



HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT MATURITY AND EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION IN HOTELS: EVIDENCE FROM MOROCCO AND HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT

Human resource management (HRM) is crucial to hotel competitiveness; nevertheless, there is limited understanding of how managers in various contexts integrate practices into cohesive systems that influence employee motivation, satisfaction, and commitment. This qualitative multi-case study assesses HRM procedures in nine four- and five-star hotels in Morocco and Hungary via semi-structured interviews with general and HR managers. The analysis aligns with Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory. Findings show that high-maturity hotels, especially international chains, deploy integrated “bundles” of formal HR systems and relational practices, while smaller independent hotels operate more fragmented, owner-driven models. The research provides a practical HRM maturity continuum for hospitality and suggests that aligning HR practices with brand positioning and employee psychological needs can strengthen motivation, commitment, and service quality in emerging and transitional hotel markets.

Keywords: commitment, hotels, HR practices, motivation, satisfaction

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AZ EMBERERŐFORRÁS-MENEDZSMENT ÉRETTSÉGI SZINTJE ÉS SZÁLLODAI MUNKAVÁLLALÓI MOTIVÁCIÓ: MAROKKÓI ÉS MAGYAR PÉLDÁK

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ABSZTRAKT

A humánerőforrás-menedzsment (HRM) kulcsfontosságú a szállodák versenyképessége szempontjából, ugyanakkor korlátozottak az ismeretek arról, hogy a vezetők különböző kontextusokban miként integrálják a gyakorlatokat olyan koherens rendszerekbe, amelyek befolyásolják a munkavállalói motivációt, elégedettséget és elköteleződést. A tanulmány kvalitatív esettanulmányokra épül, kilenc marokkói és magyarországi, négy- és ötcsillagos szálloda HRM-folyamatait vizsgálja szállodaigazgatókkal és HR-vezetőkkel készült félig strukturált interjúk segítségével. Az elemzés Deci és Ryan önmeghatározás-elméletére épül. Eredményeink szerint a magas „érettségű” szállodák – különösen a nemzetközi láncok – integrált, formális HR-rendszereket és kapcsolatorientált gyakorlatokat alkalmaznak, míg a kisebb, független szállodák széttagoltabb, tulajdonos által vezérelt modellek szerint működnek. A kutatás egy HRM-érettségi kontinuumot vázol fel a szállodaipar számára, és rámutat, hogy a HR-gyakorlatoknak a márkapozicionálással és a munkavállalói pszichológiai szükségletekkel való összehangolása erősítheti a motivációt, az elkötelezettséget és a szolgáltatásminőséget a feltörekvő és átmeneti fázisban lévő szállodák piacán.

Kulcsszavak: elkötelezettség, szállodaipar, humánerőforrás-menedzsment, motiváció, elégedettség

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1. Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) is central to hotel competitiveness because service quality depends on employees' motivation, satisfaction, and willingness to go the extra mile (Domínguez-Falcón et al., 2016). Persistent turnover, labour shortages, and intense customer contact make effective HR practices a strategic rather than purely administrative issue (Chandran & Abukhalifeh, 2021). In emerging and transitional markets, resource constraints and owner-driven short-termism can further limit investment in people despite managers recognising its importance (Agbodo-Otinpong, 2015). Prior studies link core HR practices such as training, rewards, participation, and supportive leadership to positive employee and organisational outcomes in hospitality and show that HR systems are most powerful when internally consistent, mutually reinforcing, and aligned with business strategy (Plessis et al., 2016; Khassawneh & Mohammad, 2021). However, much of this work is quantitative, focuses on single countries or chains, and treats HR practices as isolated variables rather than broader configurations that vary by context (Boxall & Macky, 2009; McGinley et al., 2021).

This study responds with a qualitative multi-case analysis of HRM in four- and five-star hotels in Morocco and Hungary. Morocco represents a developing hospitality market where international chains coexist with locally owned establishments. The sample includes four chain hotels and one boutique hotel, allowing comparison between standardised corporate systems (including HR) and more informal, relationship-based approaches (Chandad & Rochdane, 2025). Hungary offers a contrasting Central European context, with chain-affiliated urban five-star hotels and independent regional properties, in which formal HR processes are limited and owner influence is strong, consistent with evidence that Hungarian SMEs often lack dedicated HR specialists and rely on informal, owner-led HR practices (Finna & Krajcsák, 2011). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with general managers and HR managers in nine hotels (five in Morocco and four in Hungary), focusing on recognition and rewards, training and careers, communication and employee voice, working conditions and well-being, empowerment and participation, and the strategic integration of HR. These domains draw on HRM and motivation research and map onto the self-determination theory (SDT) needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which predict high-quality work motivation and well-being across settings (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Olafsen & Deci, 2020).

