

# Digital HR Innovation and Employee Well-being in Moroccan Hotels

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## Abstract

Employee well-being is the most essential factor that can greatly influence the performance of any organization, and it is required for hotels in the tourism and hospitality industry. As part of human resource (HR) strategies in the modern workplace, technology has been extensively employed to improve employee's well – being. The study revealed the significance of the digital HR innovation for the well-being of employees, serving in the hotels of Agadir in Morocco. A mixed-method approach was employed for this study. It consists of a quantitative survey of 100 hotel employees from 3 hotels and a qualitative literature review located in Agadir, Morocco. The employees' digital HR perceptions, including the integration, daily usage, workload impact, skill, and overall well - being of, were assessed with the help of the structured questionnaire having a 5-point Likert scale. The quantitative findings based on data's descriptive statistics revealed employees' "cautious optimism" attitude at the workplace and significant reasons behind the stress, fear, and anxiety because of the fear of being monitored through digital surveillance. The survey respondents believed that the digital HR tools usage resulted in the lessening of administrative burdens and the increase in job satisfaction. The research findings revealed that a human-centered strategic framework that not only guarantees ethical governance but also recognizes technology as a means that supports and facilitates work and allows continuous assistance to improve employee's well-being, required for hotels in Agadir, Morocco, for the effective utilization of Digital HR innovations.

**Keywords:** ethical governance, technology, HR, job satisfaction, human – centered

## 1. Introduction

Economic benefits generated from the tourism industry make investing in Travel & Tourism (T&T) worthwhile for the overall development of the country. Emerging economies, including Morocco are expected to account for 57% of total tourist arrivals by 2030, which paves the way towards effective achievement of the goals behind the Moroccan Vision, 2030 (Abdessamad, 2015). Morocco has changed tourism to be one of the major pillars of its economic growth besides a lot of other things by means of promotional programs like "Vision 2030" and its derivatives that were designed to increase the number of tourists three times. The lodging sector is the principal pillar which supports this industry. After the pandemic, and with the worldwide competition getting really tough while consumers continue to demand more and more personalized experiences, Moroccan hotels have to find new ways of doing things if they want to

keep their position. The 2030 National Strategy for Sustainable Development (SNDD) essentially maps different goals and broad areas to most of the SDG targets. In addition, the Human Development Program in Morocco is a flagship initiative very well-coordinated with the 2030 Agenda that intends to generate income generating activities with the aim to alleviate poverty and social exclusion, provide health and education services, along with create income opportunities for the disadvantaged and rejuvenate the abandoned areas (National Strategy for Sustainable Development for 2030, 2020). The development and reforms in the tourism and hospitality industry of the Morocco, specifically in the hoteling sector will change the economic growth and income generating opportunities into a new paradigm shift. It will be a commendable addition in the overall achievement of the milestone of success for the attainment of Sustainable Development

National Goals for Morocco in accordance with the Vision 2030.

The most significant area of HR innovating is human resource management (HRM) (Hamouche, 2023). Complete HR digitalization with the assistance of Artificial Intelligence (AI), data analytics, and cloud-based platforms is no longer looked at as a mid-term option but rather as a necessity to achieve workforce efficiency and agility (Ayanponle et al., 2024; Degtyareva, 2021). The integration of technology paves the way towards professional excellence in the HR sector of the Moroccan hotels, particularly Agadir city. Moreover, employee’s well-being (Fig. 1) is an essential and major component and factor for any organizational success. It should be done with the human-centric approach and proper strategy and policy formation for implementation of the HR Digitalization which results in employees’ job satisfaction, good mental health, motivation for work, and well - being, including elimination of stress and anxiety. Also, hotel employees, in particular, often suffer from the occupational stress. It affects the quality and professional functioning of any organization.

**Impact of Integration of Human – Centric Approach On Employees’ Well-being**

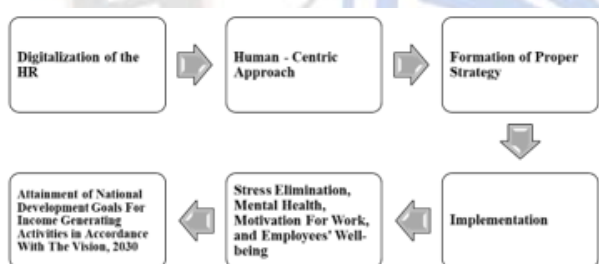


Fig. 1

Source: Author

The quality of service, guest satisfaction, and loyalty depend entirely on the employees' wellbeing (Hamouche, 2023). If employees are mentally fit and stress free, they give a commendable performance at the workplace, particularly at the hotels in the tourism industry. That’s why; digitalization of the HR plays a significant role in paving the way towards ensuring the well-being of employees, working in any organization, particularly serving the hotels and tourism industry.

