

Exploring Factors in Toxic Work Relationships: Navigating Challenges in Hospitality Internships

Korać, Gea

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2024

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **RIT Croatia / RIT Croatia**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://um.nsk.hr/um:nbn:hr:229:117987>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-07-17**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[RIT Croatia Digital repository - Rochester Institute of Technology](#)



**Exploring Factors in Toxic Work Relationships: Navigating Challenges in Hospitality
Internships**

Gea Korać

Hospitality and Tourism Management, Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT Croatia)

HSPT.495.700 – Hospitality Project Planning & Development

Mentor: Milena Kužnin

Course Instructor: Rebecca Charry

Dubrovnik, May 7, 2024.

Abstract

This study explores the impact of workplace environment on intern satisfaction in Dubrovnik's hospitality sector. Financial pressures often compel young professionals and students to accept positions, leading to potential dissatisfaction and anxiety. Through survey data analysis and hypothesis testing, the study reveals that toxic work environments significantly increase stress levels, mental health issues, and decrease job satisfaction among interns. Crucially, factors such as management support, respect from superiors, and colleague relationship emerge as key determinants of job satisfaction. The findings underscore the urgent need for organizations to address workplace toxicity, fostering environments that prioritize employee well-being and professional growth. By aligning organizational practices with intern expectations, stakeholders can create inclusive and supportive workplace cultures conducive to long-term success in the hospitality industry.

Key words: workplace environment, intern satisfaction, toxic work environments, hospitality industry, organizational culture

Healthy or not healthy work place environment – that is the question.

A successful career path is closely associated with the workplace culture. Unfortunately, financial pressures sometimes force people, particularly young professionals and students to take any workplace, which causes anxiety and leaves them feeling unsupported. The tourist sector in Dubrovnik serves as an excellent example of how young people must combine education with real-world experience to succeed. It also highlights the need of a healthy work environment, especially in internships. Young professionals might become dissatisfied and work in toxic workplaces due to stereotypes that constrain them. The potential of interns is sometimes overlooked by internships, which causes stress and frustration and influences long-term career decisions.

Dealing with workplace toxicity is not only morally required, but it is also an investment in the adaptability, creativity, and strength of the professionals who will form Dubrovnik's hospitality industry in the future. It is a commitment to a future in which interns are welcomed as active contributors rather than just participants, where learning experiences are welcomed with open minds, and where the fusion of professional practice and education results in a positive and empowering experience.

The aim of this study is to answer some of the questions in regards to the topic of importance of work environment and factors that influence intern satisfaction in hospitality in Dubrovnik.

The research questions of importance to the author of this study refer to questions about to understand how negative and tough situations affect interns in Dubrovnik's hospitality sector.

In this exploration, the focus will be on understanding the factors contributing to challenging work environments. This inquiry will delve into the dynamics of toxic workplaces, their detrimental impact on individuals' well-being, coping mechanisms adopted by interns, and the responses of

leaders and organizations. The ultimate objective is to provide actionable insights for enhancing workplace conditions.

Behavior and environment at workplace

An innovative shift in employee behavior is highlighted by Citroën (2023), who points out a conflict of ideals between actions, a company's attitude to the profession, and connection with the public or clients. According to Citroën (2023), this confusion especially when it is made worse by management problems, makes people look for other options. Citroën (2023) also notes that newer generations express dissatisfaction with work conditions due to an unclear approach to positions and obligations during working hours. This trend is exemplified by individuals who assert their autonomy and readily change jobs when faced with dissatisfaction, seeking diverse experiences.