Guided by this framework, the study addresses three research questions:

- How is information about career opportunities, organisational strategy, and performance expectations communicated between hotel management and employees?
 - Which human resource management practices most strongly shape employees' motivation, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment?
 - To what extent, and through which mechanisms, are employees empowered to share their opinions and ideas and to participate in decision-making processes within the hotel?

2. Literature review

2.1. Strategic human resource management in hospitality

In the hospitality sector, strategic human resource management (SHRM) is described as a key mechanism for aligning people practices with organisational objectives and service demands. SHRM typically involves coordinated recruitment, training, performance recognition, and career development systems that aim to improve service quality and long-term performance (Agbodo-Otinpong, 2015; Eshete & Birbirssa, 2024). Digitalisation further shapes SHRM in hotels, as modern technology and data-driven HR tools support more efficient communication, monitoring, and decision-making, helping firms respond to competitive market pressures (Radović et al., 2025).

2.2. Employee motivation

Camilleri et al. (2024) highlight employee motivation as central to service delivery in hospitality, as motivated staff are more likely to show discretionary effort, responsiveness, and pro-service behaviours. Both intrinsic factors (autonomy, meaningful tasks, career opportunities) and extrinsic drivers (fair pay, formal recognition) shape motivation in hotels, while low wages, unstable contracts, and limited training reduce morale and productivity, underscoring the vulnerability of hospitality jobs to unfavourable conditions (Al-Badarneh & Malkawi, 2025). Practices such as personalised recognition, supportive and transformational leadership and visible pathways for development are associated with stronger engagement. self-determination theory (SDT) explains these effects through the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which are strengthened when HR practices empower employees, build skills, and foster supportive relationships (Akbudak, 2024; Camilleri et al., 2024). Herzberg et al.'s (1959) motivator-hygiene theory further distinguishes hygiene factors (pay, supervision, working conditions) that prevent dissatisfaction from motivators (recognition, achievement, responsibility, growth) that drive positive motivation, clarifying why improving basic conditions alone often fails to produce highly motivated employees in hospitality. In hospitality specifically, irregular and often unpredictable shifts, high emotional labour demands, and persistently high turnover rates create conditions that erode motivation if not actively countered by supportive HR practices, making motivation-focused investment a retention necessity rather than a discretionary add-on (Michael & Fotiadis, 2022)

2.3. Employee satisfaction

Job satisfaction is widely recognised as a key outcome for both employee retention and service performance in hotels. Transparent internal communication, fair and competitive compensation, and ongoing opportunities for skills development are frequently identified as important factors influencing satisfaction (Debreceni et al., 2025; Saito et al., 2025), while respectful treatment, realistic promotion opportunities, and supportive working conditions further shape employees' perceptions of their jobs (Duarte & Silva, 2023).

Across various contexts, structured training, supportive work environments, and clear alignment between roles and the hotel's mission are associated with higher satisfaction and lower turnover intentions (Nwokorie, 2021). Based on SDT, studies show that satisfaction increases when needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met through participation in decision-making, constructive feedback, and teamwork (Camilleri et al., 2024). However, many empowerment studies treat empowerment as a formal managerial practice rather than examining whether employees actually feel psychologically 'safe' enough to exercise autonomy in decision-making.

In hotel settings, occupational well-being initiatives that support employees' psychological health and work-life balance, together with supportive management and opportunities for growth, are associated with higher motivation and more positive employee attitudes (Ali et al., 2025). These working conditions are consistently associated with higher turnover intentions in the hospitality sector, underscoring the need to integrate work-life balance considerations into HRM systems (Deery & Jago, 2015). Even though employee well-being has received growing attention in hospitality research, the literature continues to emphasise operational and physical dimensions of well-being more strongly than psychological and emotional support mechanisms.

2.4. Employee commitment

Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component model frames commitment as affective (emotional attachment), continuance (cost-based), and normative (obligation-based). This framework has been widely applied in hospitality to explain why employees remain with their organisations for emotional, economic, or moral reasons. Hotels that involve employees in decision-making, communicate career pathways clearly, and maintain consistent internal communication tend to report stronger commitment and lower attrition (Ji & Han, 2021; Ghani et al., 2022). Existing studies frequently acknowledge the importance of communication in employee management but rarely conceptualise communication itself as a strategic HR mechanism through which organisational goals, career opportunities, and performance expectations become meaningful to employees.