According to Hilton, Happiness in the workplace, personal and social development, and human connection have a significant importance (Hilton, 2022). About two-

thirds (62%) of young people in Morocco prefer an organisation with strong policies on mental health and wellbeing for employees (Hilton, 2022). Also, the extensive career development opportunities are important for over half (56%) of those surveyed in this study report (Hilton, 2022)

.Respondents also believe that human connection is more important than ever in a post-pandemic world, with nearly half (49%) valuing significance of the social interaction in the workplace (Hilton, 2022). Moreover, 52% of young professionals in Morocco rate performance recognition as an important job factor (Hilton, 2022)

.This study is about the significant role of the digitalization of HR to ensure the well-being for employees in hotels of Agadir, Morocco. It reveals the significant role of digital HR in making the work more comfortable and the support systems more efficient for employee wellbeing. This study divulges the significance of the digital surveillance for the well-being of employees. (Aloisi & Gramano, 2019; Charlwood & Guenole, 2022; Hennebert & Bourguignon, 2021). The study is done to lead the human resource departments in the Moroccan hotel, Agadir, towards the pinnacle of success of digital revolution to ensure the mental well-being of employees, serving the hotels and tourism industry, specifically in Agadir, Morocco.

**Methods and Materials**

This study employed mixed-methods study approach to investigate the digitalization of the HR innovations and employee wellness in the hotel industry, particularly in Agadir, Morocco. The main quantitative phase included a structured survey, which was staff of a different group of 100 employees from 3 hotels, Agadir, Morocco. The research- instrument was a developed questionnaire specifically designed to measure the perception of Digital HR Innovation and its impact on Employee’s Wellbeing. The survey consisted of 43 questions (Q1 to Q43), where each question was rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questions were categorized into different categories such as the first digital tool integration (Q1-Q10), daily use and productivity (Q11-Q20), workload impact (Q21-Q30), influence on skills and professional development (Q31-Q39), and overall wellbeing and job satisfaction (Q40-Q43). A sample of one hundred employees was selected as respondents of the questionnaire. The quantitative data was collected and analyzed on SPSS to

produce descriptive statistics and quantitative results of this research. The quantitative analysis presented in this paper is integrated and elaborated with a comprehensive and enriched literature review on digital HR, used for qualitative analysis, as an interpretative framework for the statistical outcomes.

Moreover, qualitative research method was also included in this study to get a better insight into the contextual factors of the interaction between digital HR innovation and employee welfare in hotels, particularly Agadir, Morocco. The qualitative research data was collected included the answers to a structured questionnaire that was given to 100 employees in 3 hotels of Agadir, Morocco. Primary data from the 43 Likert-scale questions (Q1-Q43) provided quantitative measures, the approach for this section was a qualitative, literature-driven interpretation of the same numerical dataset. The objective of the study was to provide the qualitative and quantitative results for the study.

The survey questionnaire, used as a research tool was developed based on the different research studies, and its results were also considered through the same framework. For example, the characteristics of "digital surveillance" by Aloisi & Gramano (2019) and "dehumanization of HR processes" by Charlwood & Guenole (2022) were the most influential sources that helped to clarify the moderately positive scores. This method engaged an in-depth examination of the quantitative results to find and clarify the human experiences that underlie the results.

Firstly, the major objective was to identify the main points from the literature review about the digital HR experience. The major points included the the perception of less administrative work, the experience of acquiring new digital skills, the feeling of justice in automated processes, and the general feeling of being well.

Each set of questions from the questionnaire (e.g., Q1-Q10 on integration, Q21-Q30 on workload) was aligned with those conceptual areas sourced from the literature. The interpretation phase moved beyond average scores of each single conceptual area towards the detailed narrative for it. For example, the average scores related to the workload in Q21-Q30 were always slightly positive (3.26 to 3.46). Besides just showing these figures, we interpreted them qualitatively through the study findings of Chevalier & Dejoux (2021) who argue that these figures indicate the firm but still tentative acknowledgment of less administrative tasks, and at the

same time, due to the absence of strong agreements it can be concluded that technological-related stress factors might be prevailing over the reduction of administrative work.