Considering workplace well-being, Home of hospitality (2023) emphasizes the impact of spending extensive time in a toxic work environment. According to their perspective, neglecting uneasy feelings at work can lead to more significant problems, prompting individuals to seek alternative jobs where they feel valued and free from excessive pressure. Wellness & Wellbeing (2023) offers insightful advice, noting that workplace negativity isn't always the result of an individual's mistake. They contend that although keeping an optimistic outlook might be beneficial, there are only so many things one can do to enhance the workplace culture as a whole. Reflecting on changing perspectives, Jacques Séguéla's (2023) quote underscores a departure from the traditional model of success. Séguéla's (2023) quote suggests that success is no longer solely based on material possessions like a Rolex. Today's younger generations seek fulfillment aligned with their ambitions and desires, redefining their outlook on earnings and success. According to Mallick (2024) research shows that the repetitive stress from abuse in the workplace can even lead to physical

health issues like heart disease and cancer. Among the most severe consequences are conditions like heart disease and cancer, highlighting the significant toll toxic work environments can have on individuals' overall well-being. “When employees talk about each other behind their backs, it can signify a negative style of communication that ultimately causes distrust, drama, distractions, and, in the worst cases, bullying” (Stoltz, 2024). In terms of workplace dynamics, communication is crucial to fostering an environment that is both good and productive. Interactions that border on gossip or backbiting damage trust among coworkers and reflect negatively on the corporate culture. These kinds of bad communication habits can have a number of negative effects, such as increased stress, getting distracted from work, and possibly even bullying. By highlighting the ramifications of this behavior, Stoltz (2024) emphasizes the importance of promoting transparent and respectful communication within professional settings. “In a toxic environment, communication is often one-sided. Employers and supervisors use it as a tool to assert dominance or as a power struggle. In such an environment, communication can be passive-aggressive or simply passive or aggressive” (Stojanovic, 2024). In workplaces characterized by toxicity, communication becomes a tool for control rather than collaboration. Employers and supervisors may wield communication as a means to reinforce hierarchical structures or exert dominance over subordinates. This power dynamic often leads to unbalanced exchanges where one party holds all the authority, while the other feels marginalized or oppressed. Negative communication techniques can take many different shapes in these kinds of situations, from overt hostility to total disengagement or passive-aggressive approaches. By making this discovery, Stojanovic (2024) highlights the negative effects that toxic communication patterns have on both corporate culture and employee well-being. She also promotes the development of fair, courteous, and transparent communication procedures in the workplace. According to Castrillon (2023) workers don't just

want a high salary, flexibility and work-life balance. They also want to feel psychologically safe at work. In contemporary workplaces, employee expectations extend beyond traditional incentives like salary and work arrangements. Guaranteeing mental security in the working environment is turning out to be increasingly significant. This thought connects with a work environment where individuals can act naturally, trade thoughts, and face estimated challenges without stressing over analysis or response. Castrillon (2023) highlights the need for organizations to prioritize activities that foster a welcoming and inclusive work environment, highlighting the significance of psychological safety in relation to employee happiness and organizational performance. Heston-Davis (2023) claims that leadership behavior frequently lies at the heart of toxic workplace culture. Pioneers assume a vital part in molding hierarchical culture, and their mentalities and activities act as a model for workers. At the point when pioneers show pessimism or abuse their subordinates, it starts a trend that can saturate the whole working environment. This is a bad influence that can show up in many different ways, like lower morale, more stress, and less work done. By featuring the critical effect of initiative conduct on hierarchical elements, Heston-Davis (2023) stresses the significance of cultivating positive initiative characteristics and advancing a solid workplace starting from the top. Sandhu (2023) highlights the complexity involved in defining a toxic work environment. Rather than a singular set of characteristics, such environments can encompass a variety of traits that contribute to their harmful nature. Besides, the effect of a poisonous climate can fluctuate essentially from one individual to another, contingent upon individual factors, for example, past work encounters, individual triggers, and favored working styles. Sandhu's (2023) perception highlights the requirement for nuanced understanding and assessment while recognizing and tending to harmful work environment elements, underscoring the significance of thinking about assorted viewpoints and relevant variables in such evaluations. In essence, the

paragraph underscores the multifaceted nature of workplace toxicity, its detrimental effects on employee well-being and organizational performance, and the importance of promoting positive leadership behaviors and fostering inclusive, psychologically safe work environments.

Method

The purpose of the survey was to investigate the work satisfaction of students in Dubrovnik. The survey was conducted in Croatian to facilitate students' comprehension of the questions and to ensure clear responses.

