).

In addition to affirming the need to understand the contents and structure of existing PCs in German contexts (Rebehn, Nichol and Bell, 2024), we argue for greater scholarly attention to how PCs can be consciously shaped to foster positive employment relations, organisational agility, and sustainable employee commitment. Researchers with hybrid roles, such as pracademics, impact-driven scholars, or reflective practitioners (Lau, Haist and Hewett, 2025) can play an important role in merging the theoretical concept of PCs with its already ubiquitous real-world application and its further active management. These hybrid roles benefit from knowledge and first-hand experience in both the academic and practical worlds and are thus best equipped to spearhead the introduction of the PC into the German working world.

6. A proposed context-specific model for the PC

In contrast to Germany, countries such as the Netherlands have successfully incorporated the PC into HRD by framing it as a complementary tool that enhances trust, communication, and employee agency within established legal frameworks (Schalk and Soeters, 2008). Similarly, in Norway, communitarian forms of PCs have emerged in line with horizontal collectivist cultural values, promoting long-term, trust-based employment relationships grounded in mutual care and equal status (Thomas *et al.*, 2010). To mitigate reliance on formalisation and to promote trust and flexibility, our framework (see Figure 1) promotes the reciprocal exchange of promises, inducements, and obligations (Gouldner, 1960; Rousseau, 1995). We extend the current frameworks of Guest (2004) and Rousseau et al. (2018) by incorporating the social and cultural context of Germany (Coyle-Shapiro *et al.*, 2019; Griep, Cooper and Weinhardt, 2019). We advocate that stakeholders such as professionals, leaders, and employee representatives use the PC to identify and address the needs of employees and enhance workplace satisfaction beyond legally mandated benefits or contractually formalised inducements. Greater responsiveness would promote agility and enable organisations to maintain and develop trust (Robinson, 1996). It would empower both employees and employers to act ethically and uphold their respective responsibilities and fulfil obligations beyond legal mandates during organisational change, such as ensuring well-being and maintaining a supportive work environment (Raeder, 2023).

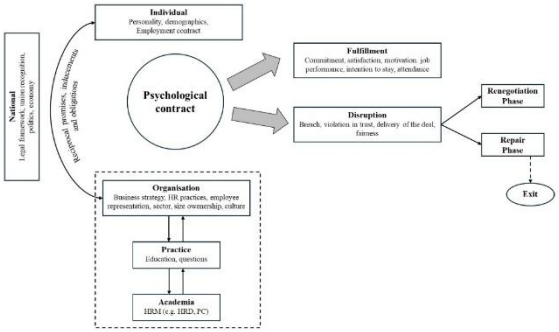


Figure 1: Based on Guest (2004) and Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou (2018)

7. Implications for HRD Practice

Integrating active interaction under the framework of the PC into German HRD practice offers a significant opportunity to strengthen employee development, foster meaningful employment relationships, and drive organisational agility. To achieve this, the German HRD community must intentionally address five critical levers: legal frameworks, educational priorities, organisational practices, cultural norms, and the research agenda. Together, these elements form a pathway for embedding relational capabilities at both the individual and organisational levels.

8.1 Legal Frameworks: Expanding HRD Beyond Regulatory Compliance

While Germany's labour law provides a stable backbone for employee protection, it is not sufficient to develop the deeper relational capacities needed in today's workplaces. We argue that Human Resource Development (HRD) must translate academic knowledge about the PC into accessible tools and practices that complement legal obligations with human-centred development approaches (Powell *et al.*, 2018).

For example, by integrating structured discussions about career development, workload expectations, and well-being into standard HRD interventions — such as onboarding programmes, mentoring schemes, and leadership training — organisations can move beyond compliance to cultivate trust and mutual growth. HRD professionals must position themselves as architects of relational capability, enabling employees to voice their expectations early and often, thus laying the groundwork for continuous learning, engagement and resilience.

8.2 Educational Priorities: Embedding PCs in Professional Development

Education is one of the most powerful levers for the advancement of relational HRD. The German HRM and HRD curricula currently underrepresent the psychological dimensions of employment. We propose introducing the PC early into university programmes and professional development tracks to promote deeper self-awareness, critical reflection, and ethical sensitivity among emerging HRD practitioners.

Practical learning environments such as "regulatory sandboxes" (Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Klimaschutz, 2023) can be adapted to simulate real-world relational dynamics, allowing students and professionals to experiment with negotiating and managing PCs under controlled conditions. Furthermore, the development of German language, context-specific handbooks on PC management would support lifelong learning, ensuring that relational competencies evolve alongside careers. In doing so, HRD actively nurtures the next generation of professionals equipped to foster adaptive trust-based employment relationships.

