

# Please don't go: Gendered formal and informal tools for talent retention in hospitality from an organizational social capital approach

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## ABSTRACT

Hospitality sector is currently facing a “war for talent” because of the exodus of professionals after the pandemic. The aim of this research is to identify the presence of gender-specific employment strategies for retaining talent within the hospitality sector, from an organizational social capital perspective. Thematic analysis was conducted based on 31 in-depth interviews with managers from different-sized hospitality organizations (15 men, 16 women). Results shows that employment practices tend to focus more on attracting talent rather than retaining it. The study emphasizes how sector characteristics, especially company size, play a crucial role in shaping both formal and informal talent retention tools, emphasizing the need for gender-specific tailoring. Additionally, gender differences in fragile trust and associability could contribute to the adoption of talent retention methods for female and male professionals. The originality of this study lies in its gender perspective, which has not always been considered in previous talent retention research.

## 1. Introduction

Talent retention is a major challenge in the 21st-century hospitality industry (Ghani et al., 2022). Retaining valuable talent in this sector is difficult due to challenging working conditions, leading to a migration of talent to other industries with better environments (Davidson & Wang, 2011; Gupta, 2019). The Covid pandemic further exacerbated the issue, resulting in a 17% loss of employees in the sector, prompting 64% of companies to view attracting new talent as crucial for success (Deloitte, 2021). For tourism companies, attracting and retaining talent is identified as a top challenge for the next three years by 77% of entrepreneurs (KPMG & CEOE, 2023). High turnover in the hospitality sector leads to recurring recruitment and training costs, as well as a negative impact on companies' reputations (Handley, 2014). Among the challenges, gender issues play a significant role in hospitality talent retention, as female employees often experience higher turnover due to perceived inferior treatment (Santero-Sánchez, Segovia-Pérez, Castro-Nuñez, Figueroa-Domecq, & Talón-Ballesteros, 2015).

Within this panorama, the objective of this study is to analyse the

existence of gendered employment practices for talent retention from an organizational social capital approach in the hospitality industry. To this end, the *Organizational Social Capital* model from Leana III and van Buren (1999) serves as the theoretical base for the present research. Social capital refers to the relationships and connections that individuals have within their social environment, including both professional and personal networks. The structure and content of these connections are what facilitate the creation of value for organizations by allowing them to access social resources (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Sánchez-Famoso, Maseda, & Iturralde, 2013). The core components of social capital are “associability” and “shared trust” (Andrews, 2010; Leana III & van Buren, 1999). Social capital has found extensive use in hospitality organizational research to explore various management phenomena such as career success, knowledge sharing and organizational performance (Dai, Mao, Zhao, & Mattila, 2015).

The novelty of this research lies in applying this theory within the context of hospitality sector to identify specific practices that aid in retaining valuable and highly skilled employees from a gender perspective. Gender plays a significant role in shaping employment

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practices within the hospitality sector, affecting various aspects such as recruitment, hiring, promotion, and career progression, all of which can be influenced by an individual's gender (Segovia-Pérez, Figueroa-Domecq, Fuentes-Moraleda, & Muñoz-Mazón, 2019). This influence can result in biased hiring decisions, occupational segregation, unequal pay, restricted leadership opportunities, and difficulties in achieving work-life balance to retain talent in this sector. In addition, gendered employment practices are crucial in the development of formal and informal tools for talent retention in the hospitality sector (Singh, Vinicombe, & Kumra, 2006). These tools (formal and informal) refer to the different strategies and approaches that organizations use to retain valuable employees. Formal tools are structured and official practices, and informal ones are more organic and interpersonal in nature. Both types of tools are essential for creating a supportive and engaging work environment that encourages employees to stay with the company.

This research addresses two gaps. Firstly, while previous studies have shown that developing tools to support employees reduces their intention to quit the organisation (Gupta, 2019), the current turbulent hospitality sector, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, demands fresh evidence on such tools (Leung, Sun, Zhang, & Ding, 2021; Sigala, Ren, Li, Dioko, & D.A.N., 2023; Villacé-Moliner, Fernández-Muñoz, Muñoz-Mazón, Flecha-Barrio, & Fuentes-Moraleda, 2023). This, along with increased career-switching intentions and the retirement of experienced employees, intensifies “the war for talent in the hospitality industry” (Goh & Okumus, 2020, p. 5).

Secondly, by adopting an organizational social capital approach and applying a gender perspective to talent retention in the hospitality sector, it becomes possible to establish personalized talent management tailored to the sector's unique business framework. Despite women holding over half of the hospitality jobs, they predominantly occupy lower-level positions (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019) and tend to leave their jobs more frequently than men due to a lack of retention tools that accommodate both professional and personal life (Peshave & Gupta, 2017). Retaining this female talent is crucial for companies, necessitating the development of specific retention tools to mitigate talent attrition.

The context of the research is the Spanish hospitality industry. In Spain tourism activity represents 12% of the GDP and 98% of hospitality business are classified as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (DIRCE, 2022). The study of social capital among tourism SMEs is relevant, since it enhances innovation and performance in organizations (Kim & Shim, 2018). The shortage of labor particularly affects SMEs, as they lack resources to attract the workers these companies need. In addition, the Spanish hospitality sector is composed by a 54% female workforce, but only 33% of leadership positions are held by female workers according to the results of the study conducted by *Women Leading Tourism* (2023) (WLT) and Deloitte on women's leadership in tourism in Spain. As in the international panorama, in Spain, the hospitality sector is facing changes coupled with a demographically and socially evolving society that requires a restructuring of retention strategies. The development of tourism depends on its ability to provide excellent service by today's standards, which requires a skilled and sustainable workforce, breaking the constraints of employment in the tourism industry associated with low status, difficult work-life balance conditions and low wages, leading to high staff turnover and lack of interest from more skilled workers (Aynalem, Birhanu, & Tesefay, 2016). According to Baum (2019), professions within the hospitality sector will continue to be regarded as “Cinderella” options for recent graduates until stakeholders intervene to redefine the nature of these careers and prioritize retention efforts. This requires “reimagining dominant models of the world in gender, culture and nature ideologies” (Eger, Munar, & Hsu, 2022, p. 1459). To this end, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ 1. To what extent does gender impact the employment practices for talent retention in the hospitality sector?

RQ 2. Can gender-differentiated formal and informal tools in talent

retention be established?

## 2. Talent management and talent retention in hospitality: social capital theory

### 2.1. Talent management and talent retention in hospitality

The topic of talent management (TM) is a major challenge in hospitality, although there is no consensus on its definition or implementation (Baum, 2019). TM is seen as a process that ensures that talented employees deliver their services in a meritorious and committed manner. TM and talent retention are widely acknowledged as relevant factors for organizational success. Specifically, talent retention in the hospitality industry becomes a challenge because of the sector's characteristics—small businesses, weak labour markets, seasonality, precarious working opportunities (Baum, 2019; Kravariti, Voutsina, Tasoulis, Dibia, & Johnston, 2022). This is why talent in the hospitality sector does not necessarily mean the same thing as it might in other sectors of the economy (Baum, 2008).

On a practical level, companies have put more effort into talent spotting and recruitment practices but have not paid enough attention to retaining talent once it has been hired. This requires the development of a “culture of retention” by creating an environment in which employees stay for the long term (Baharin & Hanafi, 2018, p. 699). Employee retention can be considered a systematic process that allows an environment to be developed that favours policies that encourage and serve the needs of employees, resulting in an effective and sustainable workforce (Ghani et al., 2022; Ihuah, Kakulu, & Eaton, 2014).