According to Bhat (2024), an online survey is defined as a set of structured questions completed by respondents over the Internet, typically via a form. This method offers a more convenient approach to reaching participants compared to traditional one-on-one interactions, saving time and resources. Online survey data are kept in a database for further analysis by subject-matter specialists. Online studies give the upside of effectively gathering information from countless respondents. Various organizations, including non-benefits, legislative elements, and instructive foundations, as often as possible utilize these surveys. There are a number of advantages that online surveys have over traditional research techniques; thus, it is necessary to investigate the main advantages of using this strategy in more detail.

The online survey was created using Google Forms and was divided into three sections of questions. The first section aimed to collect demographic information about the students and their internship arrangements, encompassing gender, internship duration, hotel star rating level, job

rotation modes, and internship department. The second section included a comprehensive list of indicators that might influence internship experiences. The final section sought to assess interns' satisfaction with their internship experience and their career intentions, with each item being a single question. The survey consisted of 20 questions, incorporating liker scale, multiple-choice, and open comment formats. Following the survey's creation, a pilot test was conducted with a few colleagues and a mentor, who provided feedback on the survey and questions.

In Dubrovnik, approximately 1050 students enroll in various faculties each year. The survey included students from three universities: Dubrovnik University, RIT Croatia, and Libertas University. Out of 1050 students, 108 participated in this survey on the topic of researching student work satisfaction in Dubrovnik. The survey was distributed to them via a link sent to their email addresses and through the social media platform Instagram.

Results

Investigating the perceptions of students across various institutions in Dubrovnik regarding their recent cooperative experiences, this research targets individuals predominantly engaged in the hotel hospitality sector. The objective is to capture a diverse array of viewpoints and insights from students occupying diverse roles within hotels, with a particular emphasis on their satisfaction levels.

Question one aims to indicate participants perceptions of the atmosphere in their recent work environments. The median score for this assessment is 4, indicating a generally positive perception, with a standard deviation of 0.95, suggesting moderate variability among responses.

Question two endeavors to identify the primary characteristics deemed significant by participants within a hospitality company. Additionally, 45 out of 110 participants underlined the value of flexible working hours, while 51 out of 110 participants emphasized the importance of collaboration.

Question three explores how participants feel about the assistance that management offers in their workplaces. The median score for perceived management support is 4, indicating a positive perception overall, with a standard deviation of 0.92, reflecting a moderate level of variance among responses.

Question four examines participants' perceptions of the level of respect accorded by management. The median score for perceived respect is 4, suggesting a generally positive perception, with a standard deviation of 0.98, indicating some variability in responses.

Question five seeks to identify the key components deemed important by students in a hospitality environment. Notably, 95 out of 110 participants considered the possibility of learning and improvement as very important, while 84 out of 110 highlighted the significance of flexible working hours.

Question six explores the primary factors contributing to participants' job satisfaction. Notably, a healthy work environment emerged as the most critical factor, identified by 69 out of 110 participants.

Question seven assesses the perceived impact of the work environment on participants' productivity and motivation. The median score for this assessment is 5, suggesting a substantial positive impact overall, with a standard deviation of 0.92, indicating some variance in responses.

Question eight investigates the role of colleague support in participants' job satisfaction. The median score for the contribution of colleague support is 5, suggesting a significant positive contribution overall, with a standard deviation of 0.76, reflecting relatively consistent responses.

Question nine examines the perceived contribution of support from superiors to participants' job satisfaction. Notably, the support from shift managers was highlighted as particularly significant by 97 out of 110 participants.

Question ten evaluates the alignment of participants' expectations with the work environment in Dubrovnik. The median score for this alignment is 4, suggesting a generally satisfactory alignment overall, with a standard deviation of 0.95, indicating some variance in responses.