8.3 Organisational Practices: Building Cultures of Continuous Relational Development

Within organisations, HRD must shift from viewing employees purely through the lens of standardised work systems to recognising them as relational partners in mutual development. Regular, structured training on PC dynamics for HRD and line managers can equip organisations to better manage shifting employee expectations over time (Hailey and Jacobs, 2023).

By integrating PC management into leadership development, talent management, and change management programmes, HRD can create environments in which employees feel seen, heard, and valued (Rodwell, Ellershaw and Flower, 2015; Gardner, Pierce and Peng, 2020; Bandyopadhyay and Srivastava, 2022). Such workplaces not only enhance individual growth, but also promote organisational adaptability, both of which are key outcomes of contemporary HRD efforts.

8.4 Cultural Norms: Changing Mindsets Through Relational Learning

Germany's preference for formal structures can be a barrier to openly addressing the relational aspect of work. HRD plays a unique role in reshaping these cultural expectations through targeted awareness-raising and education.

National initiatives, such as a nationwide survey on PCs (following models such as the Swiss HR Barometer; (Grote and Staffelbach, 2022), would generate much-needed data on relational trends across sectors. This evidence base could then inform HRD strategies that embed relational literacy into organisational cultures, encouraging employees and leaders alike to actively engage with expectations, obligations, and evolving needs.

Inappropriate translation of terms into other languages can create challenges for target audiences and impede their intended application (Evans, 2004). It is essential to consider sociolinguistic factors (Naveen and Trojovský, 2024). Consequently, we propose the adoption of the alternative term 'Erwartungsvereinbarung' in the German context, which loosely translates to "agreement of expectations." This term effectively avoids the problematic connotations associated with the word 'psychological' and the culturally specific implications of the term 'contract', which may lead to confusion between the PC

and an actual, explicit, legally binding agreement. The neologism combines the German terms *Erwartung* (expectation) and *Vereinbarung* (agreement, distinct from 'contract'). This term maintains the emphasis on the implicit mutual agreements that define the PC while precluding any interpretation of the concept as a clinical, individual one. By reframing the concept from a legally binding contract to an informal agreement, it eliminates the notion of explicit formalization of terms and outcomes. Given that PCs are inherently subjective and implicit, comprising expectations formed based on various promises, we contend that the term *Erwartungsvereinbarung* more accurately represents the essence of a PC than a direct translation.

8.5 Research Focus: Advancing the Field of Relational HRD

Finally, the German HRD research community must pay greater attention to PC dynamics as mechanisms of HRD, not merely as predictors of breach or turnover. Empirical research should explore how PCs are created, maintained, and renegotiated over time, particularly in contexts such as digital transformation, demographic changes, and new forms of work (Rousseau, Hansen and Tomprou, 2018).

Studies examining sustainable PCs (Dixon-Fowler *et al.*, 2020) could offer critical insights that could prove useful in designing HRD interventions that promote long-term employability, ethical leadership, and organisational commitment. In doing so, HRD practice would be anchored in an evidence-based understanding of relational dynamics, an essential ingredient for future-proofing the workforce.

Ultimately, the goal is to apply new knowledge and enable HRD practitioners to establish fulfilling working relationships that enhance organisational commitment and reputation, reduce staff turnover and promote sustainable growth.

8. Limitations and Future Directions for Research

Scholars agree that the results of PC research cannot be generalized, and that their structure, content or importance cannot be assumed to be the same across cultures and contexts (Abdalla *et al.*, 2021; Jung, Yoon and Aldieri, 2021; Kang *et al.*, 2021; Saleem *et al.*, 2021). There are calls for cross-national perspectives (Rousseau and Schalk, 2000). Meanwhile, the idea of shared PCs is relatively new (Tekleab *et al.*, 2020) and the national context, although acknowledged for its influence (Jayaweera *et al.*, 2021), has received little scholarly attention.

We therefore call for the development of context-specific research designs in PC studies and the development of more detailed understanding of the national context, particularly the German one, and how it influences the formation and evaluation of PCs in German organisations, and by German employees. We argue that the dimensions of culture, comprehensiveness of legal frameworks, and the background of HRD/HRM education influence how the PC is understood, accepted, and managed. Further avenues for research include the following.