Kravariti et al. (2022) provided a systematic literature review of extant research on TM in hospitality and tourism. Their results show that research discussing talent retention practices adopts either a nurturing or an achievement orientation (Hofstede, 1991). Broadening the focus, the development of strategies to retain employees in the hospitality industry must consider a variety of variables, such as training programmes, career opportunities and salary levels (Bharwani & Butt, 2012; Peshave & Gupta, 2017). Other studies incorporate employees' personal dimensions into the analysis, such as the healthiest lifestyle for its impact on family and social relationships highlighting the relevance of a work-life balance culture, especially in support of women (Deery & Jago, 2015). Similarly, the design of work environments that favour creativity, communication, and a certain level of tolerance has been considered relevant employment practices for improving talent management (Frye, Soonhwa, Chang, & Myong, 2020).

### 2.2. Social capital theory

The consideration of social ties is of interest in the study of talent retention as the elements that make up social capital (networks or trust). In accordance with the fundamental proposition of social capital theory, the social networks, relationships, and knowledge embedded within social capital enhance employment outcomes for both recruiters and employees (Lesser, 2000; Lin, 2002).

The concept of social capital is well-established as a field of study. Primary research in this domain has concentrated on exploring the impact of employers' investments in social capital on various aspects of employee behavior within organizations. This includes factors such as employees' willingness to share knowledge, job performance, employee retention, and organizational commitment (Ellinger & Ellinger, 2013; Ellinger, Ellinger, Bachrach, Wang, & Elmadağ Baş, 2011; Hau, Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2013; Watson & Papamarcos, 2002). Moreover, social capital has found applications in the hospitality sector for diverse purposes, such as assessing the industry's ability to attract talent (Leung et al., 2021).

A distinctive aspect of talent management within the hospitality sector is the significant gender disparity, as most managerial positions are predominantly occupied by men (Chen & Mooney, 2020; Hutchings,

Moyle, Chai, Garofano, & Moore, 2020). Furthermore, men tend to earn more than their female counterparts for equivalent work in this industry (Baum & Cheung, 2015). The ongoing failure to acknowledge and harness the potential of female talent in the hospitality sector represents a missed opportunity. There is an urgent need for both male and female leaders to actively contribute to shaping a more gender-equitable future within the sector (Morgan & Pritchard, 2019).

Thus, this research complements the study of talent retention from a social capital perspective with a gender perspective and by considering formal and informal organizational structures, helping to find the “missing link” between the formal organisation and informal social structure (Hunter, Bentzen, & Taug, 2020). To achieve this objective, the model proposed by Leana III and van Buren (1999) has been adopted to assess the presence of gender-specific employment practices for talent retention within the hospitality sector. This model comprises three primary components: employment practices, organizational social capital, and organizational outcomes.

- (i) **Employment practices** are based on three fundamental pillars. Firstly, *stable relationships* aim to make human capital take root, i. e., to make them feel part of their organisation, for which the relationships they establish with the organisation and with other colleagues or superiors are fundamental. Stable relationships among colleagues offer a blend of instrumental and socio-emotional support, contributing to their well-being and enhancing their effectiveness (Hayton, Carnabuci, & Eisenberger, 2012). Although previous research, such as García-Bernal, Gargallo-Castel, Marzo-Navarro, and Rivera-Torres (2005) has shown that men find interpersonal relationships with colleagues and superiors more motivating than women in a work context, women possess social skills that can be turned into motivational tools for others. The foundation of these relationships should ideally rest upon the goodwill of their participants, with superiors serving as role models (Hayton et al., 2012). Such relationships can be established through mentoring (formal or informal). Mentoring is a tool for transmitting organizational values and culture with a reference figure as transmitter. Formal mentoring, in contrast to informal mentoring, is characterized by the organisation’s structured program and process designed to facilitate mentoring relationships. Typically, formal mentorship programs have a defined duration, often lasting for about a year, with the expectation that they may naturally evolve into informal, long-term connections over time (Inzer & Crawford, 2005). Conversely, informal mentoring emerges organically when a mentor and protégé develop a bond based on friendship, mutual personal and professional respect, as well as admiration.

Secondly, through *strong norms*, such as promotion and remuneration policies, an organisation expresses which beliefs and values are important and should be followed by individuals (Leana III & van Buren, 1999). In this way, equality, work-life balance, and career development policies give the employee the blueprint for the values of their organisation and whether it is committed to their well-being. Saira, Mansoor, Ishaque, Ehtisham, and Ali (2021) argued that employees’ gender should also be considered in the design of training processes, thereby improving trust and decreasing employee turnover.

Third and finally, the generation of an organizational culture in which *specific roles* prevail will influence the generation of a stable work environment by having tasks and procedures marked out for each worker, but perhaps not a satisfactory work environment (Leana III & van Buren, 1999).

- (ii) The second component of the model is **organizational social capital**. Associability and trust are the two main components of organizational social capital, and they could be considered as building blocks for talent retention.

*Associability* can be assimilated into the concept of collectivism, in which the individual cooperates with other individuals and seeks the common good, which will indirectly result in individual benefit.

To reinforce associability, organizations can make use of both formal and informal tools that shape interactions and enable the sharing of conceptual models (Joseph & Gaba, 2020). The combination of formal and informal structures shapes the relationships between workers and support the achievement of associability. Networking tools function as an information, contact, and support system with an important weight in career advancement (Whiting & De Janasz, 2004). *Formal networks* facilitate contact and interaction between the workers through the organizational structure and established processes, reflecting the culture of the organisation in which they are framed (Soda & Zaheer, 2012). In contrast to the more exclusive nature of formal networks, *informal networks* are more inclusive as they can incorporate workers who may not benefit from formal networks because they cannot access them. Although informal networks cannot be controlled by the organisation, it can learn from them and, in this way, optimize the implementation of formal ones (Allen, James, & Gamlen, 2007). For example with the organisation of events by the organizations for women to establish contacts in the tourism sector, although a critical framework was lacking in this respect (Je, Khoo, & Yang, 2023).

The second core component of organizational social capital is *Trust*. The applied theoretical model identifies two types of trust—fragile and resilient. The difference between fragile trust and resilient trust lies in the latter’s ability to adapt to changes in the environment (Leana III & van Buren, 1999). Fragile trust is strongly affected by the occurrence of a negative event, as it has a short duration, and for its survival, agreements or contracts are usually fixed to achieve the deal between the parties (Ring, 1996). For permanence, resilient trust is based on people’s ability to adapt to change. In this way, trust in relationships and in the organisation shapes this type of trust. As opposed to fragile trust that needs to be worked on in every interaction, building solid trust based on experiences with others and the sharing of norms and values makes it easier for individuals to stay in the organisation.

Based on knowledge between the parties, trust develops over time as experience with the other person allows for the accumulation of reliable knowledge of the other (Holmes, 1991; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). However, the type of trust is not always time-dependent, since its formation depends on whether the subject is willing to depend on a third party and on the belief in the other’s honesty and competence in each situation (McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998). Furthermore, the two trusts are not mutually exclusive, since on certain occasions and considering gender, fragile trust is necessary for the worker to be guaranteed certain benefits. The personal and professional difficulties women experience may require tools that allow them to establish a relationship of trust in certain situations. For instance, although no gender differences in resilient trust in the organisation have been found (Baştug, Pala, Kumartaşlı, Günel, & Duyan, 2016), women tend to trust other women less if the relationship takes place in a risky professional environment (Bevelander & Page, 2011).

- (iii) The third component of the model is denominated **organizational outcomes** and refer to the results or effects that arise from the presence and quality of social relationships and networks within an organisation. According to Leana III and van Buren (1999), one of the outcomes of social capital is that it facilitates the development of intellectual capital in the firm. Intellectual capital represent knowledge that can be transformed into value and drives company’s revenue (Edvinsson & Sullivan, 1996), supporting and providing guidance in the talent management (Engström, Westnes, & Furdal Westnes, 2003).