Similarly, the highest scores were those of the wellbeing and job satisfaction domain (Q40-Q43). We looked at this qualitatively with the supported study reference of Hernandez-de-Menendez et al. (2020) to put forward the possible factor that such scores could indicate employees' empowerment and their professional development as a result of digital learning platforms, which is one of the main advantages emphasized in the literature.

In addition, the representation of the fact that none of the scores reached the strongly positive levels (4.5-5.0) was done through the concepts of "digital divide" research study by Hennebert & Bourguignon (2021) and "paradox of AI" by Charlwood & Guenole (2022). This qualitative narrative revealed that employees' positive eagerness is interconnected with factor of accountability based on their observation of the work and during service at the hotel in the tourism industry.

To sum up, the approach developed the conceptual frameworks of available literature to build a logically coherent qualitative and quantitative narrative for the study.

### Findings and Results

The quantitative findings were very obvious from the employee opinions analysis regarding Digital HR Innovation and Employee Wellbeing in 100 employees from the hotels in Agadir, Morocco. Results were provided on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 in questionnaire.

The group of questions from Q1 to Q10 (Fig. 1), which concerned the first integration and the use of digital HR tools, got a slightly positive reaction with the average scores going from 3.27 to 3.83.

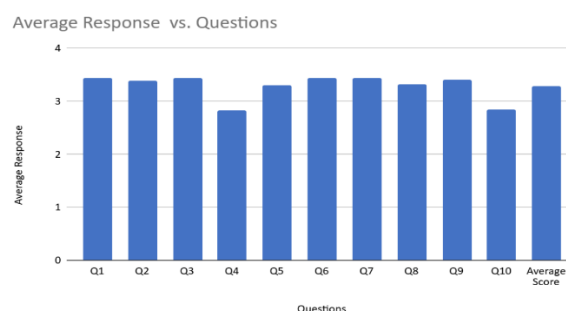


Fig. 1

The following set of questions from Q11 to Q20 (Fig.2 )about regular use and operational effectiveness also had average scores within the similar range of 3.30 to 3.69.

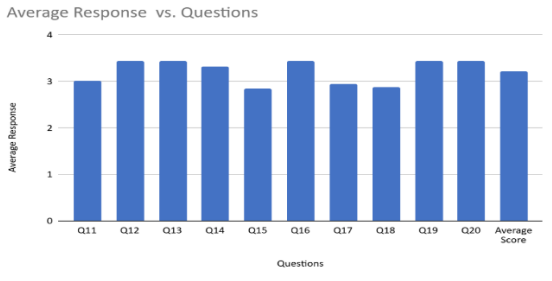


Fig. 2

The third group of questions Q21 to Q30 (Fig. 3) dealing with the workload and the efficiency of administrative tasks, followed the same pattern as the mean scores varied from 3.26 to 3.46, thus showing that respondents considered the reduction of the workload at a neutral or slightly positive level.

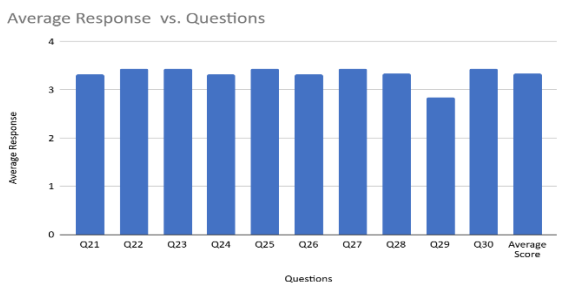


Fig.3

The part of the questionnaire that consisted of questions from Q31 to Q39 (Fig. 4) and was directed towards the enhancement of skills and professional development had the average scores varying from 3.31 to 3.59, therefore, it can be inferred that employees somewhat agree that digital HR provides them with growth opportunities.