Exploring and understanding PCs in Germany

- Exploratory studies of the contents of PCs among German employees and employers
- Sector-specific exploratory studies to determine the structures of PCs in different industries within the German national context

Mapping the influences of context-specific factors on PCs

- Examination of the influence that specific aspects of the German national context (such as uncertainty avoidance, reliance on codification and legal frameworks) have on the PC in its formation and management
- Investigation into the scope of PCs under the specific circumstances provided by Germany's extensive legal landscape
- Analysis of the role of works councils and trade unions in the formation of individual and shared PCs
- Comparative studies on how national context (beyond the purely cultural dimension) influences the formation and context of PCs
- Exploring the role of PCs in German multinational companies and foreign multinational companies' German subsidiaries

Improving the implementation of PC theory in education and practice

- Analysis of how HRD/HRM education shapes manager's understanding and management of PCs
- The development of a proposed alternative term for the PC that addresses the cultural and linguistic barriers which currently make the concept unattractive to Germans

The proposed model for the specifically German PC provides a theoretical framework to which any of these studies can refer. Furthermore, it provides a starting point for the incorporation of PC theory into HRM/HRD education at the university level, as well as for informing practitioners and developing specific consulting and training programmes to assist practitioners in implementing PC management in their organisations' HR strategies.

9. Conclusion

The PC remains underutilised in Germany due to a combination of legal, educational, organisational, cultural, and research-related barriers. However, the changing labour market, evolving employee expectations, and the need for agile, resilient organisations make its integration increasingly urgent.

We argue that advocating greater attention to the concept of PCs in German education, practice and academia is necessary and achievable. Through a tailored framework that respects Germany's legal structure while enhancing relational competence, HRD professionals can strengthen workplace relationships, improve organisational agility, and create competitive advantages in the global talent market. We provide a comprehensive list of further research opportunities that help promote the PC in the German context and assist in its implementation at educational, practitioner and academic levels.

By shifting focus towards managing expectations, obligations, and trust relationally, Germany can evolve its employment landscape to meet the demands of the 21st century workplace.

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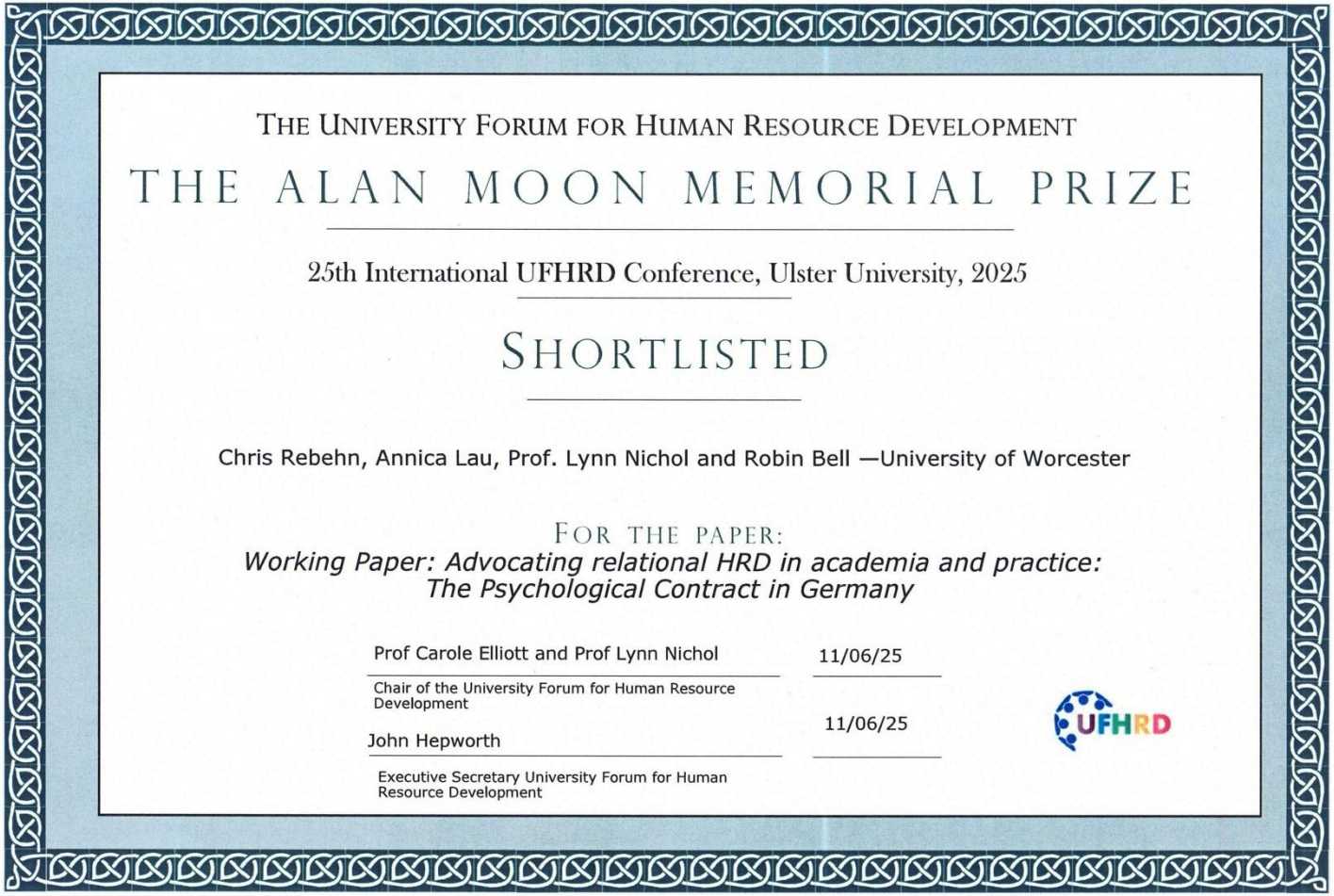
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THE ALAN MOON MEMORIAL PRIZE

