

Perceptions of Quality of Work Life in Hospitality Jobs: The Role of Interpersonal and Supportive Relations at Work

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the concept of quality of work life (QWL) in the tourism and hospitality industry, emphasising its significance for employee well-being and retention. The focus is on the psychosocial working environment, particularly interpersonal and social interactions at the workplace, described in the existing literature as stressors and coping mechanisms crucial for managing high job demands. This is especially relevant considering the long working hours, heavy workloads, and high pressure that typify tourism and hospitality jobs. The study draws on 56 in-depth interviews with three groups of purposefully selected participants at various career stages in the hotel sector to examine the role of interpersonal and supportive relations in the workplace and its impact on the perceived QWL. Findings indicate that a positive working environment and strong social capital are pivotal in buffering job demands. Participants highly value workplace social relations, considering them essential aspects of their work life. Interpersonal and supportive relations at work emerge as the most influential dimension positively affecting QWL. These findings may have implications for organisational practices and policies that foster a supportive workplace culture, ultimately contributing to the well-being and retention of employees in the industry.

KEYWORDS

Interpersonal Relations at Work, Social Support, Psychosocial Working Environment, Quality of Work Life, Employee Well-Being, Hospitality Professionals.

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1. Introduction

The tourism and hospitality (T&H) sector is a rapidly growing and job-intensive industry in numerous countries' GDP. Despite its resilience during economic downturns and contribution to job creation, it is not without challenges (Aynalem et al., 2016; Gössling et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021). The sector's reputation for high turnover rates and challenging working conditions raises questions about the quality of jobs created regarding employee retention and well-being (Yang et al., 2012; Stacey, 2015). Work constitutes a significant aspect of human life, and individuals' appraisals of their work circumstances, whether positive or negative, profoundly resonate across various domains of their lives (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). The concept of quality of work life (QWL), considered an essential dimension of quality of life, has evolved significantly in recent years, with a growing focus on factors like happiness and well-being in the workplace. This shift has sparked extensive discussions, highlighting a growing concern for employees' work experiences (Burchell et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2017; Vinopal, 2012).

QWL has been gaining visibility as an important construct within human resource management. Beyond shaping individuals' career decisions, perceptions of QWL are recognised as an essential human resource management strategy for successfully attracting and retaining valuable employees and fostering high employee retention and satisfaction, thereby substantially impacting organisational effectiveness (Sirgy, 2019; Leitão et al., 2019). Despite this recognition, studies focusing on T&H employees are still scarce, and the subjective experiences of the quality of work life among T&H employees remain an underexplored area. Empirical research addressing quality of life and well-being in tourism has traditionally focused on residents of host communities and tourists or has focused on the costumer's perspective (e.g., Uysal et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2022). The psychosocial working environment, which pertains to interpersonal and social interactions at the workplace, is one of the most critical aspects of work (Durão, 2021). Social interactions at work cover various types of workplace relationships and different types of social support. In the literature, these interactions are simultaneously described as stressors and buffers or coping mechanisms to deal with high job demands (Jolly et al., 2021). In the T&H sector, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, the psychological working environment profoundly impacts employee well-being due to the high-stress levels and demanding customer interactions (Mensah, 2021; Yu et al., 2021). A supportive psychological environment facilitates effective stress management and enhances T&H employees' ability to handle challenging interactions, which is crucial for maintaining well-being and mental health (Kurniawaty et al., 2019; Yu et al., 2021; Demirović Bajrami et al., 2022). Additionally, it fosters strong team dynamics and career adaptability, boosts job satisfaction and engagement, and reduces turnover rates by instilling a sense of value and loyalty among employees (Lee et al., 2021; Abdou et al., 2022). Social integration in the work organisation is a fundamental dimension of employees' identity and self-esteem (Lait & Wallace, 2002; Karatepe, 2009). Ultimately, cultivating a positive psychological working environment is paramount for ensuring exceptional service delivery to customers in the T&H sector (Jung et al., 2023).

The main objective of this work is to contribute to a deeper understanding the role of interpersonal and supportive relations in the workplace and its impact on the perceived quality of work life among highly educated individuals within in the T&H industry. Following a constructivist-interpretivist stance with a critical orientation, in-depth semi-structured interviews were applied to 56 informants with different job positions in the Portuguese hotel sector, at different career stages, thus purposively selected. A thematic analysis combined with narrative elements was employed to explore the perceptions and experiences of these individuals.

This study focuses on how participants perceive the significance of their social relations at the workplace and their impact on their work experiences in the T&H industry, particularly in the hotel sector. In the broader research developed by Durão (2021), interpersonal and supportive relations at work stood out as one of the most relevant aspects of people's working life and the most valued aspect within the quality of work life. Various studies demonstrate the importance of formal and informal relations in organisations (Amjad et al., 2015; Yakubovich & Burg, 2019; Pihl-Thingvad et al., 2022; Sigursteinsdottir & Karlsdottir, 2022) but found with lesser extent applied to T&H organisations (Karatepe, 2015; Omuris, 2019; Abbas et al., 2021). The study also explores how attributes such as gender, age, and educational level are considered by research participants to impact relationships in the workplace, delving into the

complexities of interpersonal relations in professional settings. The role and influence of social atmosphere and interactions at work in the participants' perceived quality of work life (QWL) is also discussed. This study has, therefore, practical implications for managerial practices. Understanding these dynamics is essential for hospitality managers to implement effective strategies for creating a positive workplace culture, promoting individual well-being within the hotel sector, improving employee retention, and ensuring that the T&H industry remains competitive and sustainable in the long run.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Quality of Work Life

Job quality is a contextual phenomenon that varies not only among individuals, with individual assessments influenced by personal circumstances such as age, life stage, family/personal relationships, location, and personal values on life and work, but also among occupations, labour market segments, societies, and historical periods (Findlay, Kalleberg, & Warhurst, 2013; CIPD, 2017).

Quality of work life (QWL) may be deemed as a general state of well-being at the workplace, which is closely related to – yet, different from – job satisfaction, and can influence other spheres of one's life (Nadler & Lawler, 1983; Kahn, 1992; Sirgy et al., 2001). QWL is a pivotal dimension for employee retention and satisfaction, exerting significant influence on employees' work adjustment, psychological bonds at work, and consequently, on organisational effectiveness. This is necessarily a multidimensional concept and translates into the sum of multiple aspects that one person values, affecting both the employment relationship and the work itself. The evolution of the concept of QWL has been mirrored by several studies and theoretical approaches devoted to measuring the concept, with different authors differing views on the core constituents of QWL (Van Laar et al., 2007). Although a range of features can be easily identified as contributing to job quality to some extent, getting to a shortlist of the most relevant dimensions will always be influenced by the backgrounds and perspectives of each author (Jones et al., 2017). Thus, different disciplines make different interpretations and focus on different measures: economists typically focus on pay (e.g., Clark, 2005), psychologists favour job satisfaction (Holman, 2010), and sociologists – underpinned by 'the intrinsic quality of work' – consider skill, autonomy or job content, instead (e.g., Gallie, 2007). Even within the same discipline, there might be divergences (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011; Findlay, Kalleberg, & Warhurst, 2013; CIPD, 2017).