Research comparing luxury chains and smaller hotels indicates that large, branded properties frequently rely on standardised appraisal systems and comprehensive benefits to sustain loyalty, whereas smaller hotels place more emphasis on personalised development, close-knit teams, and a strong sense of belonging (Marinakou & Giousmpasoglou, 2019). The provision of high-quality service can result in the satisfaction of both hotel employees and guests (Németh, 2025).

The reviewed literature directly informs this study's three research questions. Communication practices and their role in transmitting career and performance information underpin RQ1; the interplay between formal rewards, intrinsic drivers, and sector-specific pressures underpins RQ2; and the literature on empowerment and voice provides the basis for RQ3. By synthesising these strands through SDT across two national

contexts, the study extends existing knowledge beyond single-country quantitative designs.

3. Methodology

The study investigates how managerial practices in human resource management (HRM) shape employee motivation, satisfaction, and commitment in high-quality hotels in Morocco and Hungary. A qualitative multiple-case design was adopted, using semi-structured interviews with HR managers and senior hotel managers to obtain in-depth insights into HR practices, communication processes, and empowerment initiatives. This approach is suitable for exploring complex, context-dependent managerial practices that cannot be fully captured through standardised questionnaires.

In line with the exploratory aims, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted to select four- and five-star hotels that were recognised locally for service quality and professionalised management. The intention was not to obtain a statistically representative sample, but to capture variation in HRM maturity across contrasting organisational forms (chain versus independent, urban versus regional, luxury versus resort) in two hospitality markets. This logic of case selection reflects the view that rich, information-intensive cases are well suited for examining how HRM practices are bundled in different hotel contexts, rather than for estimating population-level effects.

The participating hotels included luxury chains, international, boutique, wellness, resort, and independent 4- and 5-star properties in Morocco and Hungary, where interviews were conducted with HR managers, general managers, and management assistants between October 2025 and January 2026. The selected hotels vary in size, location, and classification, and are all high-quality properties; their characteristics are summarised in *Table 1*. Selection criteria prioritised properties with established reputations for service excellence, ensuring that the sample reflected both the standardised practices of multinational chains and the flexibility of boutique operations.

The participating hotels were chosen according to three criteria: operation in the four- or five-star segment, an established reputation for service excellence in their region, and the availability of managers directly responsible for HR-related decisions. This design introduces a comparative perspective between Morocco and Hungary, but it does not aim to disentangle country-level effects from organisational-level effects statistically. National context is therefore treated as a background condition that shapes how individual hotels design and implement HRM systems, rather than as a variable that can be isolated from ownership, size, and location.

Table 1. Characteristics of participating hotels

Identification	Classification	Size	Main features
Hotel 1 (MA)	4-star (chain)	≈ 174 rooms	Business hotel with meeting facilities and suites
Hotel 2 (MA)	5-star (chain)	≈ 100 rooms	Seaside luxury chain with event and leisure facilities
Hotel 3 (MA)	5-star (chain)	≈ 255 rooms	Luxury chain with modern amenities for high-profile guests
Hotel 4 (MA)	5-star (boutique)	<50 rooms	Boutique hotel with minimalist design and upscale amenities
Hotel 5 (MA)	5-star (chain)	≈ 255 rooms	Luxury chain combining modern elegance with traditional design
Hotel 6 (HU)	5-star (wellness)	≈ 83 rooms	Wellness hotel with personalised programmes, medical check-ups, and spa
Hotel 7 (HU)	5-star (reconstructed)	≈ 100 rooms	Restored historic hotel with classic interiors, small spa, and waterfront access
Hotel 8 (HU)	4-star (resort)	≈ 260 rooms	Resort with pools, wellness/sport areas, activities and family services
Hotel 9 (HU)	4-star (countryside)	≈ 127 rooms	Modern wellness hotel with clean-lined interiors, compact spa area, and easy access to local thermal baths

Source: own editing

As the study aims to explore a managerial perspective, it focuses on general managers and HR managers because they design and coordinate the HR policies and practices that employees experience daily. While this perspective is important for understanding how HRM systems are intended to function, it also has limitations, as managers may present their organisations in a favourable light and their views may only partially reflect those of frontline employees. To mitigate this risk, accounts were compared across hotels and ownership types, and we explicitly acknowledge the absence of direct employee data as a limitation and an avenue for future research.