25th International UFHRD Conference, Ulster University, 2025

SHORTLISTED

Chris Rebehn, Annica Lau, Prof. Lynn Nichol and Robin Bell —University of Worcester

FOR THE PAPER:

Working Paper: Advocating relational HRD in academia and practice: The Psychological Contract in Germany

Prof Carole Elliott and Prof Lynn Nichol — 11/06/25

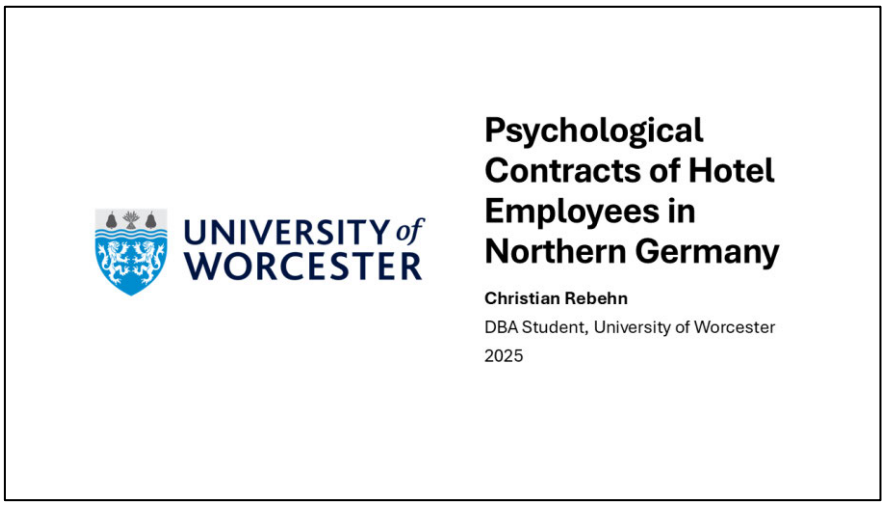
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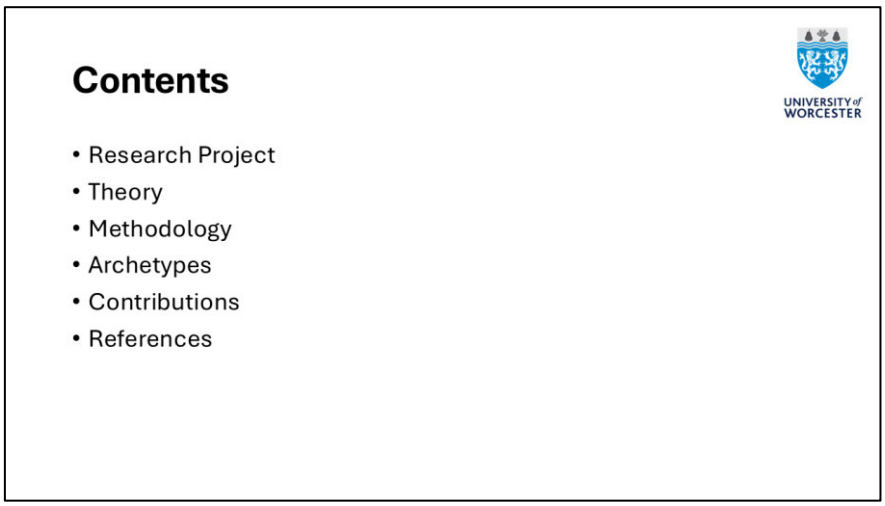
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7.5.5 German Institute for Tourism Studies, June 2025









