

THE IMPACT OF STAFF QUALIFICATIONS ON SERVICE QUALITY ASSURANCE AND CONSUMER ASSESSMENTS

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Abstract

The current situation on the labor market is characterized by significant changes in the hospitality industry: the redistribution of qualified personnel to more stable sectors of the economy. In the most affected areas of activity (trade, hospitality industry, entertainment), there is a concentration of young and less qualified personnel, a decrease in the flow of migrants and temporary labor from other countries. The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of hospitality industry personnel skill level on service quality assurance and consumer assessments. The methodological basis of the study was general scientific methods of cognition, economic and statistical methods, methods of expert evaluation and correlation analysis. Article authors emphasized the personnel role in ensuring the quality of services and enterprises operation reliability, assessed the current changes in labor markets: the impact of the pandemic affected labor migration, employees' expectations regarding the wages level, working conditions. The study revealed a decrease in the attractiveness of working in hotels and catering establishments, in comparison with other areas of activity that showed higher resilience in a pandemic. According to the results of a three-year study, a relationship was revealed between the structure of personnel by education and work experience, both in the hotel itself and at other enterprises of the industry, and consumer assessments of the services quality in this hotel. The approach proposed by the authors of the article can be used by other enterprises in the hospitality industry interested in ensuring high assessments of the services quality and services through the formation of an optimal personnel structure.

Keywords: Staff, hotel, quality of services, qualifications, labor market, pandemic, migration.

INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry, as a stable source of income, is currently one of the most affected by the outbreak of COVID-19; in 2020, the number

of guests in collective accommodation facilities in Russia decreased by 37.8% compared to 2019, which was a decrease of 28,8 million people.

The labor market is changing dramatically, qualified personnel are moving to more stable sectors of the economy, and in the most affected areas of activity there is a concentration of young and less qualified personnel, the flow of migrants and temporary labor from other countries is decreasing. Against the background of such negative global personnel dynamics in all sectors of the economy, in the hotel business, the situation looks even more complicated. In Russia, national demographic problems were also superimposed on the above-mentioned global trend of young and low-skilled personnel flow into the service sector.

All this together means an increase in personnel problems for hospitality enterprises management, due to a decrease in the attractiveness of working in hotels and catering enterprises, compared to other areas of activity that have shown higher resilience in a pandemic, and necessitates a review of approaches to the formation of a personnel structure that meets the challenges global labor market situation.

Many scientific works are devoted to the relationship study between the personnel influence on the quality of services and the hotels performance (Lisitzina, 2015; Masalimova & Shaidullina, 2016; Davoudi, 2018; Latysheva, 2018; Wu, Wang & Ling, 2021; Bénet et al., 2022; Yadav & Dhar, 2021; Wang, 2020). At the same time, the proposed models do not fully provide a prompt response to the turbulence of the external environment, characterized by changes in the situation on the labor market.

The management of hospitality companies needs clear determinants of the relationship between the structure of hotel personnel in terms of qualifications, on the one hand, and the quality of services and consumer assessments, on the other, in order to form and maintain an optimal personnel structure in the current labor market situation.

Methodological Framework

The research on personnel role in ensuring the quality of services and the reliability of the enterprises functioning was implemented using general scientific methods of cognition, including theoretical studies (analysis, synthesis, aggregation), as well as methods of a

systematic approach. To analyze the main companies' priorities in the field of personnel management during the crisis in tourism and hospitality labor market, methods of economic-statistical and factor analysis, expert assessments were used. To assess the impact of personnel qualifications level on the quality of services and consumer assessments, expert assessment methods and correlation analysis were used.

The study of personnel qualifications level influence on ensuring the quality of services and consumer assessments was carried out using the following sources of information:

- socio-economic research of the labor market;
- information databases of official statistics (Rosstat);
- data published in periodicals,
- evaluations of hotel services quality made by consumers according to the data of reservation systems;
- data of the hospitality industry enterprises on the structure of personnel;
- scientific publications on the role of personnel in ensuring the quality of services.

Results and Discussion

3.1. The Role of Personnel in Ensuring the Quality of Services and the Reliability of the Operation of Enterprises

In the conditions of an extremely unstable, poorly predictable external environment, the importance of research on ensuring the sustainability and reliability of enterprises operation increases. This is not to say that these studies have not been conducted before. So the study by A.N. Furmankov (2005) pays special attention to the concept of socio-economic systems reliability, which the author understands as the "reproductive" property of these systems, ensuring the correspondence of the real (actual) functioning of the socio-economic system to the normative one, or the correspondence between existence and "continued existence", which is applied to enterprises the service sector can be represented as the following diagram (Figure 1).