Interviews were conducted in private and lasted 40-60 minutes. Three interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim; the remaining six were documented through detailed notes taken during the session. A semi-structured interview guide was used, organised around HR practices that the literature identifies as key drivers of employee motivation, satisfaction, and commitment in hospitality: recruitment and selection, recognition and reward, training and development, feedback and communication, and well-being and work-life balance. Open-ended questions and follow-up probes were used to allow respondents to elaborate on specific initiatives, perceived outcomes, and contextual constraints. Interviews were analysed manually through deductive thematic analysis. Following established guidance on thematic analysis, we first familiarised ourselves with the transcripts and notes, then generated parent codes related to recognition and

rewards, training and development, communication and employee voice, working conditions and well-being, empowerment and participation, and the strategic integration of HR. Within each parent code, emergent subcodes were developed from the data (e.g., formal training programmes, career opportunities, etc., as sub-codes for training and development). These codes were iteratively grouped into broader themes and organised in a case-by-theme matrix that facilitated comparisons between Moroccan and Hungarian hotels and between chain and independent properties. Coding was conducted by the primary researcher, with a selection of coded segments reviewed by a second researcher to ensure interpretive consistency. The development of themes was guided by the theoretical framework of SDT. The interviews addressed the following research questions:

- RQ1: How is information about career opportunities, organisational strategy, and performance expectations communicated between hotel management and employees?
- RQ2: Which human resource management practices most strongly shape employees' motivation, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment?
- RQ3: To what extent, and through which mechanisms, are employees empowered to share their opinions and ideas and to participate in decision-making processes within the hotel?

4. Results

This section presents the results of a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with human resource and hotel managers from four and five-star hotels in Morocco and Hungary. The analysis explores how HR practices shape employee motivation, satisfaction, and commitment in two national hospitality contexts, and how managers perceive their contribution to organisational effectiveness.

The Moroccan sample included four international chain hotels and one locally owned boutique hotel, providing insights across different organisational structures within a developing hospitality market. The Hungarian sample ranged from established five-star properties to independent regional hotels.

Interviews in both countries followed a semi-structured approach focused on recognition, empowerment, and well-being. Six main themes emerged consistently across both national contexts:

1. recognition and rewards systems
2. training and career development
3. communication, feedback, and employee voice
4. working conditions and well-being
5. empowerment and participation
6. strategic integration of HR practices.

4.1. Recognition and reward system

Systematic reward systems promote perceived fairness and transparency, while interpersonal appreciation addresses deeper social and psychological needs. In Morocco, all four chain hotels use formal recognition programmes (annual awards, employee-of-the-month schemes, appraisal-linked incentives), whereas the boutique relies mainly on spontaneous acknowledgement and symbolic gestures.

In Hungary, recognition is also a key driver of morale, but systems vary in sophistication. One five-star wellness hotel combines annual evaluations, day-to-day praise, and peer-voted end-of-year awards (e.g., “Guests’ Favourite”, “Hero of Flexibility”), using guest feedback and weekly department-head meetings to highlight exemplary behaviour. Another five-star hotel runs an employee-of-the-month scheme tied to service charge distribution and upselling commissions, directly linking recognition to revenue and service quality. The countryside hotel relies mainly on guest questionnaires, naming staff, and a basic employee of the month benefit, with the incoming GM acknowledging that broader structures do not yet exist. Across both contexts, managers see recognition as central to morale, pride, and reduced turnover intentions, blending structured rewards with everyday appreciation.

4.2. Training and career development

Moroccan participants considered training essential for service quality and motivation. Chain hotels use standardised corporate learning frameworks, e-learning, and formal progression pathways, sometimes including international rotation and leadership development tracks, while the boutique relies more on mentoring and cross-functional exposure. The wellness hotel makes continuous learning part of its brand, offering English courses, communication training, and support for medically oriented staff to attend external programmes.

Another five-star property invests in language training and guest journey workshops while developing an in-house revenue manager, illustrating targeted “key role” development rather than broad-based investment. Several Hungarian managers cultivate internal labour markets by advertising all vacancies internally and developing “number two” successors for each department, including a potential successor to the general manager, to ensure continuity and visible career paths. In contrast, the countryside hotel reports no promotion opportunities and has only budgeted, not yet delivered, staff training, highlighting the structural constraints facing small independents.

Overall, training is a shared priority but with notable resource and scope differences. Moroccan chains emphasise standardised international curricula and regional support, reflecting their integration into global brand systems, while Hungarian hotels, facing post-pandemic labour shortages, prioritise succession planning and internal labour markets.