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UNIVERSITY of WORCESTER

CORDES UND RIEGER
KOMPETENZ FÜR TOURISMUS, HOTELLERIE, GASTRONOMIE

Research Questions

UNIVERSITY of WORCESTER

Aim:

To generate an understanding of the elements comprising the Psychological Contract of hotel employees in Northern Germany

Q1: What shared viewpoints exist among frontline hotel employees in Northern Germany about the employer inducements expected in their Psychological Contract?

Q2: Which inducements are equally valued by employees?

Q3: On the importance of which inducements do viewpoints differ?

Q4: What demographic and workplace characteristics are associated with the different viewpoints?

Theory & Methods

Psychological Contract

- Terms of exchange relationship
- Mutual **obligations** to another
- Subjective and individual
- Constantly change
- Employer offers **inducements**
- Employee provides **contributions**

	Employer	Employee
Expected	Promised Inducements	Promised Contributions
Fulfilled	Delivered Inducements	Delivered Contributions

Lambert (2011), Rousseau (1989)

Psychological Contract Types

Image redacted for copyright reasons

See p33 for alt description

Image: Rousseau (2000)

- Conceived by *Rousseau (2000)*
- Relational:
  - Open-ended
  - Long Term
  - Emotional
- Transactional
  - Exchange-oriented
  - Short Term
  - Rational
- Balanced
  - Dynamic
  - Open-ended
  - Firm success and worker advancement
- Transitional
  - Reflective period
  - Redefining PC
  - Temporary state

Psychological Contract Clusters



Image: Lau (2022)

- Developed by *Janssens, Sels and Van den Brande (2003)*
- Conceptualizes mutual obligations
- Multi-dimensional approach
- Scales Employer Obligations
  - Long-term Involvement
  - Tangibility
  - Personal Treatment
  - Carefulness (stability)
  - Equal Treatment
- Scales Employee Obligations
  - Loyalty
  - Open Attitude
  - Personal Investment
  - Flexibility
  - Respect for Authority

Psychological Contract Clusters



Image: Lau (2022)

- Instrumental
  - High on Equal Treatment
  - Low Personal Investment, Flexibility
  - Expect much from employer, but uncompelled to contribute much
- Weak
  - Low scores throughout
  - No particular bond with organization
- Loyal
  - High on Equal Treatment, Long-term Involvement
  - Exchange their loyalty for stable employment

Psychological Contract Clusters



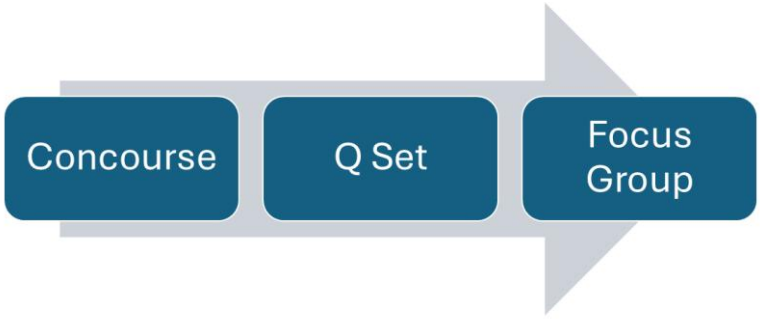
Image: Lau (2022)

- Strong
  - Very high on all scales
  - Contribute much, expect much
- Unattached
  - Very low on Long-term Involvement
  - Show low loyalty to organization
  - No particular bond to organization
- Investing
  - High on Equal Treatment
  - High on Personal Involvement, Flexibility
  - Willing to put in more than they expect back

Methodology

- Q Methodological Study *(Watts and Stenner, 2012)*
- Content-oriented
  - Find out what the PC contains
  - How it is structured
- 1: Developed list of employer inducements (Q Set)