*Intellectual capital* encompasses human capital (represented by the skills of workers and their capacity to manage it), organizational capital and relational capital (Aman-Ullah, Mehmood, Amin, & Abbas, 2022). It

is crucial that all organizational activities align with retention strategies, as these strategies play a vital role in shaping the attitudes of individual employees (Ohunakin, Adeniji, Ogunlusi, Igbadumhe, & Sodeinde, 2020). Despite this, the hospitality sector continues to face significant employee turnover rates, indicating a need to further explore and comprehend the most effective retention practices and the factors influencing their success. Advancing research in this field would involve integrating a gender perspective and examining the entire organizational structure, encompassing both formal and informal tools.

Based on the previous components of the model of organizational social capital (Leana III & van Buren, 1999), this research incorporates the construct of organizational social capital into the study of talent retention as it reflects the nature of the social relationships in organizations from a gender perspective. Fig. 1 shows the considered model and its three main parts.

### 3. Research method

#### 3.1. Research design

The aim of this research is to analyse the existence of gendered employment practices for talent retention within hospitality organizations. To this end a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis was therefore adopted through semi-structured online interviews (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Our approach allowed us to collect data in a more natural and contextual way, enabling us both to recognize previously theorised concepts and relationships and to identify less obvious ones. The research design comprised four key phases, namely literature review, interviewing design, interviewing process, and data analysis, as illustrated in Fig. 2.

### 4. Phase 1. Literature review: organizational social capital theory

#### 4.1. Theoretical model revision

The model of organizational social capital, developed by Leana III and van Buren (1999), allows social capital to facilitate talent retention by enhancing job satisfaction and commitment, fostering a positive organizational culture, and facilitating employee development (Timberlake, 2005). Research has shown that gender can influence the formation of and access to social networks within organizations. The theoretical revision allowed us to identify the main issues that have been approached through this work, serving as the bases for the analysis.

#### 4.2. Issue identification

The main issues could be grouped into three main topics, according to the model's three main blocks: employment practices, organizational social capital and organizational outcomes linked to talent retention.

### 5. Phase 2. Interviewing design

#### 5.1. Interview guide

The interview was structured around the three main issues described below. Firstly, employment practices for achieving talent retention. We started by asking about employment practices to facilitate talent retention in general terms. Going in depth with the interviewees, we specifically asked about formal and informal practices related to practices for stability in employment, relationships and networks, and organizational reciprocity norms from a gender perspective. Secondly, organizational social capital (trust and associability). In this second part, the participants were asked about the importance of trust and associability for talent retention, and how to manage trust and associability in

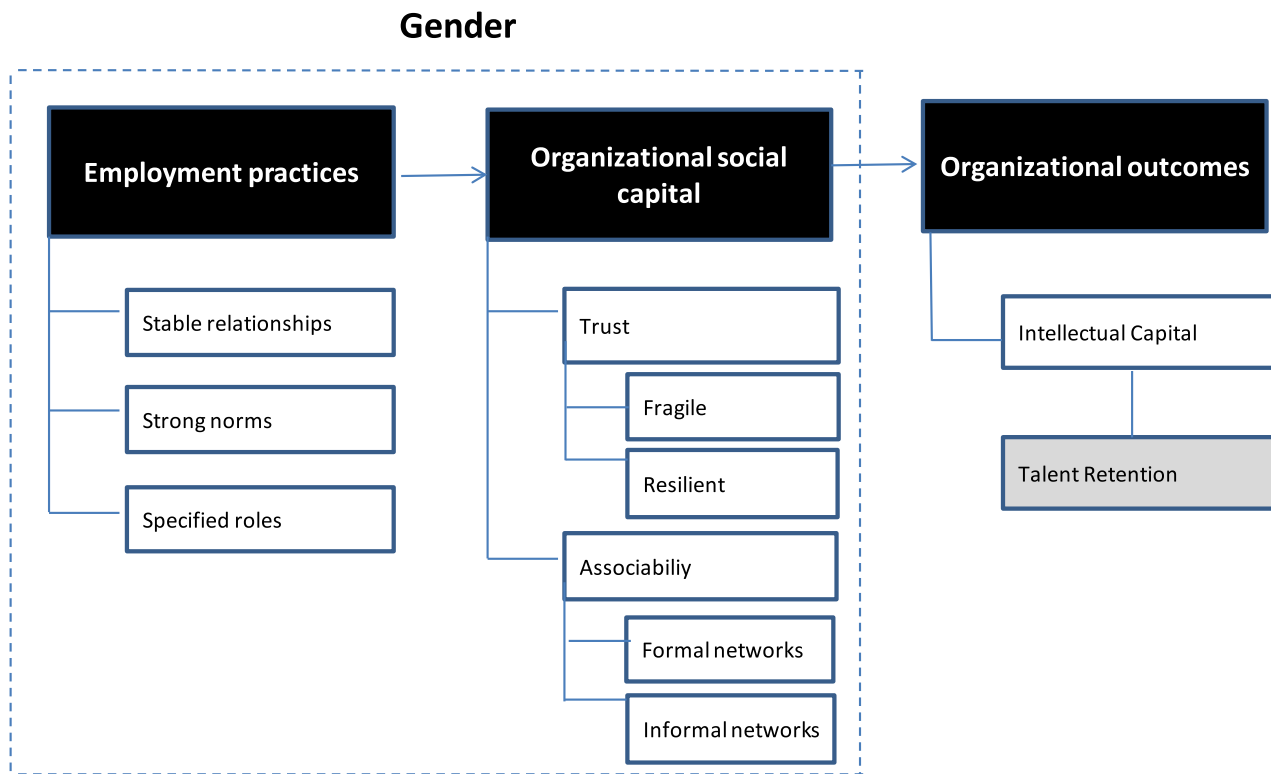


Fig. 1. Talent Retention from organizational social capital approach: A gender perspective. Source: Adapted from (Leana III & van Buren, 1999).



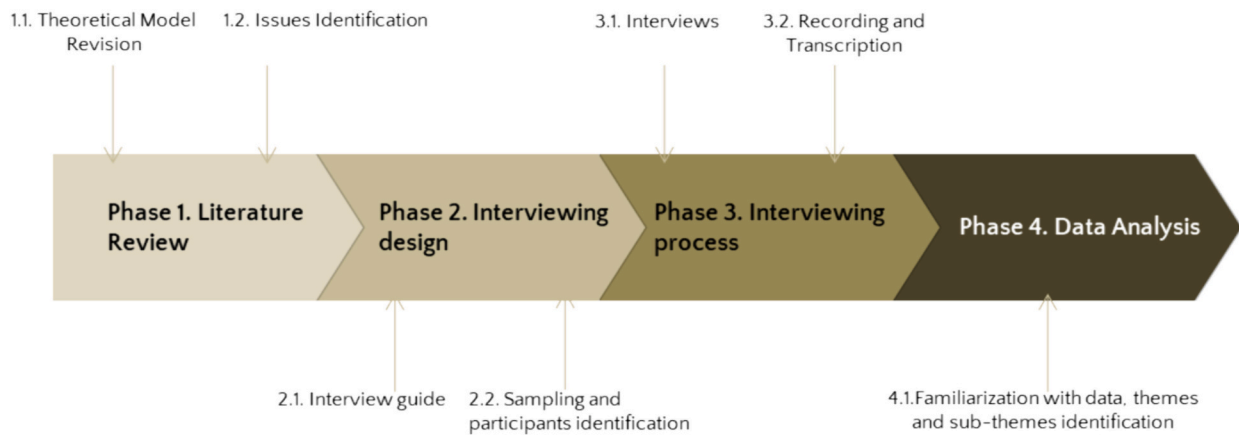


Fig. 2. Phases of deductive research design.

hospitality organizations from a gender perspective. Based on the previous questions, participants were asked about the main organizational outcomes related to talent retention. With the aim of obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the interviewees’ experiences, and avoiding biases, probing questions were asked, requesting specific examples from their company, and seeking further details about particular situations (Price, 2002). The semi-structured interview script is included in the appendix.