The Need-Satisfaction Theory is a prominent approach in the QWL literature, positing that an individual's satisfaction with their work life is influenced by the fulfilment of their fundamental psychological needs (Loscocco & Roschelle, 1991; Sirgy et al., 2001). Grounded in psychological principles, particularly Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's (Herzberg, 1966; Herzberg et al., 2011) Two-Factor Theory of work motivation, this theory suggests that employees have various needs, ranging from basic physiological requirements to higher-level needs for autonomy, recognition, and personal growth. Organisations that recognise and address employees' diverse needs are likely to create a positive work environment, fostering higher job satisfaction, motivation, and overall quality of work life.

Several authors have focused on the impact of psychosocial demands, as evident in theories and models such as the Effort-Reward Imbalance theory, which emphasises the importance of norms of reciprocity rather than the control structure of work (Siegrist, 1996, 2017); the Job Characteristics Theory, that suggests that specific job dimensions lead to psychological states and on-the-job outcomes (Hackman & Oldham, 1980); the Spillover Theory, that proposes that satisfaction in one life domain may influence satisfaction in another (Sirgy et al., 2001); the Areas of Work-life model, that focuses on the congruence between the person and different domains of the job environment (Leiter & Maslach, 1999, 2004); the Job Demands-Control model, that posits that job control can buffer the impact of high job demands, reducing strain and enhancing employee satisfaction (Karasek, 1979; Karasek & Theorell, 1990); or the Job Demands-Resources model, that explains the relationship between job demands, job resources, and employee well-being based on a health impairment process and a motivational process (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Despite the increasing recognition that investigating factors contributing to employees' well-being is crucial for promoting positive work-related behaviours such as work engagement, organisational commitment, or intention to stay, studies addressing the quality of work life of T&H employees are scarce. The findings of a study developed by Durão (2021), coupled with an examination of the extant literature, both generic and industry specific, allowed the identification of a set of six major dimensions (made up of 12 subdimensions): job structuring and work organisation (including organisational policies, job content, scheduling and working time arrangements); reward and recognitions systems (pay and fringe benefits, recognition and appreciation for work); achievement and development (promotion and advancement, skill development, learning and growth, and job security); psychosocial working environment (interpersonal and supportive relations at work, leadership style); health, job stress and emotional demands; and work-life balance.

2.2 Interpersonal and Supportive Relations at Work

Social support is an important dimension of several QWL theories and models. Interpersonal and social interactions at the workplace are deemed one of the most important job resources, specifically in the form of social integration, when considering the nature and influence of personal relationships at work in individuals' well-being (Walton, 1973), and social support (from peers, co-workers, and supervisors), that not only alleviates job demands and associated costs but is also instrumental in accomplishing work-related goals and fostering personal growth, learning and development (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Demerouti et al., 2001). Karasek's (1979) original proposal for the Job Demands–Control (JCD) model focused on two dimensions of the work environment: psychological job demands (related to workload, primarily concerning the intensity and time pressures of work) and job control (referring to a person's ability to control their work activities). This model hypothesised that high-strain jobs result from the combination of high job demands and low job control, while active-learning jobs result combination of high job demands and high job control. As research progressed to overcome some limitations, a third dimension – social support – was later added to the model, and the model was renamed to Job Demand–Control–Support (JCDS) model (Johnson & Hall, 1988; Karasek & Theorell, 1990). The expanded model hypothesises that iso-strain jobs are characterised by high demands, low control, and low support (or isolation); therefore, the JCDS model states that social support moderates the negative impact of high job strain.

The nature of personal relationships is an inherent dimension within the framework of social organisations and significantly influences employees' identity and self-esteem. Social interactions are not only frequently perceived as common work stressors, but employees' job evaluations are also shaped by their perceptions of the support provided by their organisations (Walton, 1973). As a result, the dynamics between an individual and their peers may lead to adjustment and attachment or alienation from the workplace (Porter & Steers, 1973). These interactions encompass various types of workplace relationships and different forms of support (e.g., reciprocal help, socio-emotional support, instrumental support, openness, respect). Therefore, social support itself can be considered a multidimensional concept, including variables such as organisational support (support from the employer/management), supervisor support, support from co-workers, and support from customers.

Perceived Organisational Support (POS) lies at the heart of Organisational Support Theory, which analyses relationships between employers and employees through the lens of social exchange. POS pertains to the extent to which employees perceive that their work organisation values their contributions and demonstrates a genuine concern for their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

Social support encompasses various elements, including fostering a friendly atmosphere among staff, fostering a sense of community, recognizing the value of employees' contributions, and providing opportunities for employees to interact, make friends, and collaborate on work-related tasks (Walton, 1973; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Warr, 1999; OECD, 2017). It also implies organisations being perceived as valuing their personnel, remunerating them fairly, and attending to their needs and expectations. Supervisors are expected to show interest in employees' goals, personal growth, and well-being (Daskin & Tezer, 2012). Sirgy (2012) also notes the impact of teamwork on work satisfaction, highlighting that a certain degree of felt interdependence in functions, tasks, and shared decision-making fosters reciprocal trust and respect among team members.

Social support serves as a buffer against the negative consequences of both extensive job demands and workplace stressors such as intimidation (malicious behaviour aiming to instil fear) and discrimination (less favourable treatment or prejudice based on factors like race, gender, religion, origins, disability, lifestyle, or physical appearance) (Walton, 1973; OECD, 2017). While workplace discrimination and stereotyping are more commonly associated with factors like gender or race, Wilks and Neto (2013) argue that age, particularly concerning older individuals, can equally influence work-related well-being.

In work environments characterised by abusive supervision, co-worker support becomes particularly relevant as it reinforces positive behaviour with the goal of fostering positive relationships. In the T&H context, workplace environments are often described as 'violent', with dictatorial, unfriendly, uncivil, and hostile behaviour being associated with supervisors, especially in high power distance cultures (Xu et al., 2015). Employee representation and voice also hold significance in this context, allowing workers to communicate and discuss work-related issues with management, thereby enhancing employers' awareness of their needs (Williamson et al., 2009; OECD, 2017).

It is also deemed relevant to reference appropriate styles of leadership – positive and effective – and good managerial practices as essential components of this dimension (Kara et al., 2013; OECD, 2017). "Good management practices include taking (good) actions to organise work, resolve conflict, treat workers with respect, and encourage them to take part in organisational decisions" (OECD, 2017, p. 132). Jones et al. (2017) further emphasise the necessity for managers to provide recognition and to be fair and reasonable. As a management tool, leadership style is linked to a broad spectrum of organisational processes and outcomes, including organisational climate, interpersonal relations, work attitudes, acceptance of innovation and change, and service performance (Kara et al., 2013; George, 2015).