4.3. Communication, feedback, and employee voice

Transparent communication and consistent feedback are common priorities in Morocco. Chain hotels use formal systems such as annual appraisals, digital dashboards, and engagement surveys, while the boutique relies on daily briefings and open-door interaction; managers also note younger staff prefer continuous feedback to periodic reviews. These patterns show that communication acts as both managerial control and motivational resource: formal systems institutionalise fairness and documentation, while informal exchanges sustain immediacy, trust, and psychological safety.

In Hungary, practices range from relational, everyday feedback to emerging formal tools like satisfaction surveys. The wellness hotel integrates feedback through informal conversations, one-to-ones, departmental meetings, and an annual loyalty survey, while another hotel has introduced yearly employee surveys whose anonymised results are synthesised by the general manager and shared in quarterly staff meetings, alongside a canteen suggestion box. Yet several interviewees stress that hierarchy and “old era” attitudes (“shut up, do your job”) limit psychological safety; employees hesitate to approach senior leaders, and their voice is often confined to issues such as pay or staff food.

Taken together, Moroccan hotels appear more advanced in digital engagement tools and survey infrastructure, reflecting stronger corporate investment in standardised HR systems, whereas Hungarian properties rely more on relational, face-to-face mechanisms but acknowledge hierarchical barriers to genuine voice.

4.4. Working conditions and employee well-being

All five Moroccan managers viewed well-being as integral to satisfaction and performance. Chain hotels run company-wide programmes covering health insurance, on-site meals, and structured rest-breaks, while the boutique emphasises relational well-being, flexibility, and empathetic scheduling around personal circumstances; managers also acknowledge workload peaks and long shifts as persistent pressures.

Hungarian managers likewise see well-being as central but describe a mix of basic provisions, health-oriented initiatives, and gaps. The health-focused wellness hotel offers on-site medical consultations, discounted tests and treatments, regular movement activities (e.g., Pilates, Nordic walking), and tailored daily meals, whereas other properties provide warm meals, uniforms, laundry, staff use of spa/fitness areas, and reduced-rate medical checks via local partners. Work schedules show both constraints and partial flexibility. In one countryside hotel, employees choose compressed 12-hour shifts to secure longer time off, while in luxury hotels, some back-office staff use occasional home office days, but front-line roles remain fully on site. Mental-health-specific support is largely absent, with interviewees noting past norms that treated psychological well-being as private and current initiatives focusing mainly on physical health, benefits, and work-life balance.

Overall, well-being practices indicate shared commitment but different emphases: Moroccan hotels prioritise foundational benefits and relational empathy, whereas Hungarian properties, especially the wellness hotel, integrate wellness into brand identity through medical partnerships and movement programmes. In both contexts, long, irregular hours remain a structural challenge, and mental-health support is underdeveloped, reflecting industry norms that prioritise physical over psychosocial care.

4.5. Empowerment and participation

In Morocco, patterns vary by structure: chain hotels retain hierarchy but delegate limited decision-making to supervisors, especially for guest service adjustments within set budgets, whereas the boutique's flat hierarchy grants frontline staff broader discretion; managers agree that this enhances responsiveness, confidence, and ownership.

In Hungary, empowerment practices are emerging but constrained by traditional hierarchies. Some hotels solicit ideas through team meetings, suggestion boxes, and informal conversations, stressing trust and a climate where goals and weaknesses can be discussed, yet employees seldom join major decisions, and formal shared decision mechanisms are weak, particularly in smaller or newly opened hotels.

Overall, empowerment in both countries involves gradual expansion of autonomy within boundaries set by hierarchy and leadership culture: Moroccan chains delegate guest service decisions, while Hungarian properties experiment with idea boxes and conflict resolution protocols. Structural features such as flat hierarchies and budget discretion enable empowerment, but its effect hinges on leadership attitudes and psychological safety, so participative management often remains aspirational, especially in independent properties.

4.6. Strategic integration of HR practices

Managers in both countries increasingly described HR in strategic terms, but the level of integration varied within and across hotels.

In Morocco, interviewees framed HRM as a strategic partner contributing directly to service quality. Chain hotel managers highlighted HR metrics such as training hours, turnover rates, and engagement scores in performance dashboards, while the boutique manager portrayed HR as a “cultural architect” focused on teamwork and loyalty. Large chains relied more on data-driven HR analytics, whereas smaller establishments sought strategic impact mainly through culture and cohesion, supporting the idea that performance improves when people practices align with organisational objectives.