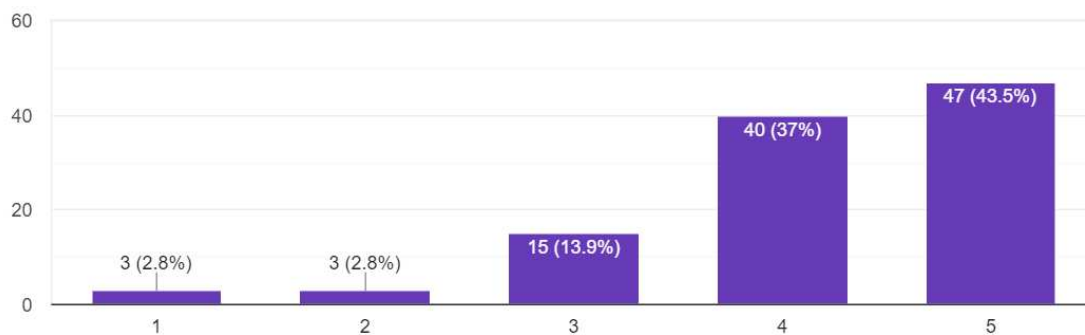
Question number eleven delves into the individuals' personal expectations regarding their work environment and how these align with the organizational culture and practices in Dubrovnik. When it comes to personal nature, they are more focused on allowing students to engage in "advanced" tasks rather than repetitive ones, respecting and providing opportunities for student progression, recognizing and appreciating students as young individuals with leadership potential. While for organizational dynamics they stand out more for implementing regular feedback sessions and setting monthly goals, offering flexibility in job roles throughout the season,

providing flexible working hours and cultivating a culture of teamwork for a healthy work.

Atmosfera u mom zadnjem radnom okruženju je bila pozitivna.



108 responses

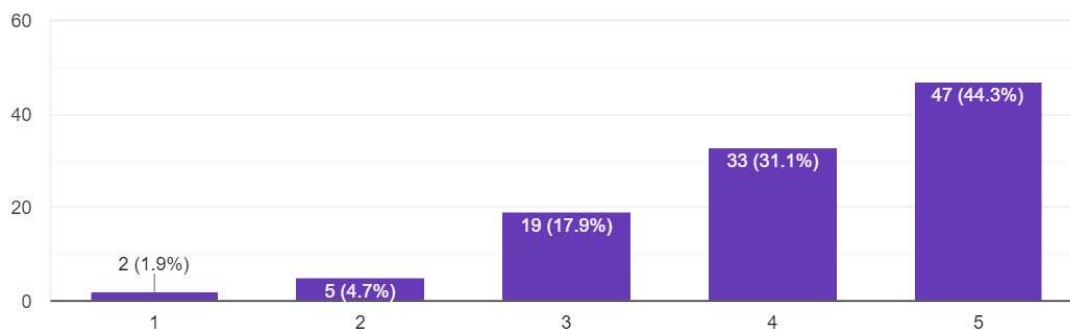


Note: "Atmosphere in my last working environment was positive."

Menadžment u mom radnom okruženju me poštuje.



106 responses



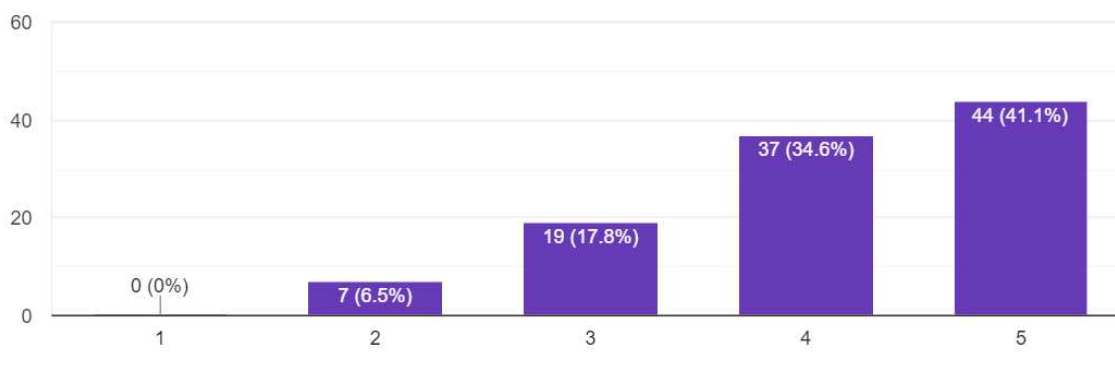
△

Note: "The management in my work environment respects me."

Menadžment u mom radnom okruženju me podržava.