A pilot test with four hospitality managers was conducted to identify any potential flaws in the interview design, enabling necessary revisions before implementing the study (Turner III & Hagstrom-Schmidt, 2022). Based on feedback received, adjustments were made to the interview structure and duration to enhance the overall flow and effectiveness of the interviews. The participants in the pilot test were not included in the final sample. With the answers and feedback received from the

interviewees, the interview structure and duration were adjusted. Specifically, the order of the questions was modified.

5.2. Sampling and participant identification

The study conducted 31 in-depth semi-structured interviews with both male (15) and female (16) professionals occupying various positions within the hospitality industry (Table 1). Most of them had previous professional experience from other sectors linked with the services sector (technologies, communication, engineering, wine sector). To ensure reliable information, purposive and quota sampling techniques were utilized to select appropriate interviewees. Initially, 48 hospitality professionals were contacted, and ultimately, 31 of them agreed to participate in the study. At the first contact with participants, we sent them the main topics that were the focus of the research. The final

Table 1  
Final sample: Participants’ profiles.

CODE*	Experience (years)	Enterprise Size	Subsector of the hospitality industry	Position	Gender
M1	30	Small	Tourism Communication	Human Resources Manager	Male
M2	20	Small	Accommodation-Hotel	Director of Internal Audit	Male
M3	10	Big	Accommodation-Hotel	Group sales manager	Male
M4	12	Small	Tourism Consultant	CEO	Male
M5	6	Small	Technology solutions	Senior Solution Engineer	Male
M6	10	Medium	Accommodation-Hotel	Operational Brand Delivery Manager	Male
M7	32	Big	Accommodation-Hotel	Director de Revenue Management	Male
M8	15	Big	Accommodation-Hotel	Front Assistant Manager	Male
M9	16	Small	Technology	Project Manager Research &Development	Male
M10	17	Small	Technology	Managing director	Male
M11	15	Big	Technology solutions	Senior Solution Engineer	Male
M12	10	Medium	Accommodation-Hotel	Revenue Manager	Male
M13	22	Big	Accommodation-Hotel	Chief commercial officer	Male
M14	26	Medium	Sustainability	Sustainability Manager	Male
M15	6	Small	Accommodation-Hotel	Front Desk Manager	Male
F1	8	Small	Accommodation-Hotel	Human Resources Manager	Female
F2	12	Small	Hotel-Technology	Head of Area and Digital Transformation Projects for Operations	Female
F3	7	Medium	Tour operator	Responsible for the travel documentation Department	Female
F4	25	Medium	Tour operator	Service Design & Analytics Director	Female
F5	32	Micro	Sustainability Consultant	CEO-General Manager	Female
F6	13	Small	Accommodation-Hotel	Head of Booking	Female
F7	15	Big	Global Distribution System	Program Manager Hospitality-Media Distribution	Female
F8	18	Micro	Tourism social media	CEO	Female
F9	19	Big	Distribution-Accommodation	Head of EMEA Enterprise Sales, Hotel Solutions	Female
F10	9	Small	Hospitality Technology	Supervisor of Sales Department	Female
F11	10	Medium	Accommodation-Hotel	Guess experience Coordinator	Female
F12	17	Big	Global Distribution System	Manager of Development Learning Solution, Hospitality	Female
F13	8	Big	Accommodation-Hotel	Guess experience Manager	Female
F14	22	Big	Food and Beverage Hotel	Technical Director of Food and Beverage	Female
F15	9	Medium	Accommodation-Hotel	Guess experience Manager	Female
F16	28	Small	Accommodation-Hotel	CEO	Female

[\*] M: Male; F: Female following by a number representing each interviewee.

sample was diverse in aspects such as job position and subsector.

Also, they presented different profiles according to age and experience. Some of the participants were human resources managers, while others occupied medium or high positions in other sections, such as revenue, operations, quality, guest experience, and sales managers. At the time of the research, the participants were employed in companies of various sizes, although most of them worked in small and medium-sized enterprises. Only a few of them were professionally engaged either in micro-enterprises or large companies.

The anonymity of the responses was guaranteed from the beginning. Some of the participants emphasized this aspect due to the potentially sensitive nature of this research.

### 6. Phase 3. Interviewing process

#### 6.1. Interviews

Online interviews were carried out due to their ability to facilitate long-distance participation and their cost-effectiveness (Thunberg & Arnell, 2022). Most of them had quite complicated schedules, and online interviews were the optimal way for them to participate. This mode of data collection was found to offer various benefits, such as decreased respondent stress, enhanced convenience, and reduced transcription costs and time. Two researchers were present during each interview, with one serving as the primary interviewer and the other as an observer. The observer took notes and provided support to ensure that no emotional connotations were missed during the interview process. The resultant dataset comprised 31 transcribed interviews, with participants categorised according to years of experience, tourism subsector, department, and gender.

#### 6.2. Recording and transcription

The interviews were carried out in Spanish and recorded and transcribed by the software Microsoft Teams. Participants were informed previously about the recording and transcription to ask for their consent. Although Microsoft Teams provides the complete transcriptions, all of them were personally reviewed by the two persons that conducted the interview to correct some mistranscriptions. All the translations into English were reviewed by the interviewers to ensure that the original shades of meaning and emotional connotations were not lost.

#### 6.3. Ethical considerations

Lobe, Morgan, and Hoffman (2020) state that the fundamental ethical issues in online interviewing are similar to face-to-face contexts. Therefore, the first ethical consideration for the present research was to obtain consent via email. An email containing a link to the statement of informed consent was sent to the participants. They responded to this email with “I understand and sign” to indicate their consent (Lobe, Morgan, & Hoffman, 2022). However, before starting each interview, participants were once again informed about the data processing and asked for their consent. Thus, both written and oral consent were obtained. Additionally, following Gray, Wong, Rempel, and Cook (2020), separate consent was acquired specifically for video recording the interview.

Both the interviewees and the researcher ensured they were in an environment free from disruptions during the interviews (Thunberg & Arnell, 2022). Participants conducted the interviews from their professional spaces using the Microsoft Teams platform. Given that all participants were professionals with experience, technical difficulties did not arise during the interviews, ensuring the quality of the communication during the interviews.

### 7. Phase 4. Data analysis

Based on Clarke and Braun (2013), thematic analysis was selected due to its adaptability in identifying themes and patterns around the three main components of the organizational social capital model. The organizational social capital approach facilitated the analysis of the relationships between employment practices and social capital (trust and associability), as suggested by the model. Interviews were analysed to identify themes and subthemes.

The study’s methodology involved a manual analysis, whereby each interview was scrutinised in detail to identify subthemes that could be consolidated into a major threat category. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the phenomenon investigated (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019). Themes linked to employment practices such as teleworking, flexible schedules, training programmes, team-building activities, free days, and social benefits, among others, were identified. Aspects related to associability and trust, such as networking, were also incorporated.

#### 7.1. Familiarisation with data, theme and subtheme identification

The familiarisation phase was critical to ensure the quality and validity of the research findings by establishing a foundation for subsequent data analysis and interpretation. Transcriptions and video recordings were read by the research team several times. The research team immersed itself in the data collected from the interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data and to identify key patterns, themes, and relationships between concepts and phenomena. This phase helped to become familiar with the context surrounding the data, such as the social and organizational structures or company size factors that may have influenced the participants’ experiences or behaviors.

The analysis was carried out in two distinct phases. Initially, a directed approach was adopted based on the proposed model, which involved using relevant research findings as a starting point to guide the identification of initial issues (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Subsequently, thematic analysis was employed to uncover additional pertinent information related to the research topic, as disclosed by the study participants (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Weber, 1990). By conducting this two-step content analysis, pertinent variables in each theme were identified and subsequently examined (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
Themes and sub – themes.