In Hungary, HRM was likewise treated as a strategic lever, though links to business strategy differed. The wellness hotel aligned language training, communication workshops, and tailored health programmes with its positioning as a five-star, health-centred establishment, while the recently reconstructed five-star hotel embedded HR in financial strategy by investing in key talent (e.g., an internal revenue manager), building

successors, and tying up-selling rewards to revenue and profit. By contrast, the countryside hotel showed low HR maturity: the GM reported almost no systems for appraisal, voice or career progression and described an owner mentality where employees should be “grateful” for their jobs, whereas retrospective accounts from the former HR led hotel illustrated how vision and mission workshops and internal labour market policies could still link HR to organisational direction in traditional settings.

Strategic HR integration thus shows the widest variation across the cases. Leading hotels in both countries align HR practices with brand positioning, guest experience, and financial performance. Moroccan chains achieve this through HR analytics and dashboards, whereas Hungarian hotels through employer branding and development of key roles, while independent and newly opened hotels struggle to embed HR strategically and often follow owner-centred, transactional models.

Overall, the level of strategic HR integration appears to depend more on organisational size, resources, and managerial orientation than on national context alone. *Table 2* summarises common patterns and distinguishing features across the six themes in Moroccan and Hungarian hotels.

Table 2. Common patterns and distinguishing features across the six themes in Moroccan and Hungarian hotels

Theme area	Common pattern (MA & HU)	Distinguishing features (MA)	Distinguishing features (HU)
Recognition	Universal motivator linked to morale and lower turnover	Structured programmes in chains; relationship-based gestures in the boutique	Peer-voted awards in the wellness hotel; revenue-linked commissions in upscale hotels; limited, informal recognition in the countryside hotel
Training	Core HR investment for service quality and competitiveness	Global curricula, international rotations and mentoring in chains; mentoring and cross-functional exposure in the boutique	Brand-linked language training, succession planning and key-role development; resource-constrained training in the countryside hotel
Communication	Transparency and feedback valued; younger staff favour continuous feedback	Mix of formal reviews, digital dashboards, engagement surveys and informal dialogue	Reliance on face-to-face communication and university-partnered surveys, with hierarchical barriers limiting open dialogue

Well-being	Seen as linked to satisfaction and performance	Policy driven benefits in chains; empathy-based scheduling in the boutique; insurance and meals	Medical partnerships, wellness activities and compressed shifts for flexibility, alongside gaps in mental-health support
Empowerment	Autonomy expanding gradually; effectiveness depends on leadership and culture	Controlled autonomy in chains; wider discretion in the boutique; some budget authority	Idea boxes and conflict resolution protocols with limited uptake; structural limits in independent hotels
Strategic HR	Integral when aligned with organisational goals	HR analytics and metrics in chains; cultural stewardship and team loyalty in the boutique	Employer branding and health centred positioning in the wellness hotel; revenue-manager and upselling focus in the reconstructed hotel; low HR maturity and a “grateful employee” mentality in the countryside hotel

Source: own editing

5. Discussion

The thematic results unveil how hotels in Morocco and Hungary design their HR practices and what distinguishes more and less advanced approaches to people management. The six themes identified align with Deci and Ryan's SDT (2000), which emphasises autonomy, competence, and relatedness as essential psychological needs driving intrinsic motivation. Recognition and rewards enhance competence and relatedness, training builds competence, and empowerment supports autonomy. This section interprets the findings through the lens of HRM maturity and provides responses to the three research questions. The presentation of the results reflects the comparisons of the hotel types involved in the study: chain and independent, urban five-star properties and a countryside hotel to show how context, ownership, and managerial philosophy shape HR systems.

5.1. Differences in HRM maturity across the two countries

Table 2 shows that Moroccan chains and the two Hungarian five-star properties exhibit high HRM maturity, with strong practices across all six themes, whereas the Hungarian resort and countryside hotels show more partial, emerging patterns. In the chains and top-tier Hungarian hotels, HR is treated as a strategic partner, with engagement surveys, dashboards, and HR indicators “always linked to our business targets”. By contrast, the countryside GM describes a

legacy mindset where employees should be “grateful to work for us”, showing how ownership and location constrain the institutionalisation of strategic HR. This gradient supports arguments that chain vs. independent, urban vs. rural, and upscale vs. standard settings shape the extent to which HR systems are formalised and integrated with business strategy, while also revealing that even in low-maturity settings, individual managers may hold people-centred values but face resource constraints and entrenched attitudes.