The availability of support also aids employees in reducing customer-related stressors, dealing with customer requests and complaints, and resolving service failures, particularly for employees who have intense face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with customers (Karatepe, 2012). Work stress can be particularly acute in customer-oriented fields because employees often experience conflicting demands from customers. For contact employees, providing friendly service at all times, especially when dealing with angry or uncivil customers and having to restrain their temper, can be emotionally draining (Deery & Jago, 2009; O'Neill & Davis, 2011; Kao, Cheng, Kuo, & Huang, 2014; Zhao & Ghiselli, 2016; Partington, 2017). This is often referred to as emotional labour, a concept that has been well-documented among hospitality employees, as they are expected to express feelings such as enthusiasm, friendliness, and cheerfulness despite negative emotions that they may experience (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002).

Social support is not exclusively work-related and may include support from family, spouses or partners (Seiger & Wiese, 2009). It also encompasses supervisor work-family specific support, which is considered to alleviate work-family conflict experiences, such as approving family-related requests or alleviating high workloads (Goh, Ilies, & Wilson, 2015).

3. Methodology

This study is grounded in qualitative research as part of a doctoral thesis. A constructivist-interpretivist perspective with a critical orientation was adopted, and, in line with the researcher's reflexivity, data collection relied on an interactive and cooperative relationship between the researcher and participants. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 56 informants (52% female and 48% male; mean age 32). Research participants occupied at the time various job positions within the Portuguese hotel sector at different career stages: 30 *employees*, T&H graduates currently employed in the industry (with a minimum of 12 months experience); 14 *leavers*, T&H graduates formerly employed in the industry, who voluntarily left their job with the deliberate intention of securing employment in a different occupational field (with a minimum of two years in the industry or two employers); and 12 *newcomers*, students majoring in T&H-related degrees who already had their first contact with hospitality work (e.g., internship) and could potentially become future workers in the industry.

3.1 Selection and Profile of Research Participants

Research participants were purposely selected based on the primary criterion that all interviewees held a higher education degree in the T&H field or, in the case of *newcomers*, were approaching graduation and completing their degrees. A purposeful sampling method combined with snowballing techniques was used in this study. Maximal variation sampling was applied to select individuals displaying different dimensions of some characteristics or traits to get a higher variation on dimensions of interest. This sampling technique allowed the researcher to capture a wider diversity of views, perceptions, and experiences while balancing out the participants' demographic profiles, work experience, and roles in the hospitality industry. Within the hospitality industry, participants were specifically chosen from the same occupational field, namely, the hotel sector. Within the hotel sector, only individuals with working experience in Hotel Establishments (according to the Portuguese Tourist Accommodation Legal Framework) were considered eligible; however, these could be hotels with any size or classification (ranging from one to five stars or *Pousadas*) and affiliation (independent hotels, local/national chain hotels or international chain hotels), so that the existence of patterns associated with business scale of operations, and their corresponding human resource policies, could be eventually identified. The choice of hotels as the research setting was motivated by the pivotal role of accommodation in the T&H industry regarding job creation. The hotel sector was also selected due to its highly structured employment hierarchy, which facilitates tracing career patterns (Ladkin & Kichuk, 2017).

The diversity within the *employees* and *leavers* groups was due to the inclusion of both back and front-of-house staff in the sample, encompassing various functional levels (staff/operational, supervisory, and managerial) and different job positions (up to 15 different positions). *Newcomers* participated in 1 to 4 different internships throughout their higher education program, hosted by up to 6 different departments and ranging from 2 to 15 months in duration. A short profile of each group of respondents is presented in Table 1.

This research was conducted nationwide. An attempt was made to recruit informants all over Portugal to have the country's seven regions (NUT II) represented: North of Portugal (29%), Central Portugal (18%), Lisbon (16%), Alentejo (2%), Algarve (7%), Madeira (5%) and the Azores (13%). Different regions exhibit differences in tourism development and destination structure, which is reflected in various patterns and challenges in tourism employment; by recruiting informants working in different geographical contexts, some valuable insights were expected to emerge from the collected data. Eventually, no regional differences were analysed as a balanced number of participants per region was not observed.

Table 1. Main Characteristics of the Study's Informants

Employees	Leavers	Newcomers
43% female and 47% male	79% female and 21% male	42% female and 58% male
Average age: 33	Average age: 38	Average age: 22
80% Millennials (20-39 years old)	57% Gen Xers (40-59 years old)	100% Millennials (20-31 years old)
Average years in the industry: 10	Average years in the industry: 7	Average number of internship experiences: 2
53% in operational positions	Average years out of the industry: 7	Average duration of internships: 6 months
30% in top management positions	14% in operational positions	
	50% in top management positions	

Source: Own Elaboration

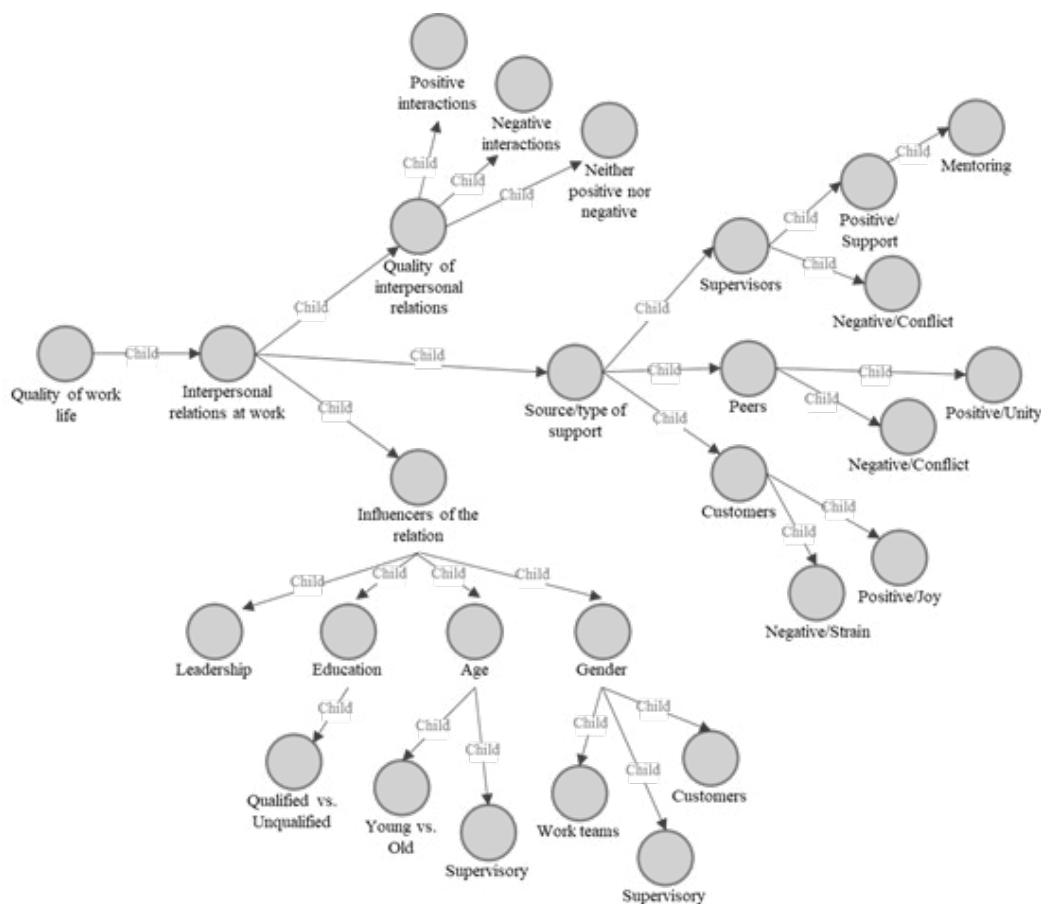
3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews provided an opportunity to explore participants' views on their career initiation, informed by their personal expectations, experiences, and conceptions. Data collection took place between November 2018 and June 2019. The interviews took a minimum of 25 minutes and a maximum of 100 minutes. Face-to-face meetings were privileged, but some interviews were conducted by web conferencing. The interview script covered five major thematic areas with a variable number of questions, as follow-up questions were made regarding specific issues when the participants did not spontaneously address these: career story (and corresponding career paths since graduation/accounts of first work experiences); career plan-

