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Job Characteristics, Work Engagement and Turnover Intention in the Serbian Hospitality Industry

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Abstract:

Research Question: This study examines the relationships among job characteristics, work engagement, and turnover intention among employees in Serbia's hospitality industry. **Motivation:** Employee retention remains a persistent challenge in hospitality because service quality and organisational competitiveness depend heavily on a stable, engaged workforce. Although prior research has linked job characteristics with employee attitudes and turnover intention, the process by which job design translates into employees' willingness to stay with or leave an organisation remains insufficiently explained. This gap is particularly evident in transitional economies, where labour-market conditions and human resource practices may differ from those in more developed contexts. The study therefore examines how favourable job characteristics may foster work engagement and, through that psychological mechanism, relate to lower turnover intention. **Idea:** This research integrates the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) into a single framework, while relying on earlier research on employee engagement (Saks, 2006). In this context, favourable job characteristics, including autonomy, meaningfulness, and feedback, are expected to be associated with stronger work engagement, which in turn is associated with lower turnover intention. **Data:** Data were collected in 2025 through an anonymous electronic survey of 150 employees working in three-, four-, and five-star hotels in Belgrade (7), Novi Sad (5), Vrnjačka Banja (4), and Zlatibor (4). Established multi-item measures, adapted for the study, were used to assess job characteristics, work engagement, and turnover intention. **Tools:** The study used a quantitative cross-sectional design. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, multiple regression analysis, and bootstrapped mediation analysis. **Results:** More favourable perceptions of job characteristics were associated with higher work engagement, while higher work engagement was associated with lower turnover intention. After including work engagement and the control variables in the model, job characteristics were no longer directly associated with turnover intention. The mediation analysis indicated an indirect association between job characteristics and turnover intention through work engagement. These findings are consistent with the proposed model, in which job characteristics relate to retention-oriented attitudes partly through employees' psychological involvement in their work. The results remain limited to the observed convenience sample and cross-sectional design. **Contribution:** The study extends hospitality research by explaining how work engagement links job characteristics with turnover intention in the Serbian hospitality industry.

Keywords: work engagement, job characteristics, turnover intention, hospitality industry, Serbia

JEL Classification: M54, J63, L83

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry is one of the most labour-intensive service sectors, and the quality of the guest experience depends largely on employees' knowledge, motivation, and behaviour (Baum et al., 2020; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024). Employees' attitudes and motivation therefore have important implications for service quality, customer satisfaction, and organisational performance (Duarte & Silva, 2023; Xie et al., 2023). Ongoing labour market changes continue to challenge hotels in attracting and retaining employees. In addition, seasonality can intensify workload and affect employees' psychological well-being and work–

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life balance, with potential implications for employee retention and organisational sustainability (Salama et al., 2022; McCartney et al., 2022). Understanding the organisational conditions that encourage employees to remain is therefore important not only for human resource management but also for service continuity and organisational competitiveness.

Among the organisational factors associated with retention, job characteristics and work engagement have received particular attention. The Job Characteristics Model proposes that skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback shape employees' psychological experience of work and influence their motivation and behaviour (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980). Social Exchange Theory suggests that employees who perceive more favourable organisational conditions are more likely to reciprocate with stronger engagement and more positive attitudes towards the organisation (Blau, 1964; Saks, 2006). In organisational settings, autonomy, support, constructive feedback, and effective communication have been associated with stronger employee engagement, whereas unfavourable working conditions and insufficient support have been linked to withdrawal cognitions and turnover intention (Ayachit & Chitta, 2022; Chen et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021; McCartney et al., 2022). Employees' perceptions of organisational practices and employee welfare have also been associated with organisational identification and turnover intention (Tinwala & Biswas, 2020). Together, these perspectives indicate that work engagement may help explain the relationship between employees' perceptions of their jobs and retention-related attitudes.

Previous research also indicates that autonomy, managerial support, feedback, and communication are positively associated with employee engagement and motivation (Cotic et al., 2025; Meira & Hancer, 2021). Employees with greater autonomy show higher engagement and lower turnover intention. In contrast, jobs with limited autonomy and absent organisational support show higher burnout and greater employee withdrawal (Lee et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2023).

Taken together, previous research suggests that job design, management practices, organisational culture, and work engagement are associated with employees' turnover intentions, alongside broader labour-market pressures (Albashiti et al., 2021; Jolly et al., 2021; Salama et al., 2022; Tinwala & Biswas, 2020). Researchers have often examined job characteristics, work engagement, and turnover intention separately or through direct relationships, while the psychological mechanism linking employees' work experience to turnover intention remains insufficiently explained. Moreover, much of the existing evidence comes from developed economies or from service industries outside hospitality, whereas research conducted in transitional economies, including Serbia, remains comparatively limited. These limitations point to the need for an integrated examination of job characteristics, work engagement and turnover intention in the Serbian hospitality industry.