Main Themes	Subthemes	
Employment practices in Hospitality Industry	Stable relationships	Training programmes, social benefits, Economic incentives, Teambuilding, Free days, Effective communication, Flexible schedules, Formal mentoring, Informal mentoring processes (Motivation, Support, Role model), Job security, Teleworking.
	Strong Norms	Organizational culture, Masculine leadership style, Values, Work-life balance.
	Specified roles	Position definition, Career development, Professionalization
Organizational Social Capital for Hospitality Industry	Associability	Collective goals, Collective actions, Sociability Formal networking, Informal networking.
	Trust	Commitment, Confidence, Gendered fragile trust, Resilient trust
Talent retention at Hospitality Sector		Talent retention, Talent attraction focus

## 8. Results and discussion

### 8.1. Employment practices

The model proposed by [Leana III and van Buren \(1999\)](#) explains how social capital can be built and maintained through employment practices, which include stable relationships among organizational members, strong norms, and specified roles. Following this schema, the interviews commenced by inquiring about the employment practices implemented within the organizations and how these practices contributed to a more effective talent retention.

Regarding employment practices, the findings confirm that the hospitality sector continues to grapple, as it has traditionally, with the challenge of a fluctuating workforce. Furthermore, the interviewees concurred that this situation has been exacerbated following the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. Consequently, all participants emphasized that employment practices play a crucial role in ensuring talent retention. The results also indicate that these practices may vary depending on the company size and gender.

### 8.2. Stable relationships

The importance of establishing stable relationships for talent retention emerged prominently in the participants' responses. They underscored various key approaches to cultivate such relationships within the organisation, encompassing training programs, job security, collaborative work, learning opportunities, communication mechanisms, and mentoring programs.

Significantly, female interviewees highlighted that these practices, overall, fail to adequately address gender-related considerations, underscoring the need for genuine gender equality, especially at medium and high hierarchical levels. Gender-specific concerns were specifically addressed when discussing certain practices, such as formal and informal mentoring, and formal training programs.

The results uncovered tangible organizational benefits in the form of heightened employee motivation, engagement, and retention. Notably, formal mentoring programs received particular emphasis from interviewees employed in large companies, whereas informal mentoring, particularly peer-to-peer mentoring, was highlighted by those working in SMEs. This distinction may arise from the fact that larger companies incorporate formal mentoring programs for their employees, while smaller ones adopt informal approaches.

Previous studies have shown the positive outcomes linked to the adoption of formal mentoring programs for the individuals involved ([Young, Cady, & Foxon, 2006](#)). Consistent with this trend, the present findings suggest that female participants from large enterprises underscored the importance of initiatives that promoted a heightened sense of belonging to the organisation, helping them navigate potential barriers. One female participant articulated this sentiment as follows:

*In my opinion, it is very important for companies to develop mentoring and coaching programmes. They serve to strengthen the professional self-esteem of women, increasing their inspiration and motivation.*

[F12]

In contrast, women in small to medium-sized organizations highlighted the importance of informal mentoring, particularly peer-to-peer mentoring, for talent retention. Past research emphasizes the crucial role managers play in fostering enduring relationships through informal practices, facilitating connections between their direct reports and the organisation through constructive feedback ([Pandita & Ray, 2018](#)).

Female participants also stressed the significance of having a professional role model for their growth, seeking mentors for inspiration. This need, applicable to both genders, was especially vital for women in male-dominated environments. Having another female colleague as a mentor not only inspired them but also cultivated positive interactions, fostering a desire to stay with the company rather than considering a

switch.

*I worked with a manager hand in hand, providing fundamental support during a professional moment that was important and new for me. She was a role model, inspiring me to be stronger and more resilient. Now, looking back, I feel that thanks to her, I did not give up.*

[F1]

Our results align with previous academic literature, indicating gender differences in how individuals receive and benefit from mentoring, highlighting the gendered nature of network design and mentoring as retention tools ([Young et al., 2006](#)).

In large companies' **formal training programs**, participants stressed the relevance of training and leadership programs for both genders. Notably, female interviewees in these companies pointed out the existence of specialized programs for young women. Overall, interviewees unanimously acknowledged the importance of these initiatives in building trust within organizations, thereby enhancing talent retention.

*I have completed a leadership and strategy training programme for executive women that was fully paid for by the company. For me, it has meant professional recognition and has allowed me to first-hand meet other professional women from other sectors with whom I maintain a relationship.*

[F14]

During interviews, other employment practices mentioned included **formal communication** methods like regular meetings, social events, or company meals. Participants highlighted that, especially since the pandemic, companies have increased the frequency and importance of these actions, a factor known to enhance engagement and professional retention ([Pandita & Ray, 2018](#)). Smaller companies also adopted these practices, though less frequently. One participant mentioned:

*Every year, we have at least one meeting during Christmastime. We do some training or coaching, and then we eat together. In other years, we used to spend a weekend together somewhere we all liked from Friday to Sunday as teambuilding. We give an extra day off.*

[M10]

### 8.3. Strong norms

Stable relationships complement strong norms in organizational settings ([Leana III & van Buren, 1999](#)). Notably, interviewees highlighted sector-specific characteristics, such as physical presence requirements and a strong, masculinized organizational culture, as influencing these norms and, consequently, talent retention.

In the context of the hospitality sector, perceived as 'masculine' and characterized by a glass ceiling hindering women's professional advancement ([Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019](#)), a pronounced gender influence emerged when discussing promotion policies. Addressing the challenges related to the glass ceiling and the resistance to women's progression into top hierarchical positions traditionally held by men, some female interviewees mentioned contemplating leaving their company (and even the professional sector) when faced with such obstacles:

*After gaining some experience in a specific field, it is essential for me to explore other areas. Unfortunately, I have encountered resistance due to my gender, and it's disheartening. Such discrimination makes me contemplate leaving the sector altogether.*

[F3]

Moreover, additional sector characteristics, like the necessity for physical presence, were deemed to adversely impact talent retention. Telecommuting is only feasible in certain departments, with the majority mandating on-site presence. This conventional approach acts as a hindrance to talent retention within the sector, particularly when

numerous companies in other industries have embraced teleworking.

*The main problem in retaining talent is that the hospitality sector is very exigent. Work–life balance is more complicated because it is not an “office” job. Wage conditions need to be improved because many activities are face-to-face, and flexibility is hard to achieve.*

[M11]

These factors have contributed to talent attrition in the sector, driven not solely by economic considerations but by the appeal of improved working conditions and better alignment with personal lives. Participants noted that post-Covid-19, numerous professionals in the sector transitioned to other industries and have yet to return.

*It is suicide to retain talent by increasing salaries. It is important to offer better conditions (more vacation days, more time flexibility, among others). This is especially important now, after the pandemic, as professionals are placing a higher value on their time and work–life balance.*

[M7]

These findings align with prior academic research, affirming that the pandemic has altered the personal and professional priorities of many workers, prompting them to explore alternative options (Sigala et al., 2023).

#### 8.4. Specified roles

According to Leana III and van Buren (1999), stability is maintained through specialized roles and clearly defined procedures for monitoring individual adherence to these roles. In hospitality companies with hierarchical and autocratic structures, lower and mid-level positions are highly specified and structured. However, in service-oriented roles, such specificity could negatively affect talent retention in foundational positions. Both male and female participants highlighted this aspect. One participant expressed their perspective on this matter with the following comment:

*I have been working in the same department for 6 years. After several unsuccessful promotion attempts, I feel tired and discouraged, so I'm considering a change, even moving to another sector.*

[M15]

The finding is consistent with Huertas-Valdivia, Gallego-Burín, and Lloréns-Montes (2019), indicating that the rigid hierarchy in the hospitality sector can lead to reduced recognition and decision-making authority at mid-to-lower organizational levels. This structure may foster “ostracism,” where employees feel disregarded, negatively impacting self-esteem. To counter this, empowering and granting autonomy to employees is essential (Huertas-Valdivia et al., 2019). Involving employees in decisions that affect them fosters unity (“WE”), reducing employee turnover significantly (Moraa & Kipngetch, 2021).