ning and initiation (interests and motivations to pursue a T&H career; the role of education and training; career aspirations and plans/(un)met expectations); career construction and critical moments (determinants to pursue, move on from, or return to a T&H career; perceived costs and alternatives; awareness of gender and age-related influences); perceptions on employee retention and future prospects; conceptions of quality of work life; and participants' profile (professional background and socio-demographics). Three versions of the same interview were prepared, with minor adjustments, according to the targeted groups, i.e., *employees* were asked to focus on both past experiences and experiences with the current employer, and *newcomers* were asked to focus on their professional experiences to date.

Data analysis ran concurrently with data collection, and interim analysis informed adaptations to the interview guide and ongoing participant selection. Data was analysed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12. Interview transcripts were subject to case classification, each coded as a case and classified into the corresponding group of participants. The research themes were broken down into nodes and sub-nodes, and the interviews were coded within the nodes and sub-nodes. The tree node structure referring to 'interpersonal relations at work' as a dimension of quality of work life is presented in Figure 1. When no new insights emerged from the analysis of an additional case, data saturation or informational redundancy was considered achieved. An adapted thematic analysis, combined with narrative elements (Ayres, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2013), was employed to offer new or deeper explanations about the proposed research topics.

Figure 1. Diagram of the Hierarchy of Research Themes and Relations used through the Coding Process in NVivo 12 for the Dimension 'Interpersonal Relations at Work'



Source: Own Elaboration

4. Results

4.1 Perceptions on Interpersonal Relations and Support at Work

Good interpersonal relations emerge as one of the most favourable aspects of working in the hospitality sector for the majority of research participants. Only two participants, overall, perceive this aspect as irrelevant to their work lives. When participants were queried about their conception of QWL, they consistently highlighted the significance of relationships with their co-workers, supervisors/ managers, teamwork, and support. Work group relationships, in particular, are also described as being related with employees' social needs, which Sirgy et al. (2001) describe as the need of positive interactions, friendships, membership and being-in-the-know in a significant social group. Positive mentions are made to three social group relationships and primary sources of support: peer/co-worker, management/supervisor, and customer support.

Peer relationships are consistently highlighted as the most significant among all workplace connections: 15 participants regard this relationship positively, while only four reported negative experiences. Three other participants neither evaluate peer relationships as positive nor negative, considering that high staff turnover does not afford them sufficient time to form strong bonds with colleagues. Not only is the experience of working with people in general mentioned several times as one of the industry's best aspects, but co-worker support is also described as fundamental for enhancing individual performance (with multiple references from participants to teamwork, trust, and joyful atmosphere) and coping with other workplace stressors, such as workload or extended working hours. These challenges are often attributed to prevalent under-staffing practices in the industry. A *leaver* (ex-receptionist, 7 years with her last employer), particularly emphasized how companionship enables her and her co-workers to deal with some shortcomings of their workplace: "There were not enough staff so if we all left on time or enjoyed certain flexibilities with shift times, everything would fall on the other colleagues. We were the ones who respected each other and helped each other. If a group arrived at the end of a shift, we would no longer leave, we would be there for an hour or two helping, so as not to leave other colleagues dealing with things alone."

While the relationship with managers and supervisors is not so extensively discussed, nine interviewees described their relationship with their immediate managers as very good, while five described it as negative. One of the most frequently mentioned aspects of supervisor support relates to ease of communication, constructive criticism and encouragement, openness to dialogue, and a willingness to take their side or alleviate their burden when necessary. Overall, the majority of positively described experiences with managers and supervisors are characterized as supportive, as exemplified by some *employees'* testimonies: "We had a fantastic manager, who allowed us to manage our time, manage our tasks and who trusted in us. There was a list of tasks that we had to do, and it was not even necessary to assign them, we took the initiative ourselves" (receptionist, 6 years in the hotel industry); "I was very blessed to get my supervisor, she is outstanding, she is in the trenches with us. She works like us, takes calls like us, talks to customers like us; she does everything we do and more. She gives us a lot of support." (reservations clerk, 3 years in the industry). Mentoring relationships are frequently found in literature as an important determinant of career development (Kim et al., 2015), but only one participant mentioned how receiving such type of support contribute to his personal and professional growth.

The most negative account came from a *leaver* (ex-assistant F&B manager) who detailed the deterioration of her relationship with her supervisor, the general manager of the independent hotel where they worked. This participant described her former supervisor as insecure; considering their organisational tenure and qualifications, she often felt perceived as 'competition'. The supervisor was portrayed as authoritarian, highly critical, and focused on absolute control, undervaluing the competencies of others. This dynamic led to tensions, resentments, and demotivation among the staff. Her portrayal of this relationship, ultimately a key factor in her decision to leave, aligns with what Kara, Kim and Uysal (2015) refer to as manager mobbing behaviour.