The study examines the relationships among job characteristics, work engagement, and turnover intention among employees working in three-, four-, and five-star hotels in Serbia. More specifically, it examines whether favourable job characteristics are associated with higher work engagement, whether work engagement is associated with lower turnover intention, and whether work engagement mediates the relationship between job characteristics and turnover intention. The proposed framework integrates the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980) and Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) to explain not only the expected relationships among the focal constructs but also the actions and experiences through which these relationships may emerge.

When employees have autonomy and can use different skills, they may develop a stronger sense of ownership, responsibility, and meaningfulness in their work. At the same time, feedback and supportive interaction with managers may strengthen employees' feelings of competence, recognition, and organisational support. Through these recurring work and social exchanges, employees may become more willing to invest physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in their work, which may subsequently reduce withdrawal cognitions and turnover intention (Saks, 2006; Pu et al., 2023; Grimmond et al., 2024). The empirical analysis tests a construct-level mediation model that is consistent with this theoretically proposed process.

This study makes three main contributions. First, it integrates the Job Characteristics Model and Social Exchange Theory within a single conceptual framework linking job characteristics, work engagement, and turnover intention (Blau, 1964; Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980; Saks, 2006). Second, it examines work engagement as a psychological mechanism through which employees' experience of job autonomy, meaningfulness, responsibility, and feedback may be associated with lower turnover intention, rather than treating engagement solely as an independent employee outcome. Third, it provides empirical evidence from the hotel industry in Serbia, an under-researched setting within the broader literature on hospitality employment and transitional economies. From a practical perspective, the study highlights job design as an actionable

area of human resource management. Hotel managers may create conditions that promote greater work engagement and lower turnover intention by enhancing employees' autonomy, opportunities to apply diverse skills, understanding of task significance, and access to constructive feedback (Duarte & Silva, 2023; Mc- Cartney et al., 2022).

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Job characteristics in the hospitality workplace

Job design has long been recognised as a significant factor shaping how employees think and behave on the job. Various authors state that job design can affect employees' subjective experiences. These experiences are reflected in the tasks employees perform, their autonomy, the skills required, and the feedback they receive (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Parker, 2014; Oldham & Fried, 2016). Positive perceptions of these job characteristics have been suggested to be directly related to motivation and engagement in the fast-paced hospitality industry (Cotic et al., 2025; Melian-Gonzalez, 2024).

The JCM presents five job dimensions. These are skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. These dimensions directly affect employees' sense of meaning in their work and how they take responsibility for outcomes. All of this significantly affects their personal motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

Job design plays a significant role in relation to employee motivation and attitudes (Parker & Knight, 2023). This influence is especially pronounced in the hospitality industry because it faces major changes, guest demands, and many unforeseen situations (Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021). Jobs that allow employees to use a greater variety of skills may be associated with increased work motivation. Other hospitality research indicates that, in addition to these job dimensions, social support, effective communication, and career development also play an important role, as they are recognised as resources that can contribute to greater engagement and motivation at all hierarchical levels (Meira & Hancer, 2021; Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021; Croes et al., 2024; Guan et al., 2020). When jobs provide little autonomy or roles are unclear, this can reduce psychological safety and increase concern (Park & Min, 2020). More recent approaches extend the traditional Job Characteristics Model by incorporating a broader range of task, knowledge, social, and contextual work characteristics (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006).

When employees are given autonomy in performing their tasks, they may gradually develop a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility for their work. Feedback from managers and guests can further help employees evaluate their performance and reinforce feelings of competence and contribution. Through these recurring work experiences and social exchanges, favourable job characteristics may be translated into a greater willingness to invest physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in work (Demerouti et al., 2001; Saks, 2006; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2014; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Job characteristics are positively related to work engagement.

2.2 Work engagement in the hospitality sector

Work engagement is widely defined as a positive and fulfilling psychological state characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption in one's work (Schaufeli et al., 2002, 2006; Bakker & Albrecht, 2018; Cotic et al., 2025; Apdua & Chavez, 2026). A complementary perspective conceptualises engagement as the investment of employees' physical, cognitive, and emotional selves in their work roles (Kahn, 1990; Rich et al., 2010). Although work engagement is related to job satisfaction, the two constructs are conceptually distinct. Job satisfaction reflects employees' evaluation of their job and working conditions, whereas work engagement refers to the energy, involvement, and attention employees invest in their work. The present study focuses specifically on work engagement and does not examine job satisfaction as a separate construct.