5.2. Communication of strategy, careers, and performance expectations (RQ1)

Across the sample, the sophistication of communication practices mirrors the overall HRM maturity of each property. In high-maturity hotels, communication is a deliberate, structured act: investments like the decision to “invest a lot of money into one person... to do the revenue management on long term for us” signal to staff which careers the organisation values, while dashboards and surveys make performance expectations tangible in daily operations. Career opportunities are communicated through equally deliberate means: high-maturity hotels advertise all vacancies internally, develop ‘number two’ successors for each department, and offer formal progression pathways including international rotations and leadership development tracks, making career pathways visible and institutionalised rather than implicit. In low-maturity settings, by contrast, the countryside GM’s acknowledgement that “outside of hotel chains, HR activities receive practically no emphasis” reflects an absence of systematic communication: information about long-term goals or career opportunities is rarely formalised and tends to be transmitted informally, if at all. The contrast reveals that communication maturity and HRM maturity are not merely correlated; rather, communication is the mechanism through which strategic intent either reaches employees or remains confined to management. The findings extend Meyer and Allen’s (1991) framework by demonstrating that communication itself is a critical mediating mechanism. Career systems and developmental opportunities only strengthen attachment when they are made visible, credible, and institutionally embedded through communication practices.

5.3. HRM practices shaping motivation, satisfaction, and commitment (RQ2)

5.3.1. *Balancing formal systems and human connection*

Across both countries, the strongest hotels combine formal HR systems with relational, everyday practices rather than relying on one or the other. For instance, Moroccan chains operate annual performance awards and appraisal-linked bonuses, yet managers also insist that “authentic day-to-day appreciation” is crucial for morale. Similarly, the Hungarian wellness hotel has structured end-of-year awards but emphasises “continuous feedback and recognition based on the daily work, and the feedback of guests”, treating mistakes as “a chance to learn and enhance skills”.

This pattern aligns with Herzberg’s motivator-hygiene theory and SDT: formal rewards and benefits provide fairness and security, while interpersonal recognition, mentoring, and supportive communication satisfy deeper needs for competence and relatedness. The

contribution is to show, in a hospitality context, that high engagement appears where formal systems are not purely bureaucratic but are animated by personal attention, storytelling in meetings, and visible role-modelling by managers.

5.3.2. Well-being as more than perks

All hotels recognise the importance of well-being but operationalise it differently. Moroccan chains offer “company-wide well-being programmes encompassing health insurance, on-site meals, and structured rest break policies”, whereas the Moroccan boutique and several Hungarian hotels stress flexibility and empathy in scheduling as a way of caring for people. The Hungarian wellness hotel goes further, providing annual medical consultations, discounted laboratory tests, movement activities (e.g., Pilates, Nordic walking), and tailored meals for staff, clearly linking its internal well-being offer to its external health-focused brand. Yet support specific for mental health- remains limited. One former HR manager recalls that “back then, nobody cared about mental well-being... it was said that this is for home”, and even in more advanced cases, well-being is still framed mainly in physical or benefit terms. This suggests that hospitality HRM is moving from basic security (meals, insurance, shifts) toward more holistic well-being, but has not fully integrated psychological and emotional dimensions, a gap that the study makes visible and that future practice can address. The results support the findings of the study Ali et al. (2025), while also identifying an important implementation gap. The evidence suggests that well-being initiatives in hospitality are most effective when they move beyond transactional employee benefits and become integrated into broader organisational cultures of support, communication, and development. In this sense, HRM maturity appears closely connected to the extent to which employee well-being is treated not merely as an operational necessity, but as a strategic and relational component of organisational sustainability and employee retention.

5.4. Employee empowerment, voice, and participation in decision-making (RQ3)

Empowerment and participation are the most uneven themes, especially in Hungary. Moroccan chains grant “limited decision-making authority to supervisors [...] within set budgets,” while the boutique allows frontline staff wider discretion because of its flat hierarchy. In Hungary, managers declare open doors, install idea boxes, and one GM runs quarterly all staff meetings with anonymous questions, yet employees still mainly complain about “staff food” and “salary” and fear approaching top management. These findings extend SDT by showing that formal channels for autonomy are insufficient if psychological safety and historical norms (“shut up, do your job”) are not addressed. Across cases, empowerment appears as a staged process: it begins as controlled autonomy (small decisions, suggestion schemes) and only becomes meaningful when line managers consistently invite ideas, mediate conflicts fairly, and model a “voice-friendly” culture. The countryside hotel illustrates the starting point of this trajectory, with “no such processes”

for employee opinions or decision-making, despite the GM’s personal belief in work-life balance and professional development. The findings align well with Deci and Ryan’s (2000) SDT, and further suggest that HRM maturity in hospitality can be understood partly through the extent to which organisational structures and leadership practices enable autonomy, competence, and relatedness in everyday work.