According to some participants, conflicts, when they arise, are primarily attributed to intense competition among co-workers, particularly when supervisory roles are in consideration. Conflict is also noted

in relation to the dynamics between work groups from different departments, typically between front office and housekeeping, or between restaurant and kitchen teams. According to two participants, tipping can be a source of conflict, especially in low-paid departments. A *newcomer* recalls how tips cause friction between regular and casual employees in his hotel's F&B operations, resulting in a poor working environment. Regular employees describe the distribution of tips as unfair, as casual workers are paid a higher hourly wage compared to regular employees, whose overtime is not fully compensated but rather banked. Mixed feelings are observed regarding the role of supervisors in managing tip distribution, with some participants believing that oversight is necessary, while others prefer that these issues be left to employees' discretion. Conflict, whether hierarchical (e.g., between workers and supervisors) or lateral (e.g., among workers in the same department), is identified as a significant cause of turnover. This occurs when differences cannot be resolved, leading one of the conflicting parties to leave or be compelled to leave (Staw, 1980; Mobley, 1982), as previously exemplified.

Although less frequently mentioned and more often described as a source of workplace stress, customer interaction was positively highlighted by five research participants in the context of workplace interpersonal relationships. Interacting with people, enjoying customer orientation, or avoiding a monotonous work-life are all significant motivators for individuals interested in T&H jobs. Previous research supports the notion that establishing trusting relationships with customers can enhance organisational commitment and reduce turnover intentions (Walsh, 2016). Several interviewees mentioned frequently hosting regular guests, often business travellers, who became familiar acquaintances. These guests knew the staff members by name, inquired about their families, and even occasionally offered small gifts: "[When I was a receptionist] I loved the contact with the client. As I was in a business hotel, there were always the same faces, every week. It was very good, because after a while you already knew their names, they already knew your name, they already trusted you, and they always come to talk to you. It was a very good relationship" (*employee*, 6 years in the hotel industry).

Customer interaction serves as both a source of joy and strain for many research participants. Interestingly, all accounts from *newcomers* regarding work stressors are related to the challenge of managing relationships with customers, which they categorise as highly stressful and emotionally demanding. Previous research has also noted that hotel restaurant frontline service employees perceive interactions with customers as sources of both positive and negative emotions (Yang et al., 2020). Particularly for contact staff, such as receptionists or waiters, regular job duties involve dealing with customers of diverse profiles, moods, and attitudes, making them prone to emotional labour. Two interviewees specifically mention that working in hotels that frequently host last-minute guests due to flight delays and cancellations is highly stressful, as customers may already be in a bad mood due to circumstances completely unrelated to the hotel staff.

Emotional labour becomes emotionally draining when employees are expected to express feelings such as enthusiasm, friendliness, and cheerfulness despite experiencing negative emotions when dealing with angry or uncivil customers (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). Customer incivility has also been found to have a positive relationship with frontline service employee job burnout (Han et al., 2016; Nitzsche et al., 2018). Han et al. (2016) have also observed that organisational and supervisory support moderates the relationship between customer incivility and burnout, whereas Erenler Tekmen and Kaptangil (2022) suggest supervisory support may impact employees' willingness to deal with various situations. The importance of supervisory support (or in this case, the lack of it) in mitigating the negative impacts of customer service problems was highlighted by three interviewees. They expressed feeling consistently left alone to handle complaint resolution or lacking adequate support from other departments (considering that complaints are typically directed to the front-desk and may not necessarily pertain to front-desk service and performance). Only one interviewee (*employee*, receptionist), who works for an international hotel group, mentioned having received special training, specifically oriented for the hotel sector to deal with difficult customers and emotional self-regulation.

Other *employee* (assistant manager) also mentions how the positive work environment that characterizes her current organisation has played a decisive role in retaining or re-attracting employees. She believes that this is especially evident in low-paid areas, such as housekeeping, the restaurant, or the kitchen, where staff may easily switch organisations for a slight salary increase. the working environment

in her organisation is so positively regarded that many individuals return after having less favourable experiences in other organisations.

4.2 Factors Influencing Interpersonal Relations at Work

Three sociodemographic variables are presented by interviewees as influencing interpersonal relations at work, both at horizontal and vertical levels, namely gender, age, and educational level.

Gender is cited by some participants as a factor influencing certain attitudes and behaviours in the workplace. Both male and female interviewees ($n=5$) perceive women to be more competitive than men, contributing to conflicts with peers, exacerbated when these peers are also women. Several female participants express reservations about the prospect of joining exclusively female teams. Three interviewees believe that teams comprised solely of women exhibit a degree of animosity, citing jealousy, gossip, and stressful working environments as the primary reasons. A female *employee* (reservations clerk) states that women are highly judgmental of each other, an attitude that she does not find as prevalent in male co-workers. At the same time, she acknowledges that the poor working environment in her department is more likely to be due to the work values of the people who work there than to their gender or the fact that it is a team mostly comprised of women. One of the *leavers* (male, general manager) believes that this phenomenon is not exclusive to women-only teams, as teams made up exclusively of men are also not as productive and functional as mixed teams. Other *leaver* (female, receptionist), despite agreeing with the competition-driven conflict thesis, highlights that women are simultaneously more proactive than men in getting together and standing out for each other when necessary. They exhibit a strong sense of friendship and mutual support, either to solve a common problem or to improve women's rights in the workplace. Some female interviewees (namely an ex-assistant manager and a deputy manager) report instances when customers exhibited sexist attitudes, asking to 'speak to the director', assuming that the company's representative was a man, and feeling disregarded when brought before a woman in a supervisory position. Four other female participants, all in supervisory/managerial positions, report difficulties in dealing with subordinates who they felt questioned their authority and management skills due to being women. Some of them also believe that such attitudes were due to the intersectionality of their gender and age (Holgate et al., 2006; Jyrkinen & McKie, 2012), as they were both women and considerably younger than some or most of the staff reporting to them. One of these interviewees admits having adjusted her leadership style to be better accepted. These testimonials strongly support findings from previous research that have demonstrated the existence, in T&H organisations, of gender discrimination, gender stereotyping, and delegitimization of women as leaders (Costa et al., 2012; Walsh, 2016; Mónica Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019).

In turn, age is referred to by participants from three different perspectives. On the one hand, older age is associated with a lower predisposition for training and openness to welcome younger members in work teams. For example, an *employee* (receptionist, 21 years old at an early career stage) recalls how much younger colleagues were willing to share their knowledge and guide her through organisational procedures when she joined the organisation, compared to older co-workers. Other *employee* (waiter, 9 years in the industry) offered other perspective on this issue, stating that it becomes excessively tiring and stressful to be constantly training new entrants. This happens not only because turnover rates are high but also because he is assigned this role cumulatively to his regular duties. Age is also cited as influencing interpersonal relations at work, particularly when supervisors are younger than those they supervise. A female employee recalled her experience as deputy housekeeper when she was 21 years old, having to supervise a group of employees much older than herself. She remembered how difficult it was to 'be heard' and the struggle to prove to her team that she was knowledgeable about the job and capable of holding a supervisory position despite her lesser operational experience.