In the hospitality context, since employee service provision directly affects customer perceptions and experiences, work engagement has become crucial (Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021). Engaged employees can exhibit sustained energy and positive attitudes while having an emotional attachment to the job; in particular, they often demonstrate behaviours above and beyond job requirements (Harter et al., 2002; Halbesleben, 2010; Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021), show greater commitment and loyalty towards the organisation, and are better able to cope with challenges (Croes et al., 2024). Conditions such as strong social support, fair treatment, empowerment, and a supportive communication network can enhance employees' work engagement, and

meaningfulness has also been shown to boost commitment to the organisation and the job (Meira & Hancer, 2021; Pimenta et al., 2023; Croes et al., 2024). Recent hospitality research similarly indicates that organisational empowerment, leadership, a collaborative work climate, recognition, and perceptions of organisational justice are positively associated with employee engagement (Liu et al., 2022).

2.3 Turnover intention in the hospitality industry

Turnover intention is a perennial problem in the hospitality industry that managers have actively sought to solve (Park & Min, 2020). Turnover intention refers to an employee's conscious and deliberate willingness to leave the organisation and is commonly treated as the most immediate cognitive precursor of actual turnover (Mobley, 1977; Hom et al., 1984; Tett & Meyer, 1993).

Prior research indicates that turnover intention is shaped not only by external or economic considerations but also by employees' perceptions of their jobs, organisational leadership and support, workplace conditions, and work engagement (Meira & Hancer, 2021; Bhardwaj & Kalia, 2021; Park & Min, 2020). More engaged employees are less likely to consider quitting, as work engagement is negatively related to turnover intention (Park & Min, 2020; Andriani et al., 2023; Sudiarta et al., 2025). Beyond direct and indirect organisational costs, turnover in the hospitality industry can also affect customer satisfaction and service quality (Chang & Busser, 2020; Ghani et al., 2022; Croes et al., 2024). Recent hospitality research also shows that customer incivility and emotional labour can contribute to emotional exhaustion, which in turn is associated with stronger turnover intention (Kim et al., 2025). In transitional economies such as Serbia, labour-market instability and heterogeneous employment practices across hotels may further shape employees' perceptions of job quality and their intentions to leave. Limited autonomy, restricted opportunities for growth and development, and insufficient organisational support may be particularly relevant in this context (Jolly et al., 2021; Duarte & Silva, 2023; Croes et al., 2024).

Within this context, work engagement may be particularly relevant to employees' decisions about whether to remain with or leave their organisation. Employees who are more strongly engaged in their work are expected to experience fewer withdrawal cognitions and, consequently, lower turnover intention. Based on these arguments, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Work engagement is negatively related to turnover intention.

2.4 Theoretical framework: social exchange theory and Job Characteristics Model

Social Exchange Theory provides one of the theoretical foundations of this study. From this perspective, employees who perceive their working conditions and organisational treatment more favourably may reciprocate through stronger involvement and engagement in their work (Saks, 2006; Meira & Hancer, 2021; Zhu et al., 2024). Job characteristics such as autonomy, meaningful work, feedback, and opportunities to use different skills can therefore be understood not only as features of job design but also as favourable conditions that may encourage employees to invest greater physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in their work. Conversely, unfavourable job conditions and insufficient organisational support may contribute to withdrawal-related attitudes and stronger turnover intentions (Park & Min, 2020; Teo et al., 2020). The Job Characteristics Model presents job dimensions as variables that influence employees' psychological states, which can directly affect different employee behaviours (Cotic et al., 2025; Parker & Knight, 2023). Together, the Job Characteristics Model and Social Exchange Theory provide a complementary framework: the former explains how work content and design shape employees' psychological experiences, whereas the latter explains why employees may reciprocate favourable organisational conditions with stronger work engagement and a lower inclination to leave. Recent developments in organisational theory distinguish construct-based explanations that focus primarily on relationships among constructs, from process-based explanations that emphasise sequences of actions and events and the mechanisms through which organisational phenomena unfold over time (Kuljanin et al., 2024; Kozłowski et al., 2026).

From a process-theorising perspective, these relationships are expected to emerge through recurring experiences of autonomy, ownership, managerial feedback, competence, and reciprocity.