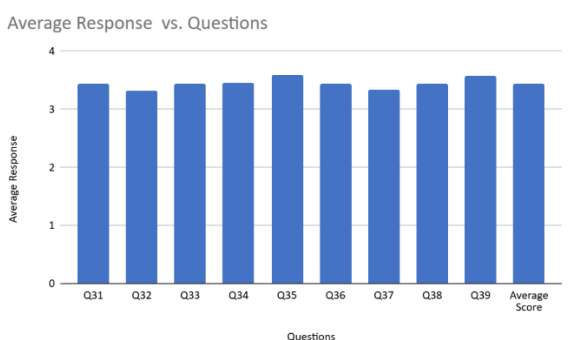


Fig. 4

Moreover, the questions Q40 to Q43 (Fig. 5) about overall wellbeing and job satisfaction had the highest average scores that ranged from 3.81 to 3.84.

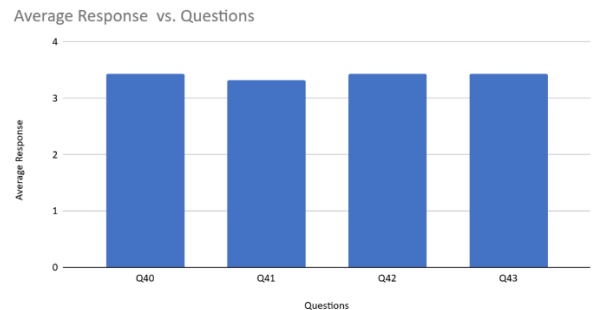


Fig. 5

Overall, hotel workers in Morocco have accepted Digital HR changes as efficient instruments that resolve their problems, hence giving them the opportunity to upskill themselves and, additionally, contributing a considerable positive impact to their general well-being and work happiness.

In order to move beyond just descriptive statistics and reveal the human perspective that is behind the numeric scores, a qualitative interpretative perspective was applied to the quantitative dataset. This method provided the pattern of average scores from the 43-item questionnaire as a powerful source of the collective employee sentiment. The relevant questions were not only considered as numbers but also as an indication of a bigger psychological and organizational phenomenon's finding behind them for this study.

As an example, the rationale for the moderate positive workload scores (Q21-Q30, means 3.26-3.46) was provided through the reference to the concept of "digital double shift" (Hennebert & Bourguignon, 2021). On the one hand, employees recognized a situation where manual administrative tasks had been reduced - a point that was specially emphasized by Chevalier & Dejoux (2021) - nevertheless, on the other hand, the refusal to strongly agree indicates that this efficiency accounts only as a factor to get rid of the cognitive load. The enormous cognitive resources involved in learning new software, fixing digital problems, and dealing with the continual flow of notifications, which altogether make up a new kind of invisible workload, can be qualitatively regarded as the factor that is limiting their enthusiasm. Besides that, the skills development scores (Q31-Q39, means 3.31-3.59) were interpretatively focused on the research of Hernandez-de-Menendez et al. (2020), thus

employees consider digital platforms as facilitators of their professional development.

The qualitative investigation of the data with the highest scores, i.e. those related to wellbeing and job satisfaction (Q40-Q43, means 3.81-3.84), reveals the major perspective. The scores, although positive from a quantitative viewpoint, when considered through a qualitative review, represent a relative rather than an absolute state of high wellbeing. Taking this interpretation from the literature, it would be quite logical to think that employees, as compared to non-digital, completely manual processes, could experience a greater feeling of control and empowerment. These scores are quite far from the "Strongly Agree". However, from a qualitative perspective, it is very important, vital, and significant. It was further elaborated in the study by Aloisi and Gramano that the digital surveillance-caused stress in employees (Aloisi & Gramano, 2019). The factor of the employees' awareness for their service surveillance and digital observation at work most likely brings about the intense pressure which is not comfortable for the mind and total job satisfaction in employees.

## **Discussion**

The evidence derived from the study revealed that the implementation of digital HR in hotels, specifically in Agadir, Morocco is very challenging and it requires proper strategy and action plan for the implementation of the digitalization policy for the HR department. Digital HR employees are gradually positive about the changes that are happening through the use of the digital medium. Overall, the results of the survey especially the highest scores in overall wellbeing and job satisfaction (Q40-Q43) which can be considered as the most important benefits of Digital HR that have been revealed and presented in the literature. The staff appear to be very sure that digital tools will lead to the elimination of the of boredom of the administrative tasks (Chevalier & Dejoux, 2021), and their skills will be improved through easily accessible training platforms (Hernandez-de-Menendez et al., 2020), thus providing them with power and contributing to their increased wellbeing. It will empower the hotel employees and equip them with the required skills to perform and give the positive as well as quality input at work.