Also mentioned by participants is the educational level, which, in the opinion of five female interviewees, indicates that the higher the academic qualification, the smoother interpersonal relations are. According to these participants, conflict tends to be more prevalent in lower-skilled departments (such as housekeeping) and even between these departments and others. According to a *leaver* (female, ex-assistant manager) and an *employee* (male, hotel deputy manager), both in supervisory positions, it is also more challenging to maintain the divide between professional and personal spheres. Less qualified indi-

viduals may have more difficulty distinguishing between sympathy/openness and permissibility/lowering of job requirements. A *leaver* (female, receptionist) also attributes the origin of conflict with her peers to the fact that she was only employee with a university degree in her department and her co-workers always made the point that attending university does not make people more knowledgeable than work experiences do. This reinforces the notion that higher education degrees are not particularly valued in the T&H industry (Petrova & Mason, 2004; Costa et al., 2012).

In addition to these sociodemographic influences, various research participants emphasise, either directly or indirectly, the impact of leadership on numerous dimensions of work and career development. Managers are identified by several interviewees (n=8) as the primary individuals responsible for fostering a positive working environment and cultivating a strong work community. Particularly, mid-level managers, such as immediate supervisors, are perceived as having a key role in mediating interpersonal relationships and averting potential conflicts, all while maintaining a level of supervision that is not overly restrictive. Most participants express a preference for being granted autonomy to make decisions related to their daily work (e.g., scheduling, tip distribution). Some highlight the positive impact on team spirit, particularly in small teams, when they have the freedom to choose their working schedules or decide who works on holidays like Christmas or New Year. This autonomy, however, should not be interpreted as *laissez-faire* or an abdication of responsibilities. Instead, it indicates increased empowerment, as supervisors are still expected to oversee and intervene when necessary to ensure fairness and equity among team members or to make decisions when consensus is not reached.

Supervisors are also expected to mediate employees' relationships with customers, especially in the face of potential complaints and disrespectful attitudes. One *leaver* (ex-receptionist) and an *employee* (previously working as a bar waiter) recount multiple instances when they lacked adequate supervisory support when dealing with challenging customers. They believe that this lack of support ultimately impacted the working environment in their respective departments.

Despite the belief of several interviewees that promoting a positive working environment is largely dependent on leadership, one of the *employees* (receptionist, 38 years old) argued that people should view interpersonal relations in the workplace not merely as something experienced or acquired but as something that should be actively cultivated by each employee: "The working environment must also be built between colleagues. For example, if I receive a tip, I share it with my colleague. He may get surprised, but the next time, he also shares his tip with me. Or being open to exchange work schedules (...) This is how everything starts to improve."

In analysing the differential influence of the abovementioned factors in interpersonal dynamics within the workplace across the three participant groups, it is observed that gender was identified as influential by both *employees* and *leavers*. Although both female and male participants acknowledge gendered influences in interpersonal relations, many women (particularly those holding supervisory positions) portray the nature of these relations as conflictive or detrimental to their well-being, particularly regarding the relationship with managers and supervisors. No noteworthy differences were found among the participants concerning the attributes of age and education; however, most testimonies refer to career initiation moments, which may suggest that these issues were particularly pressing when entering the labour market. Despite qualifying for entry-level management positions, recent graduates are frequently assigned to operational roles, a situation several studies have shown to be recurrent over time (Raybould & Wilkins, 2005; Robinson et al., 2016), which can also explain the relevance attributed to age and education as factors influencing the relationship with peers and supervisors. Leadership style was also identified as influential by *employees* and *leavers*, but more specifically by participants holding middle-level managerial positions when depicting their career paths. Despite acknowledging the importance of a supportive work environment, *newcomers* are the group that explored these nuances the least due to their relatively limited experience in the labour market.

4.3 The Role of Social Atmosphere/Interactions at Work in Perceived QWL

Research participants were directly asked about their own conception of the *quality of work life*, and a specific closing question aimed to unveil the multiple meanings that this concept holds for the different interviewees. In the research conducted by Durão (2021), the psychosocial working environment, referring to

interpersonal and supportive relations at work and leadership style, was found as one of the dimensions comprising the multidimensional concept of QWL. When considering the order of importance assigned by the participants (measured through the number of references made to each aspect of work in T&H), social atmosphere/interactions at work is one of the most relevant aspects of work (with 25 mentions), following recognition and appreciation (deemed the most important aspect, with 26 mentions), but at the same level as pay (also with 25 mentions). Interpersonal and supportive interactions at work gathered the greatest consensus as a highly valued aspect of people's working life, which was again supported by the participants' own definition of QWL.

Although the QWL dimensions were not assessed based on their sequence in participants' narratives, it is evident that when it comes to a positive working environment, interviewees almost always expressed it as a priority by stating "In the first place...". This suggests that this aspect of work stands out in comparison to others and is deemed particularly significant in their evaluations.

Several participants highlight the importance of a strong team spirit, solidarity, enjoyment, honesty, and mutual trust among colleagues. They also stress the significance of having supportive supervisors, voice (feeling free to express doubts and ask questions without receiving detrimental comments), and a generally positive working environment. These elements are seen as crucial buffers or coping mechanisms to address high job demands, including extensive working hours, a fast work pace, heavy workloads, and high job stress. The participants believe that positive social interactions at work contribute significantly to their psychological well-being, job involvement, willingness to invest effort in their work, and persistence in the face of difficulties, as illustrated by the following testimonies:

"We spend so much time at the workplace that the hotel becomes our home and the way we get along with colleagues is very important. If everything is okay, we always carry a smile and everything has higher chances of going well, you have another mood. If not, then it's terrible." (*leaver*, ex-guest relations, 46 years old)

"For me, QWL is to have a good working environment, it's to have a good team. That's essential. Because, whether there's work overload, whether there's a thousand and one problems, if you have a good team, if people know how to work together, if there's a good team spirit, everything goes well, everything can be solved, and we all go home happy at the end of the day. If there is no good atmosphere, we won't be motivated to go to work, we won't give our best, we won't be there 100%. I think that's key to a company's success." (*employee*, web sales executive, 31 years old)

"QWL starts right at the moment when our manager, who is responsible for us and the company, tells us 'you can count on me for everything'. That's the basic. When you have a person or a department that lets you know they are there for you, to back you up, that's QWL; everything else comes after that." (*employee*, receptionist, 28 years old)

"Having a director who looks you in the eye and says 'Hello, good morning! Everything okay? So how are we doing today? Is there any problem?'. But beyond just saying, it's really being interested to know. And that's important, knowing that if you have a problem and you need help, you'll get it, because they care for you." (*employee*, receptionist, 24 years old)

One of the general managers interviewed asserts that fostering a positive social atmosphere at work and enhancing working conditions are crucial strategies for earning the admiration and trust of colleagues. Additionally, half of the *newcomers* ($n=6$) identify a psychosocial working environment as a significant dimension in shaping QWL. These results are consistent with previous studies, asserting that high social support from colleagues and supervisors, as an element of the work environment, have a positive impact on employees' well-being at work (Demirović Bajrami et al., 2022) job control, and social support and quality of work life (Baker & Kim, 2020).