Methodology



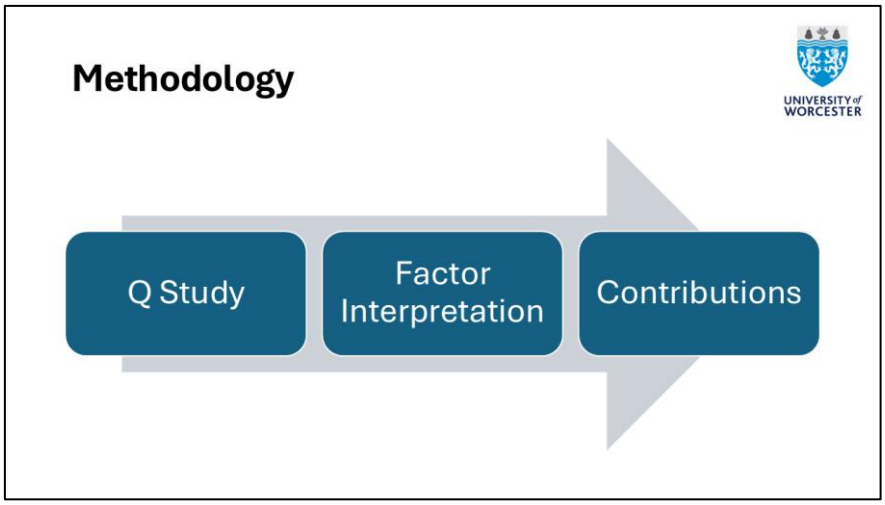
Rebehn, Nichol and Bell (2024)

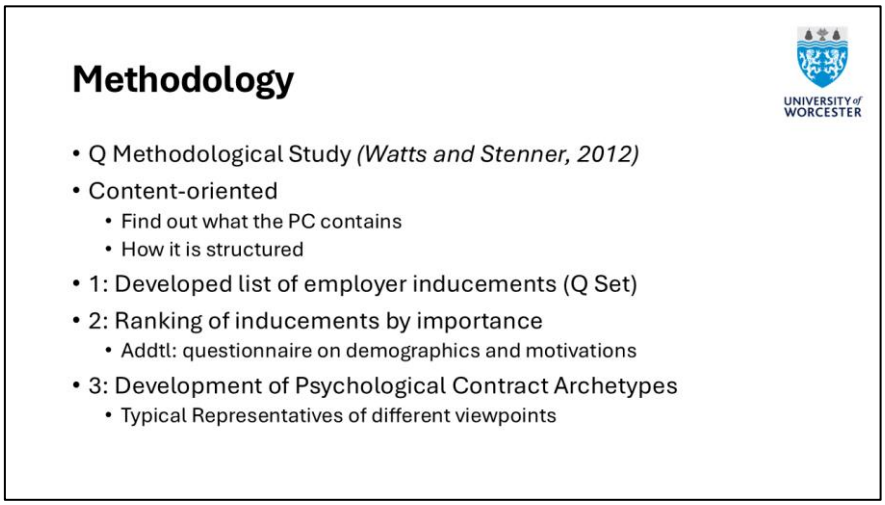
Methodology

- Q Methodological Study *(Watts and Stenner, 2012)*
- Content-oriented
  - Find out what the PC contains
  - How it is structured
- 1: Developed list of employer inducements (Q Set)
- 2: Ranking of inducements by importance
  - 36 hotel employees across Northern Germany

Methodology




Methodology
UNIVERSITY of WORCESTER
Q Study
Factor Interpretation
Contributions


Methodology
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• Q Methodological Study (Watts and Stenner, 2012)
• Content-oriented
• Find out what the PC contains
• How it is structured
• 1: Developed list of employer inducements (Q Set)
• 2: Ranking of inducements by importance
• Addtl: questionnaire on demographics and motivations
• 3: Development of Psychological Contract Archetypes
• Typical Representatives of different viewpoints

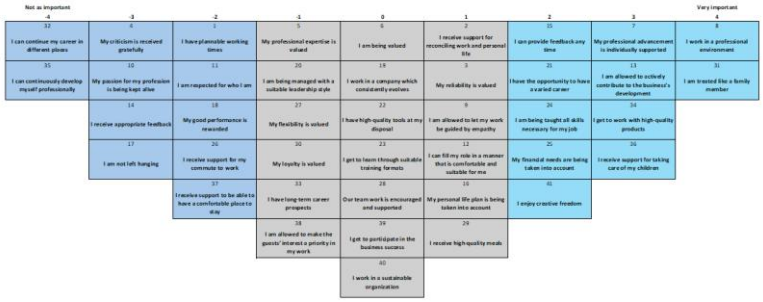

Eight
Archetypes

Alex



Age	30
Qualification	Vocational
Industry Experience	2 years
Job	Front Desk Agent
Career Ambition	Low
Contract Type	Loyalty
Contract Cluster	Loyal
Most Important	Professionalism Loyalty Work-Life Balance
Least Important	Mobility
How to Retain	Team Stability Professionalism Personalized Leadership