5.5. Implications of the emerging patterns to theory

The current study contributes to hospitality HRM literature by showing that effective people management depends not simply on the existence of HR practices, but on how strategically integrated, consistently communicated, and relationally embedded those practices are within hotels. The study also extends existing research by identifying communication and psychological safety as key mechanisms through which HR practices become meaningful and effective. In addition, the research highlights that HRM maturity varies more strongly according to ownership structure, managerial philosophy, and organisational resources than national context alone. Methodologically, the qualitative multi-case design adds depth to hospitality HRM research by revealing how formal systems and relational leadership practices interact in everyday hotel operations.

To synthesise the main cross-case patterns, *Table 3* summarises the key dimensions, common patterns, and implications of the findings.

Table 3. Summary of discussion insights

Dimension	Key pattern across cases	Main implications from this study
HRM maturity levels	Hotels form a continuum from highly developed (Moroccan chains, Hotel 6 (HU), Hotel 7 (HU)) to emerging (Hotel 9 (HU)), with Hotel 8 (HU) in the middle.	HR maturity is strongly shaped by ownership and context (chain vs. independent, urban vs. countryside), and even “low maturity” hotels may have managers who are personally committed to better HR but lack systems.
Formal systems and human connection	Strongest hotels combine structured programmes (awards, appraisals, surveys) with daily, interpersonal recognition and support.	Effective motivation in hotels depends on integrating formal rewards with genuine everyday appreciation and coaching, not relying on procedures alone.
Empowerment and voice	Empowerment is the most uneven theme; formal channels (idea boxes, open doors, limited discretion) exist, but fear and “old era” hierarchies reduce real voice.	Building psychological safety and developing participative leadership are critical if employee voice is to move beyond complaints about pay or food.

Well-being focus	All hotels value well-being, but most focus on physical security and benefits (meals, insurance, shifts); only a few move towards holistic health (medical checks, movement programmes).	Hospitality HRM is still early in addressing mental-health and psychosocial aspects of well-being, pointing to a clear area for improvement and further research.
Strategic integration of HR	High-maturity hotels use HR metrics and targeted investments (e.g. revenue-manager training, rotation schemes) to support business goals and brand positioning.	The cases demonstrate concrete ways HR can act as a strategic partner, while smaller hotels rely more on culture and cohesion as their route to competitive advantage.

Source: own editing

6. Conclusion and limitations

6.1. Theoretical and practical implications

Taken together, the nine hotels form a continuum of HRM development rather than a simple split between good and bad practice. At one end, Moroccan chains and the two Hungarian five-star properties show strategically aligned HR systems where recognition, training, voice, well-being, empowerment, and strategy reinforce each other. In the middle, the resort hotel has strong legacy systems in recognition, development, and well-being but only partial empowerment, while the countryside Hungarian hotel represents an early stage with limited formal training, feedback, voice, and strategic HR structures. Mapping cases along this continuum provides hotel HR leaders with a practical tool to diagnose their maturity level and decide where to invest next, and illustrates for researchers how classic HRM theories play out differently across chain vs boutique, urban vs regional, and high-star vs recently upgraded hotels. Theoretically, the findings extend self-determination theory and Meyer and Allen's commitment framework by demonstrating that neither autonomy, competence, and relatedness nor affective and normative commitment are fixed outcomes of individual practices; rather, they emerge from the coherence and maturity of the broader HR system in which those practices are embedded.

6.2. Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the small, purposive sample of four- and five-star hotels in two countries limits the generalisability of the findings to other regions, hotel categories, or tourism sectors. Second, data come mainly from general and HR managers, so the results reflect managerial views; frontline employees might assess the same practices differently, and future studies will focus on employees' perspectives. Third, the qualitative, cross-sectional design captures perceptions at one point in time and cannot show how HRM changes across seasons, crises, or leadership transitions. Finally, the

analysis focuses on a predefined set of HR practices (recognition, training, communication, well-being, empowerment, and strategic integration), while other domains, such as recruitment, job design, and work-family policies, were not examined in depth.

Future research should address these limitations by collecting employee-level data to assess whether frontline staff perceive the same practices as managers reported, and by extending the sample across additional national contexts and hotel categories.

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