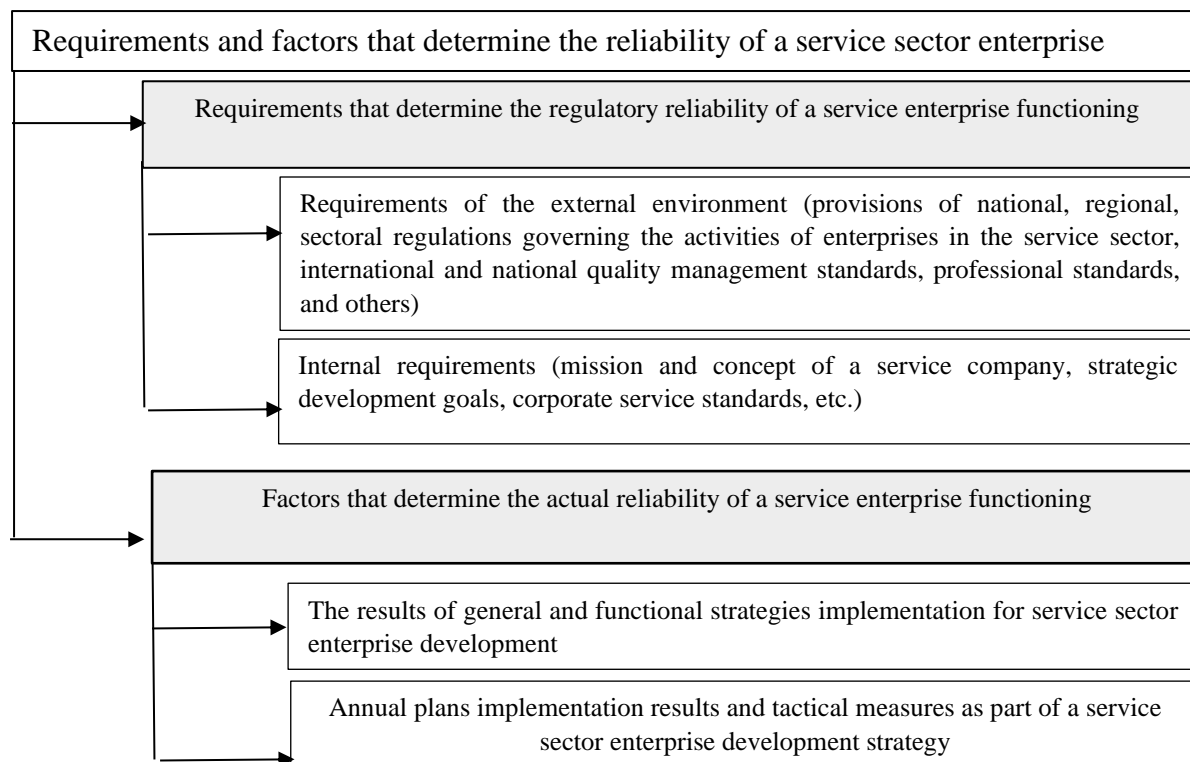


Figure 1. A set of requirements and factors that determine the reliability of business services sector operation (compiled by the authors using the approach described A.N. Furmankov (2005))

As can be seen from the diagram in Figure 1, with the general requirements for the activities of service enterprises, it is the mission and concept of the enterprise, the goals of its development, the results of the implementation of the strategy that determine the actual reliability of the functioning and sustainable development of any enterprise, including in the service sector.

Thus, the concept of sustainable development, which is now gaining more and more distribution, based on a system of environmental norms and values, has found implementation in international and Russian regulatory legal acts. In particular, our country has adopted a number of documents defining the foundations of state policy in the field of environmental development and safety (State Policy, 2012; Decree of the President of the Russian Federation, 2017), which were used in development of regional regulations in the field of environmental policy (Resolution of the Moscow Government, 2014).