Respondents highlighted that professionals in hospitality are often overqualified, compounding challenges in maintaining motivation and sustained development within companies. El-Sawalhy, Shaaban, Salem, and Elbaz (2022) supported these observations, emphasizing that overqualification significantly affects employee retention and job satisfaction in the hospitality sector.

#### 8.5. Organizational social capital

Drawing from Leana III and van Buren (1999) social capital framework, the results demonstrate that trust and associability among employees in the hospitality sector contribute to the formation of organizational social capital, thereby improving talent retention. Additionally, the findings suggest that gender plays a role in talent retention, influenced by the nature of trust—whether it is fragile or resilient.

#### 8.5.1. Trust

As per Chitsaz-Isfahani and Boustani (2014), there exists a significant correlation between talent management, organizational trust, and employee retention. In the hospitality industry, both resilient and fragile trust have been challenged during the Covid-19 pandemic, a topic frequently discussed in interviews. Consequently, many professionals have transitioned to different sectors, undergoing professional reinvention. Nevertheless, interviewees acknowledged the dedication of those who persevered through challenging circumstances, recognizing them as a crucial asset to the companies and expressing gratitude for their unwavering commitment amid adversity.

*The pandemic has highlighted how much our employees have sacrificed and accomplished for very little reward. As a result, I believe we aren't doing enough to retain them.*

[M1]

*Despite our small size, the crisis has brought our team closer together, and the resulting friction has made us stronger.*

[M10]

#### 8.6. Resilient trust

Interviewees highlighted the evolving nature of talent retention strategies aligned with changing company dynamics. The shift is notably influenced by the preferences of newer generations, who seek personalized recognition and respect rather than being perceived as mere numbers within a large organisation. This sentiment was consistently emphasized throughout the interviews.

*There are various practices that can be adapted to achieve the desired work–life balance for everyone, considering their priorities and circumstances, particularly for those with dependents.*

[M4]

According to the interviewed individuals, establishing trust and retaining talent involves more than just offering competitive salaries. Social incentives such as meal vouchers, private healthcare, and company share packages are deemed crucial. Additionally, the interviews highlighted that gender doesn't directly impact resilient trust within the company. Both male and female participants emphasized the importance of designing professional careers that are compatible with private life, considering it equally vital alongside economic incentives. One participant expressed this sentiment with the following comment:

*Differences between individuals are more determined by their individual profiles than by their gender. Shared biases and personal predispositions also come into play. To implement effective measures, it's crucial to understand the subjective components and individual dispositions of each person.*

[M4]

#### 8.7. Fragile trust

Certain life stages, as noted by some interviewees, can strengthen trust relationships. For example, providing increased schedule flexibility for women during the child-rearing period was highlighted as a significant factor in building trust. Addressing these specific needs during such stages fosters a deeper emotional connection between professionals and the company.

*Trust isn't gender dependent. However, achieving a healthy work–life balance tends to impact women more significantly. Without some advantages to support this balance, women may feel less connected to the organisation.*

[F4]

The results corroborate previous findings stressing the pivotal role of



trust in talent retention, coupled with the importance of employment practices fostering work-life balance and personal development (Chen, Severt, Shin, & DiPietro, 2021). Agarwal (2021) emphasizes the fundamental nature of designing practices that consider employees' personal lives for building trust. Notably, research suggests that work-family balance has a stronger association with turnover intentions for women than for men, given the commonly associated family responsibilities with women (Blomme, Van Rheede, & Tromp, 2010).

#### 8.7.1. Associability

Associability, developed through collaborative efforts leading to mutual benefits, is vital for achieving superior or otherwise unattainable individual advantages (Andrews, 2010; Leana III & van Buren, 1999). Tools facilitating associability include those enhancing work and interaction, such as group work or networks (formal or informal).

Interviewees emphasized the significance of associability in service-oriented companies, where a shared sense of belonging and working towards a common goal is crucial for providing a comprehensive user experience. Gender differences in associability were identified, with women expressing a stronger focus on achieving common goals, a perspective not mentioned by any male interviewees. This sentiment is reflected in the following comment:

*Projects that have to do with the common good always involve more women in my experience, although more and more women are getting involved (...)*

[F5]

These results are in line with other studies indicating that traits often linked to women, such as empathy and interpersonal skills, play a crucial role in result orientation, particularly in small and medium-sized companies (Fuentes-Moraleda, Villacé-Molinero, & Muñoz-Mazón, 2014).

#### 8.8. Formal networks

Formal networking was deemed significant for talent retention in medium-sized and large companies, but it poses challenges in smaller firms. Female participants reported spending less time on networking than their male counterparts, who typically have robust networks.

The findings reveal that women with more experience have a greater appreciation for support and networking compared to younger women. Experienced women are more actively involved in networks, with the lesser participation of younger women potentially attributed to family-related time commitments.

*With age comes a greater tendency towards collaboration. Previously, I had experienced a working environment that was competitive and masculine. However, now I find that the working culture is more collaborative and feminine.*

[F5]

These findings echo Singh et al. (2006) observations that socializing beyond work hours can impact work-related outcomes, potentially disadvantaging women with family responsibilities. The study also noted age-related differences in prosocial behaviors, with senior women more likely than younger counterparts to engage in activities like driving change, assisting others, and providing support. Yet, emerging trends suggest that in the United States, single or unattached women are displaying similar levels of such behaviors as men (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). In this context, female participants acknowledged the more robust networking of men compared to women, as illustrated in the following comment:

*(...) men have always dedicated more time to networking and creating these relationships at work. That is why I think it is very important to encourage women to create their own network in the company, to meet other women in leadership positions who can inspire them.*

[F12]

Workers' participation in networks varies based on gender, a pattern supported by previous literature (Singh et al., 2006). Knouse and Webb (2001) further concluded that men tend to belong to extensive, robust, and tightly knit networks, providing them with a distinct advantage in their careers.

#### 8.9. Informal networks

The importance of informal structures, encompassing informal working relationships, collaborations, and knowledge exchanges initiated by employees, is particularly relevant in small and medium-sized companies (Allen et al., 2007). Results indicate that these informal tools are more common than formal ones, potentially influenced by the company's size. Traditionally, this type of action has been more prevalent in the sector, especially among small companies. As noted by one male professional:

*In a small company like mine (we are 28 employees), we informally work in the same office, have breakfast, lunch together, and even try to get to know everyone's families.*

[M1]

Gender differences are evident in the creation and engagement of informal networks, with women often relying on these networks for emotional and personal support, while men approach them more strategically to advance their careers. These external networks promote sociability but lack a sense of association within organizations, serving individual rather than collective objectives for women. The preference for external networks by women is attributed to lower competition, offering more support and solidarity among members, a trend previously noted by academics (Burke, Rothstein, & Bristor, 1995; Singh et al., 2006).

Combs (2003) further confirms that women utilize informal external networks with those sharing socio-cultural patterns as socialization systems for professional and personal development. Literature highlights that these informal networks extend beyond internal boundaries to include external connections with other organizations (Allen et al., 2007). All female interviewees emphasized the importance of belonging to networks where other professional women are integrated, recognizing the significance of networking for professional advancement, unity, and support. As expressed by one female participant:

*I belong to a club of professional women from all sectors. I don't find the envy that exists within my company there. And if someone needs help from another, everything is much easier. I even have a young professional under my "supervision." I am her coach.*

[F16]

#### 8.10. Organizational outcomes: intellectual capital management for talent retention

At the end of the interviews, participants recognized that the employment practices and organizational social capital in the sector contributed to a significant talent drain, leading to a critical situation for everyone involved and impacting the sector's competitiveness negatively.