107 responses

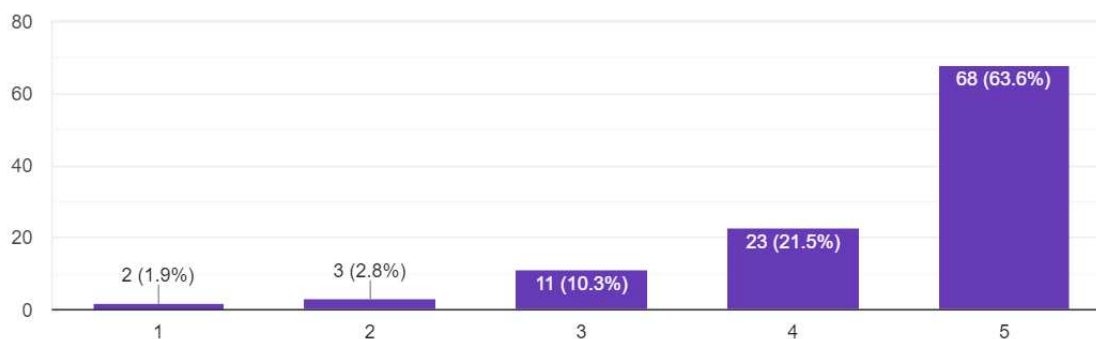


Note: "The management in my work environment supports me."

Moj osjećaj zadovoljstva radnim okruženjem utječe na moju produktivnost i motivaciju.

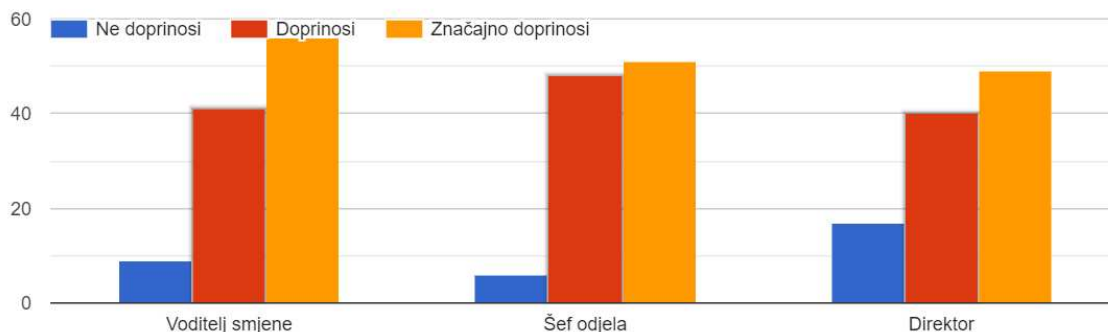


107 responses



Note: "My feeling of satisfaction with the work environment impacts my productivity and motivation."

Podrška koju dobivam od nadređenih značajno doprinosi mom zadovoljstvu poslom.



Note: "The support I receive from my superiors significantly contributes to my job satisfaction."

Discussion

The study's conclusions highlight the significance of the workplace in Dubrovnik's hospitality industry, with a special emphasis on the perspectives and experiences of interns. A number of significant revelations have been made by the examination of survey data and the investigation of theories, and they need more consideration. Based on moderate answer variability, the results show that most participants had a good perception of their workplace. This implies that, although there could be potential for development, interns in the hotel industry in Dubrovnik generally have positive opinions about their places of employment. This favorable impression may be due to elements that were emphasized as important contributors to job satisfaction, such as management support, respect from superiors, and support from colleagues. Despite the majority of favorable opinions, it is essential to recognize the existence of poisonous work settings and their consequences for interns. The study's tested assumptions provide important light on the incidence and consequences of occupational poisoning. According to the research, interns who work in