On the other hand, not all enterprises pay sufficient attention to environmental safety issues, as this does not always correspond to

their mission and strategic development goals. As a positive example of ensuring reliable functioning and sustainable development, we can cite the experience of the multinational hotel corporation Hyatt (as of December 31, 2020 consists of 974 hotels in 69 countries on six continents), which formulates its goal as follows: “our goal is to take care of people to be the best, informs our business decisions and growth strategy and aims to attract and retain the best employees, build relationships with guests and create value for shareholders” (Hyatt Hotels, 2021a, 2021b). This company actively supports the mission of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and has also contributed to the ITP-led hospitality industry goal setting that will help propel our industry forward on carbon and water emissions. In particular, many of the hotel chain's resorts are designed to the strictest standards of Earth Check, the world's leading environmental sustainability advisory panel (Hyatt Hotels, 2021d). In July 2021, Hyatt Hospitality Corporation launched Hyatt's new global ESG platform, World of Care. The creation of this platform reflected the company's principle that any action can create long-term value for people and the community and that when our people, communities and planet thrive, so can any business (Hyatt Hotels, 2021c).

As can be seen from the data in Figure 1 and confirmed by the example of the transnational hotel corporation Hyatt, in order to ensure the reliability of enterprises operation, first of all it is necessary to know what requirements are imposed on enterprises activities in general and in a specific field of activity, including those that are referred to quality assurance of the services provided. On the other hand, to ensure the reliability of the enterprises functioning and sustainable development, it is necessary to have a development strategy determined by the company mission and development goals. Company personnel play the main role in the development strategy implementation, of course. The level of personnel qualifications, how motivated they are for effective work, how the control system is organized and the connection between the results of the control system and staff incentives is ensured, what will be:

- firstly, the development strategy itself (conservative, competitor-oriented, innovation-oriented, and so on);
- secondly, how effectively the strategy will be adjusted in the process of implementation, depending on changes in the factors of the external and internal environment;
- thirdly, what development strategy implementation results will be and how it will affect the financial indicators of the enterprise's development, customer satisfaction, and ultimately - the enterprise competitiveness.

Consider further what changes are taking place in labor markets and how the pandemic has affected labor migration and employee expectations regarding wages, working conditions, and so on.

3.2. Labor Migration and the Main Priorities of Companies in the Field of Personnel Management

As reported in a recent Forbes article, (2021 Brought Us The 'Great Resignation.'): "Workers don't just leave; they are rethinking what they want out of work and changing their expectations for their professional life." This phenomenon has even received a name: Great Resignation (some call it Great Re-Evaluation).

Against the backdrop of such a negative global dynamics of personnel in all sectors of the

economy, in the hotel business, the situation looks even more complicated. The fact is that due to the pandemic, when it was the enterprises of the food and hospitality industry that were closed in the first place, on the one hand, there was a large outflow of personnel to other areas of activity, on the other hand, the flow of migrants and temporary labor from other countries decreased. In a study conducted by M. Peters (2021), he substantiates post-war migration to West Germany and gives an assessment of modern migration, which is now predominantly oriented to megacities, and the main share of migrants is low-skilled personnel.

In our country, national demographic problems have also superimposed on the above-mentioned global trend of young and low-skilled personnel flow into the sphere of servants. So, according to Rosstat, as of January 1, 2019, the share of the population aged 15-19 years was only 4.7% of the total population (in January 2022 they were already 18-22 years old), which is almost two times less than the share of the population in age 30-34, which in 2019 amounted to 8.7% of the total population of the Russian Federation (Figure 2).

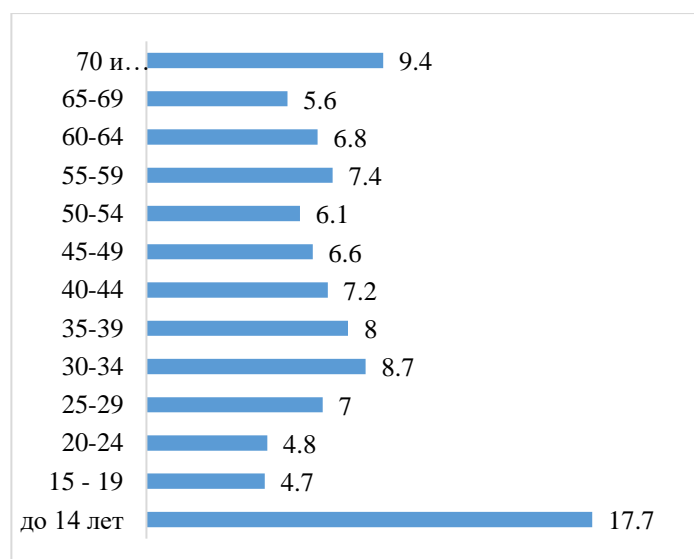


Figure 2. *The structure of the population in the Russian Federation by age (as of January 1, 2019), % (compiled by the authors according to Russia in numbers (2020))*

It is quite obvious that in preparation for the summer season of 2022, hotel management will fight for staff primarily through price competition, i.e. 4-5* hotels offering higher salaries will generally be able to fill vacancies by pulling personnel from 3* hotels or less. As a

result, a situation is possible when in hotels of the highest category the quality of services will be at the level of hotels of the 2-3 star category, while in budget hotels the quality of services will decrease, and in sanatoriums of a low price category there may be situations when the staff of medical personnel is not fully staffed.