#### 8.11. Intellectual capital

The hospitality industry is experiencing a decline in human capital as professionals witness a regression in their careers, ultimately leading to sector abandonment and a loss of intellectual capital. Our findings attribute talent drains to several factors, including employment practices influenced by sector characteristics such as specified roles hindering professional development, especially for overqualified

individuals, and a prevailing masculine culture obstructing female talent development and career progression. [Chen and Mooney \(2020\)](#) have highlighted the absence of a gender equality perspective in the sector, exacerbated by the under-representation of women in management teams, particularly during the pandemic. Increasing the diversity of management teams is essential for organizations to meet the challenges of diversity, equality and inclusion ([Im & Chung, 2023](#)). Consequently, employment practices fail to effectively support critical social capital components like trust and associability.

This inefficiency in managing intellectual capital contributes to talent loss, resulting in the sector's inability to retain crucial human capital and fortify its competitive position in the market. As expressed by a male professional with extensive sector experience:

*I believe we have failed to recognize the expertise of the workers and their accumulated knowledge over the years in the sector, as it is invaluable. Instead of rewarding them, we have been preoccupied with surviving the environment. Now we realize the mistake we made.*

(M7)

This result aligns with [Pfeffer \(1998\)](#) perspective, emphasizing that organizations seeking to preserve social capital should adopt an extended view of employment relations, treating employees as valuable assets to be nurtured rather than expenses to be minimized. Participants concurred that the ongoing talent drain in the sector remains uncovered, with companies prioritizing talent attraction over retention. This urgency has led to a focus on recruitment rather than implementing measures to retain talent, as highlighted by one participant:

*The sector is deeply concerned about the possibility of not being able to fully staff their operations. Corporations are implementing measures regarding remuneration and incentives, but the trust between co-workers is deteriorating as some resort to stealing professionals from other businesses. There is a noticeable trend: companies are visiting universities to attract new talent, improving worker infrastructure, and training specialized workers.*

[M2]

The critical situation in the sector has multiple explanations. [Leana III and van Buren \(1999\)](#) highlight that maintaining organizational social capital requires resources and effort, but the sector prioritizes short-term goals over long-term investments, hindering the support and enhancement of intellectual capital. This approach also obstructs the maintenance of trust relationships, crucial for information and knowledge exchange, flexibility, and risk-taking among human resources, essential for fostering intellectual capital ([Oliveira & Holland, 2007](#)).

The talent drain becomes more acute as young people reconsider their professional and personal priorities, with increasingly blurred lines between personal and professional life ([Agarwal, 2021](#)). This implies a lack of immediate replacements for the current talent. Regarding gender differences, interviewees generally agreed that the talent drain outcome is not specific to any gender.

In conclusion, the interview results contribute to existing literature by emphasizing the acute talent retention challenges in the hospitality sector, signalling the necessity for substantial changes in intellectual capital management strategies. The significance of internal networks and associability in fostering social capital and talent retention is underscored, along with the observed gender differences in the behavior of men and women in accessing and utilizing networks.

## 9. Conclusions

The hospitality sector is currently facing an unparalleled retention crisis, necessitating significant adjustments in talent recruitment and retention management ([Goh & Okumus, 2020](#); [Sigala et al., 2023](#)). To address the challenges posed by talent drain in the sector, this study adopts the theoretical framework of organizational social capital.

Based on the analysis of the interviews, two main conclusions can be drawn. The first conclusion pertains to the influence of sector-specific characteristics on the successful implementation of formal and informal tools to retain talent (RQ1). The second conclusion relates to the impact of gender on the talent retention strategies utilized by hospitality companies (RQ2) (see [Fig. 3](#)). Thus, if companies in the sector intend to retain talent, they must develop gendered tools to retain the talent of their professionals, considering their specific needs, so as not to lose human capital and, consequently, intellectual capital.

The social capital model employed in this study has helped us understand some of the reasons that, according to the results, can explain this talent loss in the sector. Firstly, employment practices are highly influenced by the intrinsic characteristics of the sector, which makes them perceived as unattractive by professionals. Additionally, in the case of women, there is a perception that the development of their professional careers is hindered by gender-related aspects, as [Fig. 3](#) reflects.

Similarly, the characteristics of hospitality companies (size, vertical hierarchical structures, among others) do not facilitate the construction of strong social capital, contributing to talent drain (RQ1). Trust and associability are key aspects for talent retention in the sector. Although resilient trust, according to our participants, is not affected by gender, it depends on respecting individuals and their specific needs, making them compatible with their personal lives. This has been highlighted by previous literature, which emphasizes the growing demand for a more fulfilling and interconnected work environment ([Baum, Mooney, Robinson, & Solnet, 2020](#); [Leung et al., 2021](#); [Timberlake, 2005](#)). This change has led to an increased emphasis on achieving work-life balance for both men and women ([Gupta, 2019](#)).

However, fragile trust can be built by considering gender-related aspects of professionals who may need to adjust their professional functions at different stages of life (especially during parenthood). When gendered tools are applied during critical life moments, it creates a win-win relationship where all parties give and receive rewards, generating greater trust (RQ2).

One of the key points in generating social capital and talent retention in hospitality organizations is the strengthening of associability, where networks play a crucial role. According to the results, these tools are indeed affected by gender and the type of company based on its size. Thus, although both men and women recognize the importance of networks, their behavior differs. These gender differences represent a contribution to the existing theory on talent management. On one hand, professionals from small companies tend to engage in informal networks. Men traditionally do so to a greater extent. It should be noted that previous studies have shown how men control these networks as an "old boys club," making it difficult for women to access them and, consequently, gain access to information that would allow them to progress ([Brass, 1985](#); [Timberlake, 2005](#)).

Women, on the other hand, face certain disadvantages in this regard. They seek informal networks outside companies and even outside the industry, where they find cross-mentoring and other professional and emotional support. Unlike men, who build their informal networks within the company, women seek them externally. This highlights a novel aspect and a gender-specific difference in talent retention that the sector must consider when aiming to retain female talent. Facilitating networks for women within companies can make them feel more secure and confident, ultimately preventing the loss of female professionals.

The organizational outcome of this situation is the mentioned talent drain, which leads to a loss of intellectual capital. This capital is a fundamental component of the competitive advantage of hospitality organizations. Tourism companies should consider investing in intellectual capital since it has an economic return ([Sardo, Serrasqueiro, & Alves, 2018](#)). Therefore, if the sector wants to reverse this dire situation, it must focus not only on talent attraction but also on talent retention.