dangerous environments do, in fact, suffer greater mental health problems, experience higher levels of stress, and have worse job satisfaction. This emphasizes how crucial it is for businesses to confront and reduce harmful workplace environments in order to protect workershappiness and well-being. The study also highlights the significance of particular elements in fostering a positive work atmosphere and raising intern satisfaction. Important elements include chances for growth and development, flexible work schedules, and support from coworkers were found to be important contributors to job satisfaction. These results highlight how crucial it is to establish work cultures that put a focus on staff development, work-life balance, and a positive environment. A significant factor of intern satisfaction was also found to be the alignment of individual expectations with company culture and procedures. The participants conveyed their want for stimulating assignments, chances for advancement, and a collaborative environment. In order to better meet the expectations of interns, organizational dynamics like frequent feedback sessions, position flexibility, and an emphasis on goal-setting were found to be areas that needed improvement. As a result, this study highlights how important it is to provide a healthy work environment in Dubrovnik's hotel industry, especially for interns. Through the resolution of workplace toxicity concerns and the giving of priority to elements that enhance job satisfaction, companies may foster work environments that promote workers' well-being and career development. In the future, further study and preventative actions are required to maintain workplace culture improvement and guarantee happy internship experiences in Dubrovnik's hotel sector.

Limitations

One constraint of this study is the timing of the survey, conducted outside of the peak tourist season. This timing may have influenced the responses of students, as they were not actively engaged in work-related experiences during this period. Including data from the high season, when students are more likely to encounter situations that impact their workplace experiences, could offer a more nuanced understanding of intern satisfaction within Dubrovnik's hospitality sector. Incorporating insights from both peak and off-peak periods would enhance the study's comprehensiveness and validity.

References

Ahmed, N. (2023, August 10). Tips to Deal with a Bad Internship Experience. Dtevolve Blogs.

<https://dtevolve.com/blog/bad-internship-experience/>

Bhat, A. (2024, January 25). Surveys: What they are, characteristics & examples. QuestionPro.

<https://www.questionpro.com/blog/surveys/>

Castrillon, C. (2023, June 4). 10 signs It's time to leave a toxic workplace. Forbes.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/carolinecastrillon/2023/06/04/10-signs-its-time-to-leave-a-toxic-workplace/?sh=27296ec5506c>

Fih, I. S. (2023, April 13). How to stop the culture of fear and bullying in the Hospitality

Industry. EHL Insights. <https://hospitalityinsights.ehl.edu/culture-of-fear-and-bullying-hospitality-industry>

Gürbüz, S. (2017). Survey as a Quantitative Research Method.

Gundumogulam, M. (2020). Importance of Focus Groups in Qualitative Research.

Heston-Davis, R. (2023, July 26). Toxic Work Environment: How to Spot the Signs and Fix it.

Lyra Health. <https://www.lyrahealth.com/blog/toxic-work-environment/>

JobTeaser. (2023, August 20). Gen Z knows how to say no to toxic management and infantilizing working conditions \ JobTeaserCorporate.

<https://www.jobteaser.com/en/corporate/gen-z-lab/gen-z-knows-how-to-say-no-to-toxic-management-and-infantilizing-working-conditions>

Mallick, M. (2024, February 24). How to tell if a prospective workplace is toxic. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2024/01/how-to-tell-if-a-prospective-workplace-is-toxic>

Restnecat. (2023, January 18). How to Deal with a Toxic Work Environment - Restaurant and Catering Industry Association of Australia Inc. Restaurant and Catering Industry Association of Australia Inc. <https://homeofhospitality.rca.asn.au/how-to-deal-with-a-toxic-work-environment/>

Sandhu, P. (2023, January 24). 9 Signs you're in a toxic work environment—and what to do about it. The Muse. <https://www.themuse.com/advice/toxic-work-environment>

Stojanovic, M. (2024, April 16). 9 key signs of a toxic work environment + best survival tips. Clockify Blog. <https://clockify.me/blog/business/toxic-work-environment/>

Stoltz, R. (2024, April 23). Toxic work culture: Signs of an unhealthy work environment & how to fix it. Workhuman. <https://www.workhuman.com/blog/toxic-work-culture-environment/>

Zoe, & Zoe. (2024, February 28). How do you survive a toxic internship? - Local Workforce Hire. Local Workforce Hire - Your Labour Hire and Recruitment Agency. <https://localworkforcehire.com.au/how-to-survive-toxic-internship/>

“All references were available at the time of the research (April 2024). Some references might not be available at a later date.”