Alex



Bianca



Age	21
Qualification	Vocational
Industry Experience	3 years
Job	Waitress
Career Ambition	Strong
Contract Type	External Employability
Contract Cluster	Unattached
Most Important	Independence Career Growth
Least Important	Belonging
How to Retain	Structured Career Development Feedback Recognition

Bianca

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Not as important ... Very important

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
8 I work in a professional environment	7 My professional advancement is individually supported	15 I can provide feedback any time	2 I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	6 I am being valued	5 My professional expertise is valued	1 I have plannable working times	4 My criticism is received gratefully	32 I can continue my career in different places
31 I am treated like a family member	13 I am allowed to actively contribute to the business's development	21 I have the opportunity to have a varied career	3 My reliability is valued	18 I work in a company which consistently evolves	20 I am being managed with a suitable leadership style	11 I am respected for who I am	10 My passion for my profession is being kept alive	35 I can continuously develop myself professionally
	34 I get to work with high-quality products	24 I am being taught all skills necessary for my job	9 I am allowed to let my work be guided by empathy	22 I have high-quality tools at my disposal	27 My flexibility is valued	18 My good performance is rewarded	14 I receive appropriate feedback	
	36 I receive support for taking care of my children	25 My financial needs are being taken into account	12 I can fill my role in a manner that is comfortable and suitable for me	23 I get to learn through suitable training formats	30 My loyalty is valued	26 I receive support for my commute to work	17 I am not left hanging	
		41 I enjoy creative freedom	16 My personal life plan is being taken into account	28 Our team work is encouraged and supported	33 I have long-term career prospects	37 I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay		
			29 I receive high-quality meals	39 I get to participate in the business success	38 I am allowed to make the guests' interest a priority in my work			
				40 I work in a sustainable organization				

Clemens

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Age	38
Qualification	Vocational
Industry Experience	12 years
Job	Customer Service Mgr.
Career Ambition	Low
Contract Type	Mistrust
Contract Cluster	Instrumental
Most Important	Reward Work-Life Balance
Least Important	Belonging
How to Retain	Appreciation for Experience Reward Performance Flexibility

Clemens

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Not as important ... Very important

-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
31 I am treated like a family member	19 I work in a company which consistently evolves	10 My passion for my profession is being kept alive	7 My professional advancement is individually supported	8 I work in a professional environment	1 I have plannable working times	4 My criticism is received gratefully	2 I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	6 I am being valued
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		40 I work in a sustainable organization	36 I receive support for taking care of my children	27 My flexibility is valued	17 I am not left hanging	34 I get to work with high-quality products		
			41 I enjoy creative freedom	28 Our team work is encouraged and supported	29 I receive high-quality meals			
				39 I get to participate in the business success				

Diana



Age	36
Qualification	Vocational
Industry Experience	10 years
Job	Housekeeping Attendant
Career Ambition	High
Contract Type	Internal Advancement
Contract Cluster	Weak
Most Important	Career Material Quality of Life
Least Important	Belonging
How to Retain	Reliable Schedules Long-term Employment Prospects Material Security

Diana



Elias



Age	56
Qualification	Vocational (non-related)
Industry Experience	4 years
Job	Facility Manager
Career Ambition	None
Contract Type	Loyalty
Contract Cluster	Strong
Most Important	Communication Empathy
Least Important	Prestige/Quality
How to Retain	Appreciation Open Communication Supportive Team

Elias

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Not as important → Very important

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22 I have high-quality tools at my disposal	1 I have plannable working times	7 My professional advancement is individually supported	8 I work in a professional environment	3 My reliability is valued	2 I receive support for reconciling work and personal life	5 My professional expertise is valued	6 I am being valued	4 My criticism is received gratefully
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				37 I receive support to be able to have a comfortable place to stay				

Franzi

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Age	33
Qualification	Academic
Industry Experience	13 years
Job	Management Trainee
Career Ambition	Very High
Contract Type	Dynamic Performance
Contract Cluster	Investing
Most Important	Career Active Contribution
Least Important	Work-Life Balance
How to Retain	Career Development Involvement in Change Projects

Franzi

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Not as important → Very important