To sum up, when adopting the organizational social capital approach in the hospitality industry, it is crucial to consider the interplay between

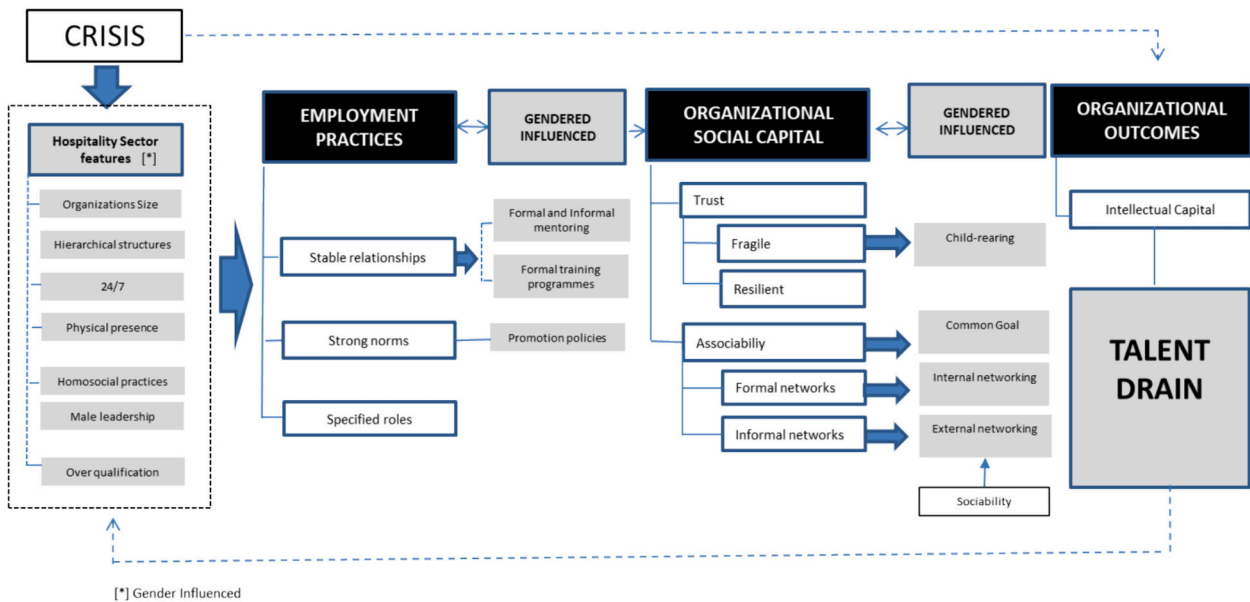


Fig. 3. Gender Talent Retention in hospitality sector from an organizational social capital.

employment practices, social capital components, and organizational outcomes. As can be seen in Fig. 3, these interconnected elements create a cycle in which sector-specific characteristics and gender play a significant part. To mitigate the substantial loss of talent in the sector, both formal and informal practices should be tailored based on gender considerations. In addition to being cyclical, the model also exhibits interconnections among each of its internal components. These components cannot be considered in isolation; instead, they all influence one another, resulting in continuous feedback loops. According to Leana III and van Buren (1999), trust, for instance, is not only a constituent of organizational social capital but also a probable consequence of its existence. Therefore, if, as per our findings, trust in the sector has been lost due to the various reasons stated, the result is that, in addition to the talent drain, there is a lack of trust in the sector, which also contributes to the sector's limited ability to retain talent.

## 10. Implications and future research

### 10.1. Theoretical implications

The model of organizational social capital developed by Leana III and van Buren (1999) is a well-supported framework that analyses the structural and explanatory aspects related to the effect of industry-specific factors on talent retention. This analytical approach is significant not only for identifying the factors that impact talent retention in the hospitality industry but also for bridging a gap in research, the gender perspective.

Fig. 3 shows the interdependence of the considered dimensions and exemplifies the systemic nature of organizational social capital. The diagram highlights the interaction between internal factors, such as employment practices and social capital, and external factors. The importance of social capital in talent retention is evident from this conceptual system, where it is recognized as the primary source of human strategic resources and knowledge. Gender is identified as a crucial factor affecting trust-building and associability within the organisation. On an external level, failure to establish robust social capital within industries such as hospitality can result in irrevocable talent loss during times of crisis.

The theoretical proposal also emphasizes the existence of a virtuous cyclical approach to talent retention, where causal relationships between employment practices and social capital mean achieving a

continuous process of improvement. This process represents a break with organizational and sectoral inertia which is particularly acute in hospitality, where the focus has been on continuous talent attraction (Oliveira & Holland, 2007). However, the balance in the talent pool is negative, with more talent being lost than gained. Developing a conceptual and practical roadmap for talent management in the hospitality sector would mean a redistribution of resources and no longer wasting them on a “fatal attraction” that never pays off. The gender focus contributes significantly to this, with female talent being the least valued and, consequently, the most likely to be lost.

### 10.2. Practical implications: major changes for talent retention

This research has practical implications that can support the hospitality sector in improving talent retention proposing specific actions for hospitality managers, tourism policymakers, and Academy to break free from old practices.

Managers and consultants can focus on enhancing both human and organizational capital by redesigning jobs and careers, promoting employee development, and recognizing workers' skills and competencies rather than rigid functions. Equality and work-life balance policies should also be considered to create a more inclusive and supportive work environment. Implementing a range of measures can greatly contribute to fostering it. These measures encompass compressed workweeks, flexible schedules, and the option for remote work (Medina-Garrido, Biedma-Ferrer, & Bogren, 2023; Vijayaraghavan & Martin, 2020). Additionally, instituting wellness and mental health programs aimed at stress management is crucial. Regular evaluations of pay equality, offering childcare services for events or meetings beyond typical working hours, and the establishment of policies discouraging excessive overtime are essential steps (Biedma-Ferrer & Medina-Garrido, 2014; Chandran & Abukhalifeh, 2021).

In terms of relationships, a more personalized and open-minded approach is needed. Promoting formal and informal mentoring, taking gender-specific characteristics into account, and developing internal networks can improve talent retention, especially for women. If the company does not encourage the development of these informal tools, women will find more opportunities outside the boundaries of the company. This is especially true for women professionals with less seniority and weaker company networks. The objective is not to eliminate the use of informal networks, but to make their use complementary



and beneficial to the organisation's formal networks. Formal networks should incorporate some informal characteristics like flexibility and choice of reference persons, while making them complementary to informal networks.

These practical implications extend beyond company boundaries, requiring a global framework applied at the local level through legislation or certifications of *public and social institutions*. In this regard, recent work recognises the importance of developing regulations related to the practice of gender equality in tourism (Je et al., 2023). Training, informative policies, and economic incentives can facilitate compliance with these recommendations. For example, by developing of training programmes for both employees and managers that focus on cultural competence and anti-bias in an environment that encourages the open exchange of ideas (Im & Chung, 2023). For its part, *the Academy* is required to provide a strategic vision is required in the design of systems and processes that favour the retention of a resource that is as valuable as it is scarce. This entails not only increasing efforts to conduct further research on talent retention but also fostering collaboration among academics (Ramos-Rodríguez, Lechuga Sancho, & Martínez-Fierro, 2021). Furthermore, academic courses should be adapted to align with the changing dynamics of talent attrition. The hospitality sector faces significant challenges in achieving talent retention while adapting to evolving employee needs, including gender-specificities. An intelligent investment in personalized policies, considering both gender-specificities and shared needs, is necessary for strategic talent retention and organizational success.

### 10.3. Limitations and future research

The sample of this qualitative study is significant, but interviews were conducted with middle and senior management. Future studies could complete the study with professionals at lower levels of the hierarchical structure. The interviews were conducted in Spanish and later translated into English, which may mean a loss of the original emotional connotations (nuances of tone, cultural nuances, or expressiveness).

Although the methodology used allows us to interpret a novel reality by establishing categories, it is advisable to complete the results obtained with other quantitative approaches, such as surveys. To validate the results obtained, it would also be interesting to share the findings with the participants, enabling further information to be expanded upon and areas of interest to be explored in depth.

Another limitation of the study is to measure Social Capital. It is an abstract concept that encompasses social relationships, trust, reciprocity, and other intangible aspects that are not easily quantifiable. Additionally, these qualities are subjective and can vary depending on the cultural and social context.

Future research can establish the impact that the different tools have on trust and associability, which will allow us to quantify the improvement of social capital. In addition, more research is needed on the interrelationships between practices to establish a complete picture of the positive and negative effects between them.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Teresa Villacé-Molinero:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Laura Fuentes-Moraleda:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Rocío González-Sánchez:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

### Declaration of competing interest

None.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2024.101297>.

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