The current situation on the labor market, in which the number of vacancies is much higher than the number of resumes, is called the "candidate market". The shortage of personnel, as noted above, leads to the fact that employers are forced to raise wages to staff in order to retain full-time employees and attract new ones. A study by Deutsche Bank (2021) predicts a "hypersonic" recovery of the labor market, that is, instead of the usual four years, recovery will take about a year or less, which is already seen in some countries. For example, Deutsche Bank (2021) cites data that in France and Spain the employment rate at the end of 2021 was higher than in 2019. But at the same time, the high demand for labor and the associated increase in wages leads to the emergence of additional inflationary factors. In addition, we must not forget about the existing stable trend associated with the desire of employees to change the field of activity. This is described in detail in the McKinsey study (McKinsey, 2021) and, in particular, it is substantiated that 40% of employees in the United States intend to change jobs in one way or another.

3.3. The Crisis of the Tourism and Hospitality Labor Market

Another study of the development of the world economy during a pandemic (World Economic Outlook, 2021), including labor migration issues, showed that during 2020-2021 there is a redistribution of qualified personnel to more stable sectors of the economy, and in the most affected spheres of activity (trade, hospitality industry, entertainment), there is a concentration of young and less qualified personnel. Moreover, as the head of the European department of the International Monetary Fund noted in an interview with the Russian newspaper Kommersant (2021), such a concentration of low-skilled personnel will limit the recovery of the above economy sectors for a long time even after the end of the pandemic.

In the most recent quarterly U.S. job market report, the job listing showed that 58% of

hospitality workers said they plan to quit their jobs by the end of 2021. Moreover, 24% said they would not have quit their last job if the pandemic had not happened, and 25% of former hospitality workers say they would not want to work in the industry again (Job Market Report, 2021.).

All this together means the emergence of big issues in the hospitality enterprises management, which will need not only to fill existing vacancies, but to form a staff of new enterprises, the commissioning of which continued in 20201 (Table 1.)

Table 1. *Enacting capacities and facilities of the social and cultural sphere in the Russian Federation in the period from January to September 2021*

Types of enterprises	value
Hotels, places	9723
Sanatoriums, beds	1108
Holiday homes, places	829
Tourist bases, places	754
Motels, places	29
Campsites, places	24
Swimming pools with track lengths of 25 meters and 50 meters, units	38
Sports facilities with artificial ice, units	20
Fitness centers, units	94
Gyms, thousand meters ² total area	86,7
Stadiums, thousands of seats	7,9

In the Russian economy, during the pandemic, travel companies, hotels and restaurants lost at least 30% of their employees, and in some enterprises, the number of vacancies in mid-2021 reached 50% of the total number of jobs. The main reason for the outflow of qualified personnel was the lack of stability in the development of the tourism and hospitality industry - during periods of a sharp increase in the number of coronavirus cases, various restrictions were introduced, up to the complete closure of catering establishments, hotels, fitness clubs and other service enterprises. The second problem of the Russian service sector is low wages (Table 2).

Table 2. *Average monthly wages dynamics of enterprises employees in the hospitality, food, sports, recreation and entertainment industry (without social payments) (September 2021)*

Indicators	rubles	B % K		rubles	%	
		to August 2020	to July 2021		to January - to August 2020	the all-Russian level of average monthly wages
Total (average for all types of economic activity)	52 355,0	108,3	94,7	54 408,0	109,2	100,0
Activities of hotels and catering establishments	30 615,0	115,7	93,8	31 408,0	117,5	58,0
Activities in the field of culture, sports, organization of leisure and entertainment, of which:	44 625,0	101,1	91,1	50 001,0	109,5	92,0
- activities in the field of sports, recreation and entertainment	51 754,0	98,0	99,6	56 862,0	110,4	105,0

Compiled by the authors based on (Federal State Statistics Service, 2021)

As can be seen from the data in Table 1, only for enterprises operating in the field of sports, recreation and entertainment, the average monthly accrued salary of employees in September 2021 slightly exceeded the all-Russian level of the average monthly salary. The biggest lag (by 42%) from the all-Russian level of the average monthly salary is in hotels and public catering establishments. At the same time, the size of September salary in relation to the level of the average monthly salary for hotels and catering enterprises employees in July 2021 even decreased (by 5.3%). All of this indicates the low attractiveness of working in hotels and catering, compared with other areas of activity that have shown higher resilience in a pandemic.