When participants in the research were queried about the potential sacrifices they would have to make if they were to leave their current jobs (*leavers* were specifically asked about the most significant loss in changing jobs), 18 interviewees highlighted their work group relationships, emphasizing the importance of the people they work with. Both the constructs of Job Embeddedness (Mitchell et al., 2001) and Organisational Commitment (Hom et al., 2017) contemplate dimensions associated with the perceived costs of leaving the organisation: *sacrifice*, in the former, which refers to the ease with which links with the organisation can be broken; and *continuance commitment*, the latter, referring to both financial and non-financial costs of leaving and side-bets individuals make. While some participants point out the lack of alternatives that could match their current employment terms and conditions, social relations in the workplace are consistently emphasized as a crucial aspect of work life. Participants have invested significantly in these relationships, and the potential loss of these connections would complicate the decision to change jobs. Even though not all interpersonal relationships are positive or free of conflict, they remain among the most valued sources of support and motivation at work, as the following quote reveals:

"[The thing I would miss the most if I left the job would be] some of the people I work with. Companies are the people who work there. And you have to be lucky to be in the right place at the same time as the right people. We never get along 100% with everyone, but if we are lucky enough to meet, at that moment, with X or Y, and we are able to work well with these people, it is halfway to making you want to go to work every day." (female *employee*, sales and events executive, 32 years old).

According to the findings of previous studies, the work environment significantly affects employees' turnover intentions (Kurniawaty et al., 2019; Abdou et al., 2022).

5. Conclusion

Quality of work life (QWL) refers to the general state of well-being in the workplace, which is different from job satisfaction and can influence other aspects of one's life. QWL is a multidimensional concept and varies among individuals, occupations, and societies (Sirgy et al., 2001). There is no consensus on the core constituents of QWL, and different authors propose various factors that contribute to positive evaluations of the work experience. While different disciplines focus on different measures, some key dimensions of job quality include pay, job security, work-life balance, and psychosocial working environment. In general terms, the quality of a job refers to the extent to which a set of work and employment-related factors contribute to, or detract from, workers' well-being and foster positive attitudes towards one's job-occupation (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011; Holman, 2012; CIPD, 2017). The objectives of the present study are particularly aligned with the strand of literature that postulates that individuals' affective responses to work essentially determine QWL. QWL is crucial for employee retention and satisfaction, impacting work adjustment, psychological bonds at work, and organisational effectiveness (Sirgy et al., 2001; Wan & Chan, 2013; Bednarska, 2013).

The concept of perceived organisational support underscores the importance of employees feeling valued and supported by their organisations. This encompasses fostering a friendly atmosphere, recognizing employees' contributions, and providing opportunities for interaction and collaboration (Omuris, 2019). Moreover, supervisors' interest in employees' personal growth and well-being is crucial for creating a supportive work environment. This aspect of work is especially relevant when considering the culture of long working hours, heavy workloads, intense work pressure, tight time constraints, challenging working conditions, and insufficient training and safeguards for health and safety that typify hospitality jobs (Rowley & Purcell, 2001; Page et al., 2018). Social support is, therefore, a core constituent of models of QWL such as the Job Demand–Control–Support (JCDs) model (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), which ascertains that social support moderates the negative impact of high strain, especially in jobs which are characterised by high demands, such as those in T&H. This buffering role of social support over high strain jobs is also a central tenet in Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory or Karasek's (1979) job strain model. Positive social interactions at work are posited as one of the factors that can contribute significant-

ly to employees' psychological well-being, job involvement, and willingness to invest effort in their work (Demerouti et al., 2001; OECD, 2017).

Based on the interviews conducted with purposely selected participants from the T&H industry, results from this study suggest that a positive work environment, characterised by supportive relationships with co-workers and supervisors, emerges as a decisive factor in retaining employees, both in their jobs as in the T&H industry. Participants' narratives underscore the critical role of supportive relationships with co-workers, supervisors, and customers in creating a positive work environment. Rewarding, supportive, and trusting coworker and supervisor relations have also been positively associated with psychological safety (Kahn, 1990; May et al., 2004), whereas the lack of social support is related to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Supportive interpersonal relations are deemed particularly relevant by participants occupying frontline job positions. Frontline employees in T&H must deal with frequent customer interaction while managing the pressure to deliver high service quality and effectively resolve complaints. Supportive relations in the workplace may help them better manage these high job demands (Karatepe, 2009).

Peer relationships are consistently highlighted as the most significant among all workplace connections, contributing to enhanced individual performance and the ability to cope with various workplace stressors. Previous research supports that coworker support reduces strain (Viswesvaran et al., 1999), has the ability to attenuate the adverse effects of abusive supervision (Xu et al., 2015), and influence turnover rates within the hospitality sector, particularly among entry-level employees, by potentially offsetting less favourable employment terms and conditions (Tews et al., 2013a). The positive impact of supervisor support, including ease of communication, constructive criticism, and encouragement, is also evident, with mentoring relationships identified as an essential determinant of career development. Previous research has also provided evidence that supervisors are important in improving employees' daily lives by alleviating work-family conflict (Goh et al., 2015) and may positively affect both employees' organisational commitment and career satisfaction (Kang et al., 2015).

Emotional labour, particularly in the context of customer interactions, can be emotionally draining for employees, especially when dealing with customer incivility (Lam & Chen, 2012). While customer interactions can serve as a source of joy, they can also be a significant strain for employees, particularly those in contact staff roles. Among Portuguese hotel employees, supervisor and co-worker incivility were found to be significant positive predictors of emotional exhaustion (stronger for supervisor incivility) and cynicism (strongly reported for co-worker incivility) (Nitzsche et al., 2018). However, the presence of organisational and supervisory support has been observed to buffer the strain from customer relations, highlighting the crucial role of support systems in mitigating the negative impacts of customer service challenges.

Attributes such as gender, age, and educational level can also significantly impact interpersonal relations in the workplace. Gender dynamics, in particular, were found to play a role in shaping attitudes and behaviours, with some interviewees perceiving women to be more competitive than men, leading to conflicts with peers, especially when those peers are also women. Additionally, some participants suggest that all-female teams can exhibit animosity, jealousy, and gossip, leading to stressful working environments. However, previous research supports the idea that women are always in conflict with each other, which generates conflicts in organisations is more of a stereotype than a fact (Carvalho, 2017). On the other hand, female interviewees also report a strong sense of friendship and mutual support among women in the workplace, highlighting the need for further research to understand better how gender influences social support dynamics at work, as to the findings of previous studies, in male-dominated environments, women tend to value being in contact with other women (Wahl, 2010).