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Giulio

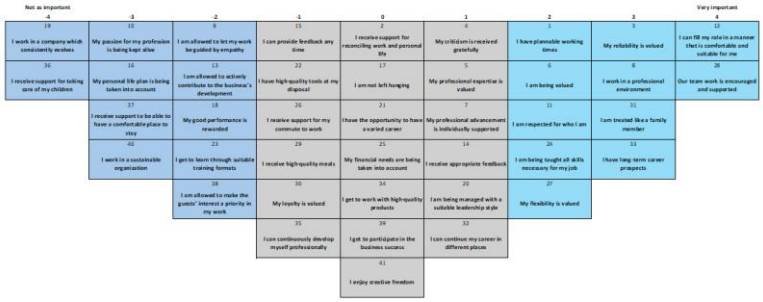


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Age	37
Qualification	Basic
Industry Experience	6 years
Job	Conference Attendant
Career Ambition	Low
Contract Type	Stability
Contract Cluster	Weak
Most Important	Comfort Predictability
Least Important	Organization's Development
How to Retain	Job Security Supportive Team Culture

Giulio

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Hannah



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Age	29
Qualification	Vocational
Industry Experience	3 years
Job	Reservations Agent
Career Ambition	Low
Contract Type	Internal Advancement
Contract Cluster	Loyal
Most Important	Stability Empathy
Least Important	Teamwork
How to Retain	I-Deals* Flexibility Modern Structures

* (Rousseau, 2005)

Hannah

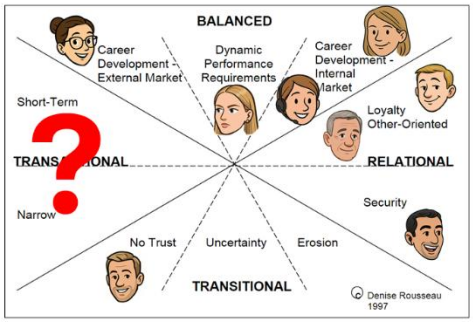
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Contract Types

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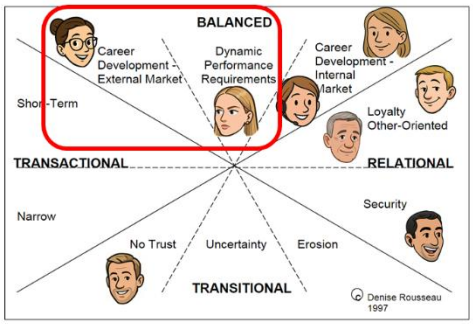


- Most types present
- Many intend to stay w/ hotel
- Requires differentiated retention and recruitment strategies
- Requires knowledge of the PC that employees hold
- Requires working with employees to improve conditions

- No Transactional contracts in the study
- Permanent employees unlikely to hold them
- Possibly prevalent in **Minijobbers**, seasonal help
- If PC broken, may become transactional

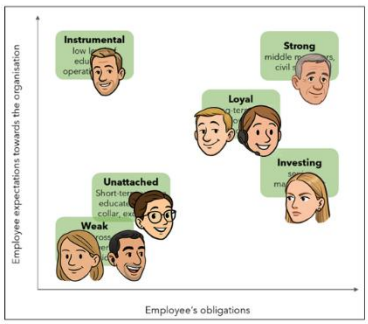
Contract Types

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- Dynamic Performance & External Market:
- Long-term retention unlikely
- Provide good development opportunities
- Utilize motivation and passion
- Create replacement funnel (new trainees)

Contract Cluster



- All clusters present
- Some shared, but very different reasons!

- Are Weak/Unattached harder to retain?
- Are Instrumental not productive?

- Each PC requires individualized treatment, understanding for motivation

Contribution

- To Theory
  - Calls for content-oriented research post-Covid (Lopez and Fuiks, 2021)
  - Calls for context-specific PC research (Kraak et al. 2024)
  - First study on PC content in Northern German Hotel Employees
  - Robust methodology for context-specific Q Set development (Rebehn, Nichol and Bell 2024)
  - Further Research:
    - Longitudinal: Effectiveness of HRM/D strategies on PC types
    - Statistical: Prevalence of PC types among regional population

Contribution

- To Practice:
  - Guide for managers to categorize employees
    - Tailor targeted inducements
    - Create I-Deals
    - Create PDPs
    - Utilize employees' strengths and motivation
    - Attract the employees preferred
  - Understanding for what motivates employees
  - Helps gauge which employees want to move on, need replacement
  - Insight to develop effective retention methods
  - Insight to develop attractive / cost-effective benefits
  - Guidelines for structured interviews / appraisal conversations

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