3.4. Assessment of Service Sector Enterprise Personnel Structure a influence on Consumer Assessments of the Services Quality

The problems identified by the authors in the labor market of workers in the hospitality industry necessitate clarification of approaches to the formation of the personnel structure. The management of hospitality companies needs clear determinants of the relationship between the structure of hotel personnel in terms of qualifications, on the one hand, and the quality of services and consumer ratings, on the other. In this study, the task was set to assess the influence of personnel qualifications level on the provision of services quality and consumer assessments.

In the course of the study, hotel business representatives' survey was conducted, the expert group included 12 experts, which included managers and specialists of 3-4 star hotels in Moscow.

The experts evaluated the degree of parameters significance by assigning them a rank number. The factor, which the expert gives the highest mark, is assigned a rank 1. If the expert recognizes several factors as equivalent, then they are assigned the same rank number. Based on the data of the questionnaire, a summary of the ranks was compiled, which is presented in Table 3.

The assessment of experts' opinions agreement degree was carried out by calculating the coefficient of concordance (agreement) in the absence of related ranks.

The value of the concordance coefficient was 0.679, i.e. agreement of experts' opinions is positive, indicates a high degree of agreement of experts' opinions, the agreed ranking was used to assess the impact of the personnel structure on service quality assurance and consumer assessments.

Table 3. *Ranking by experts - hotel business representatives, indicators of hotel personnel structure according to the importance of their impact on consumer assessments*

Indicators that have the greatest impact on consumer assessments of hotel staff work quality	agreed expert assessment
share of employees engaged in guest service with more than 5 years of experience in this field	1
share of employees with more than 5 years of experience in the hotel	2
share of employees with specialized education	3
share of employees with higher education	8
share of employees engaged in serving guests with more than 3 years of experience in this field	6
share of employees with more than 3 years of experience in the hotel	7
share of employees engaged in guest service with more than 10 years of experience in this field	4
share of employees with more than 10 years of experience in the hotel	5

Source: research by the authors of the article

As a result of hotel business representatives expert survey, three parameters were identified that characterize the structure of staff by education and work experience, which, according to experts, have the greatest impact on how consumers of hotel services: the share of employees with more than 5 years of work experience in the hotel, the share of employees occupied with serving guests, with more than 5 years of experience in this field, the share of employees with specialized education.

At the next stage of the study, according to the data of the hotels booking systems booking.com, tripadvisor.ru, a sample of assessments by the category of personnel for 2019-2021 was compiled quarterly. The sample included 12 hotels 3-4 stars in Moscow, and according to the hotels' data, the structure of personnel by education and work experience: the share of employees engaged in serving guests with more than 5 years of work experience in this area; employees with more than 5 years of experience in the hotel; employees with specialized education. The results of hotel staff work quality consumer assessments correlation and indicators characterizing the structure of the staff are presented in table. 4

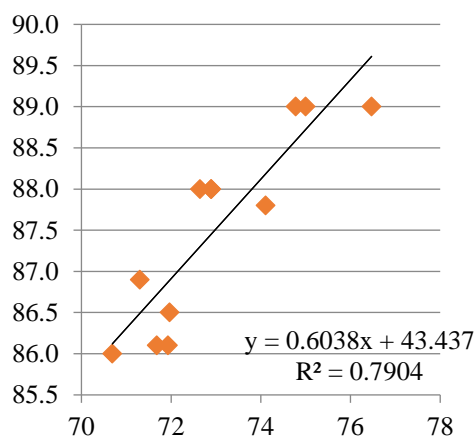
Table 4. *Staff work quality consumer assessments correlation and hotel staff structure*

Indicators that have the greatest impact on consumer assessments of hotel staff work quality	hotel												average value
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
share of employees engaged in guest service with more than 5 years of experience in this field	0,88	0,91	0,78	0,82	0,84	0,91	0,79	0,78	0,82	0,82	0,87	0,86	0,84
share of employees with more than 5 years of experience in the hotel	0,93	0,85	0,91	0,90	0,88	0,92	0,88	0,84	0,82	0,89	0,94	0,91	0,89
share of employees with specialized education	0,69	0,58	0,71	0,74	0,59	0,7	0,72	0,65	0,56	0,59	0,67	0,7	0,66