Age was also considered to influence interpersonal relations, with older workers being less predisposed to training and less open to welcoming younger members into work teams. This finds support in existing literature, as Pološki Vokić and Hernaus (2005) found that although they have hypothesised that interpersonal skills can improve throughout life, which would make older employees able to handle distressing emotions better, to listen and empathize with younger ones, their research had proven this assumption not to be true. The same study by Pološki Vokić and Hernaus (2005) also found that employees with higher levels of education tend to have a more positive attitude towards interpersonal relations at work. Likewise, educational level was cited by the interviewees as an indicator of smoother interpersonal relations, with higher academic qualifications leading to fewer conflicts in the workplace.

Research participants have also highlighted that leadership plays a crucial role in fostering a positive working environment and cultivating a strong work community. Mid-level managers, in particular, were perceived as having a pivotal role in mediating interpersonal relationships and averting potential conflicts while maintaining a level of supervision that is not overly restrictive. Based on a study with non-supervisory hotel and restaurant employees in the US, Kim and Jogaratnam (2010) reported that intrinsic motivation and supervisory leadership emerged as the most significant predictors of employees' intent to stay. Autonomy was also found to be important, with employees expressing a preference for being granted the freedom to make decisions related to their daily work. Discretion and autonomy are related to personal control, together with the absence of close supervision, self-determination/self-control, participation in decision-making, and freedom of choice, and therefore constitute a relevant attribute of job quality (Holman, 2012). This study highlights the importance of understanding the impact of sociodemographic attributes on workplace interpersonal relations, particularly when it comes to gender and age stereotyping (Wilks & Neto, 2013) and leadership's role in fostering a positive working environment.

Of all QWL dimensions, interpersonal and supportive relations at work have the most significant consensus on a positive perspective. Although QWL dimensions were not evaluated according to their sequence in participants' narratives, it is perceived that when it comes to a good working environment, interviewees almost always refer to it first, which suggests that this aspect of work stands out compared to others and is more importantly evaluated. Social interactions at work are seen as significant sources of support and motivation, and participants value the connections they have made at work. Also, as described in the literature review, social support may have multiple foci, which were all referred to by the participants in this study. For most research participants, good interpersonal relations are one of the most positive aspects of hospitality work, especially concerning peer relationships and customers/guests (the latter not as consensual as the former).

In contrast, the relationship between managers and supervisors receives mixed reviews. Both at horizontal (e.g., between peers) and vertical (e.g., between employees and supervisors) levels, gender, age, and educational level are presented by several interviewees as influencing interpersonal relations at work. Research participants were also asked about the most significant loss (or was, for *leavers*, when quitting their career) if they left their jobs/organisations. Any other mention was so considerable as those referring to the people they work with. The potential loss of social connections and relationships in the workplace is a significant factor that influences participants' decisions to stay in their current jobs. They have invested in these relationships and consider them crucial aspects of their work life. Interpersonal relationships are, therefore, the highest perceived costs of leaving. The decision to change jobs and/or careers also relies on the extent to which individuals perceive the material or psychological costs of leaving as too high or worth taking. The more an employee perceives to be giving up on benefits and advantages that usually are associated with tenure, to be incurring personal losses (e.g., giving up colleagues or projects), or losing the sense of belonging to a community or desirable community attributes, the more difficult it is to switch jobs (Mitchell et al., 2001; Ghosh & Gurunathan, 2015).

Following the happy-productive worker thesis, which is founded on the belief that individuals who are happy and maintain high levels of psychological well-being are likely to be more productive compared to their less happy counterparts (DiMaria et al., 2020), T&H employers and managers would benefit from this study in understanding the conceptions that employees make of the concept of *quality of work life*. Gaining a better understanding of employees' expectations regarding their *quality of work life* may help organisations in attract and retain valuable employees, ultimately enhancing organisational effectiveness. More specifically, the practical value of this research lies in underscoring the importance of social support at work. Recognising the significance of a positive work environment and mobilising endeavours to create them can contribute to employees' well-being.

From the findings, it is evident that the support from co-workers and supervisors significantly influences individuals' perceptions of quality of work life, making them more able to handle negative and stressful situations in the workplace and less prone to the adverse effects of emotional labour (Lam & Chen, 2012). This is particularly relevant for frontline employees who are more susceptible to negative and stressful customer interactions. This emphasizes the need for supervisors and those tasked with employee well-being to prioritise fostering rewarding, supportive, and trusting relations. Concerning supervisory

support, organisations may provide supervisors with the necessary tools and resources to enhance their communication and mentoring skills, namely by investing in training programs that promote effective communication and conflict resolution skills. Supportive actions may involve delivering regular and constructive feedback sessions to address employee concerns and encourage task completion while demonstrating empathy and concern for employees' needs. Encouraging peer support can involve implementing peer recognition programmes to foster a positive work environment (Chang et al., 2023) or promoting team-building activities to strengthen bonds among co-workers (Tews et al., 2013b). Organisations may also craft policies tailored to promote a supportive workplace culture, encouraging teamwork, mutual respect, and collaboration, taking into particular consideration personal attributes such as gender, age, and educational level. These efforts may be achieved by recognising and rewarding positive interpersonal interactions among employees, establishing channels for open communication and feedback to address any issues promptly (including reporting uncivil behaviour from customers), and defining clear policies and procedures for handling complaints and disputes (also concerning customers).

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of social atmosphere and interactions at work in shaping employees' perceptions of QWL. Creating a positive and supportive work environment (characterised by team spirit, solidarity, enjoyment, honesty, and mutual trust), fostering strong relationships among colleagues, and providing effective leadership can enhance employees' well-being and job satisfaction.

Using qualitative research methods, this study emphasises the importance of personal experiences in understanding work-related issues. It underscores the significance of social support at work, a concept described in the existing literature as both a stressor and coping mechanism crucial for managing high job demands, supporting previous findings (Karatepe, 2009; Tews et al., 2013a) and suggesting that a positive work environment can contribute to employees' well-being (Joseph Sirgy, 2019; Jolly et al., 2021). By exploring the significance of social relations at the workplace and their impact on work experiences, this study adds valuable insights to the broader research on the quality of work life in the T&H industry (Wan & Chan, 2013; Domínguez Albiter et al., 2021). Like other studies, this research also has limitations. The major limitation of the research is its scale. Qualitative studies offer rich and more profound perspectives but are also context-specific and not easily generalisable. Participants were purposively selected from the Portuguese hotel sector, which may limit the diversity of perspectives and may not be directly applicable to other industries within the tourism sector. The research presented in this article is part of a broader study, so it may not capture all the complex ramifications of these themes.

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