The lack of very strong positive ratings (i.e. ratings above 4.0) may indicate that the digital transition is seen as a good element but not yet as a factor for a very

significant change. The reasons probably lie in the risks and challenges that are discussed in the qualitative review of the study. The sources of digital surveillance (Aloisi & Gramano, 2019) and losing the human factor (Charlwood & Guenole, 2022) is a major cause of anxiety. Therefore, the staff may only partially show their support for the change. Staff in the hotels of Agadir, Morocco, who may be on the disadvantaged side of the digital divide (Hennebert & Bourguignon, 2021), might feel that they just have to get used to the situation. Consequently, their stress level is raised. It creates the overall negative impact on employees' performance and make the workplace for employees more stressful (Charlwood & Guenole, 2022).

Our qualitative mode of inquiry was "What conceptual reality does this score represent?". Actually, the explanation emphasized the connection between the scores in Q31-Q39 (skills development) and the theoretical construct of "perceived employability", thus reveals that employees view digital tools as a way to climb up their careers' ladder.

Moreover, the justification for the limited range of scores was based on the negative side of the technology research that was used as a source for the analysis. In addition to the paper on digital surveillance (Aloisi & Gramano, 2019) and the one on dehumanization (Charlwood & Guenole, 2022) being referred to as concepts related to the field of study, they were also considered as means that help identify the reasons for the quantitative gap between "agree" and "strongly agree". This interpretive phase indicates that the absence of higher scores is actually the way the data presents findings - a clear narrative of major concerns about monitoring and the loss of the interpersonal connection with the HR function.

The point of view also facilitated the current status of research findings against the socio-cultural and economic background of Morocco. The moderate scores on workload reduction (Q21-Q30) were, thus, not only a general technological reaction but might also be reflecting the "digital divide" (Hennebert & Bourguignon, 2021), the cognitive load of getting used to new systems may be quite high in a place which is still at the stage of building its digital infrastructure and literacy even though workers are already there. This methodological step ensured that the discussion was not only a generic on digital HR but a local explanation based on the hotel sector of Morocco's specific realities. In other words, the implementation of this qualitative

interpretative methodology enabled descriptive findings - "moderately positive scores" - to be converted into the analytical concept of "cautious optimism," thus supplying the argument with the required depth to demonstrate that the success of Digital HR depends on the human-centric strategy rather than technology.

## 2. Future Research Directions and Recommendations

There are different effective and strong recommendations and future research directions required, based on this study. One of the most significant initiative that Moroccan hotel management must take is to communicate not only openly but also very effectively with the change management team, before they think of trying to implement anything. It needs proper formation of effective strategy and a very strong action plan. No one can intend to avoid role-specific, on-going training and still go very far in his/her career. Ethical preparation of guidelines regarding data use and monitoring on one side, and, employee representatives collaborating closely in fostering trust through consultation on the other, are equally important. If employees have a strong spirit of the self-accountability, it makes their service output more effective and productive at the workplace.

## 3. Conclusion

Overall, the digital aspect of HR transformation basically forms the core of the change of the hotel sector, particularly in Agadir, Morocco via HR digitalization. The study reveals that digitalized HR function backed by the technology creates a significant impact on the overall service output in the hotels and makes the employees capable enough to make the tourism industry and hotel service customer and people centered to attain the hospitality excellence.

The overall working atmosphere for the employees played a significant role for the employees' job satisfaction. It shows their readiness for the change. However, most of the "cautious optimism" sentiment can be considered as a very important factor. It signifies that just being provided with technology is not enough; the outcome still depends to a large extent on the way it is accomplished. It needs effective formation of strategy, planning and action plan for digitalization of HR to ensure the well-being of employees.

It is essential for the hotels in Agadir, Morocco to adopt a human-centric approach during this digital revolution to pave the way towards service excellence in the field of

tourism and hospitality. Technological innovations should be utilized to supplement and empower the employees, rather than utilizing it to create fear for employees of being monitored at the workplace.

Through the use of ethical governance, providing continuous staff support, and having an open feedback culture, Moroccan hotels will be able to employ Digital HR as a means of creating a workforce that is more resilient, satisfied, human-centered, and consequently capable of delivering the exceptional experiences for the people which are essential to attain the service excellence in the field of tourism and hospitality.

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