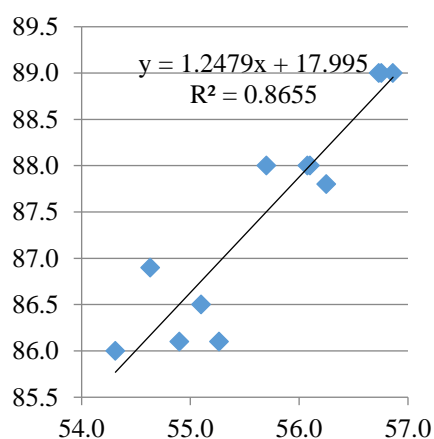
Source: research by the authors of the article

In order to put forward a hypothesis about the presence of hotel personnel structure consumer assessments statistical dependence, we construct

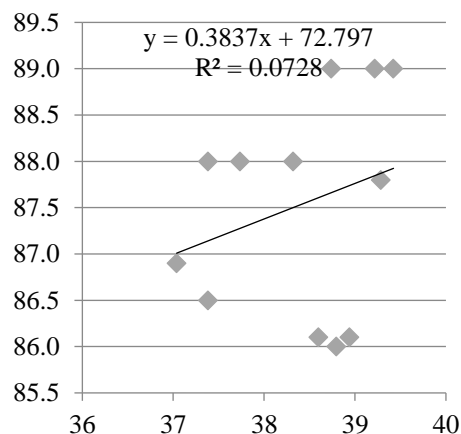
a correlation field of points based on the sample of the first hotel (Figure 3). Each point of the correlation field corresponds to a unit of observation. The number of observation units is equal to the sample size. The position of each point of the correlation field is determined by two coordinates: the abscissa and the ordinate — the consumer's assessment of the quality of the work of the personnel and the structure of the personnel at the moment of time. In this case, the sample is a time slice containing the values of the studied indicators for 12 quarters. To test the assumption that the points of the correlation field are close to a certain straight line, a linear trend was added to the correlation field. Figure 3 also shows the equations of the constructed trends and the coefficients of determination.



A) share of employees engaged in guest service with more than 5 years of experience in this field



B) share of employees with more than 5 years of experience in the hotel



C) share of employees with specialized education

Figure 3. Correlation field and linear trends

Source: research by the authors of the article

As the results of the study, the closer the relationship the consumer assessments of staff quality (Y, points) Figure 3 is marked with the staff shares with experience in the hotel for more than 5 years (X,%) Figure 3 is a graph in , then a proportion of staff engaged in service guests with the experience of more than 5 years in this area (X,%) Figure 3 graph a low degree of correlation observed in consumer assessments of staff quality (Y, points), with the share of employees with specialized education (X,%) Figure 3 graph C.

Thus, this study offers hotel management targets for improving the quality of service, competitive advantages, and taking into account the structure of personnel by education and work experience.

On the consumer assessment of staff quality affected by many factors, other than those described in this article, which leads to the continuation of research in this direction.

Conclusion

The authors of the article have repeatedly, since 2013, conducted research on training for the service sector (Zaitseva, 2013; Efremova, 2017), forecasting changes in training requirements for the service sector (Zaitseva et al., 2015), ensuring the quality of training based on the use of integration models (Razumovskaya et al., 2018). Also, the authors of the article conducted research on methodological approaches to the

development of a system of indicators for assessing the quality of certain types of services (Mozhelev, 2021).

At the same time, over the past two years, as a result of the pandemic, there have been significant changes both in the hospitality industry itself and in the labor market, and not only within individual countries, but also in the global hospitality industry as a whole. Although in some countries, industry trends were superimposed on global trends. Thus, a “demographic hole” was imposed in the Russian Federation, which resulted in a sharp reduction in the number of new (young) personnel in the labor market.

In addition, within the framework of this study, the task of determining the impact of personnel qualification level on ensuring the quality of services and consumer assessments was set and solved. In the process of research at the first stage, based on the results of hotel business representatives expert survey, three parameters were identified that characterize the structure of personnel by education and work experience, which, according to experts, have the greatest impact on how consumers of hotel services evaluate the quality of services. Then, based on the results of a three-year study, the relationship was revealed between the staff structure in the hotel by education and work experience, both in the hotel itself and at other enterprises in the industry, and consumer assessments of the quality of services in this hotel.

The approach proposed by the authors of the article can be used by other enterprises in the hospitality industry interested in ensuring high assessments of the quality of services and services through the formation of an optimal personnel structure.

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