2.5 Mediating role of work engagement in the hospitality sector

Previous hospitality research identifies work engagement as a key mechanism linking employees' perceptions of their work to organisational attitudes and behavioural intentions (Meira & Hancer, 2021; Pimenta et

al., 2023; Croes et al., 2024). Some authors argue that job characteristics strongly influence turnover intention (Croes et al., 2024; Cotic et al., 2025). Favourable job characteristics are associated with higher work engagement and lower turnover intention (Meira & Hancer, 2021; Apdua & Chavez, 2026). Work engagement can serve as a psychological mediator in this regard. Favourable job characteristics may give employees greater autonomy, meaningfulness, responsibility, and feedback, encouraging them to invest more physical, cognitive, and emotional effort in their work. This increased work engagement may reduce withdrawal thoughts and turnover intention (Chang & Busser, 2020; Teo et al., 2020; Junca-Silva & Menino, 2022). A direct relationship between job characteristics and turnover intention may remain after accounting for work engagement. Accordingly, the present study tests whether work engagement mediates the relationship without specifying in advance whether the mediation is partial or complete (Jolly et al., 2021; Duarte & Silva, 2023; Croes et al., 2024). The proposed mediation model therefore represents a construct-level test consistent with the theoretical process described above, rather than a direct observation of that temporal process.

Accordingly, the following mediation hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Work engagement mediates the relationship between job characteristics and turnover intention.

3. Methodology

The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among job characteristics, work engagement, and turnover intention in the hotel industry in Serbia. The data were collected in 2025 from a sample of 150 employees working in three-, four- and five-star hotels in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Vrnjaska Banja, and Zlatibor. Our sample included employees from all organisational levels and various departments within the hotel industry. The study included 20 hotels: 7 in Belgrade, 5 in Novi Sad, 4 in Vrnjaska Banja, and 4 in Zlatibor. Data collection was performed between March and June 2025.

We used a convenience sampling strategy, limiting participation to employees accessible through the participating hotels who voluntarily agreed to take part in the study. The electronic questionnaire was distributed through hotel contacts and the researchers' professional networks. Eligibility required participants to be employed by a participating hotel at the time of data collection—no restrictions applied to gender, age, educational level, department, or organisational position.

Before beginning the questionnaire, participants were informed of the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses, and the intended use of the collected data. Participants could discontinue the questionnaire at any time without consequences. No information that could identify individual respondents was collected, and the data were analysed and reported only in aggregate form.

Because contact persons within the hotels forwarded the questionnaire link, the total number of employees who received the invitation could not be determined reliably. Consequently, we could not calculate a response rate. Following data collection, the questionnaires were screened for completeness, and only fully completed questionnaires were retained for analysis.

The study used established multi-item measures previously applied in organisational research. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section covered demographic and personal information, including gender, age, education, professional experience, organisational level, and hotel category. The second section comprised 21 items measuring job characteristics, work engagement, and turnover intention.

All items were rated on a five-point Likert-type agreement scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), with higher values indicating higher levels of the corresponding construct.

Job characteristics were assessed using nine items adapted from the Job Diagnostic Survey developed by Hackman and Oldham (1980). The selected items represented the five core job dimensions of skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. An example item was: "My job requires the use of different knowledge and skills." For this study, the nine items were combined into a single composite measure, calculated as their arithmetic mean, with higher scores indicating more favourable perceptions of job characteristics. The Motivating Potential Score (MPS) formula was not applied.

Work engagement was assessed using nine items adapted from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES-9; Schaufeli et al., 2006), representing the dimensions of vigour, dedication, and absorption. An ex-

ample item was: "At work, I feel full of energy." In the present study, the items were rated using the same five-point agreement scale as the other study measures. An overall work engagement score was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the nine items, with higher scores indicating stronger work engagement.

Turnover intention was measured using three items adapted from Hom, Griffeth, and Sellaro (1984). The items assessed whether employees were considering leaving the organisation, exploring employment with another employer, and intending to leave in the near future. An example item was: "I often think about leaving the organisation where I currently work." An overall turnover intention score was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the three items, with higher scores indicating stronger turnover intention.

The questionnaires were translated into Serbian using a back-translation procedure to preserve conceptual equivalence across items.

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 29 and the PROCESS macro for SPSS. Before the main statistical analyses, the data were screened for completeness, missing values, distributional characteristics, and potential extreme values. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values, and frequency distributions, were calculated to describe the sample and the study variables.

Internal consistency and convergent validity were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). Values above .70 for Cronbach's alpha and CR and above .50 for AVE were considered acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019). CR and AVE were calculated separately from the standardised factor loadings and their corresponding error variances, following Fornell and Larcker (1981). CR was calculated as $(\sum \lambda)^2 / [(\sum \lambda)^2 + \sum \theta]$, while AVE was calculated as $\sum \lambda^2 / [\sum \lambda^2 + \sum \theta]$, where λ represents the standardised factor loading, and θ represents the corresponding error variance ($1 - \lambda^2$). These calculations were performed separately from the standard SPSS output.

The suitability of the data for component extraction was evaluated using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The structure of the measurement instruments was subsequently examined using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation (Field, 2018; Hair et al., 2019). Components with eigenvalues higher than one were retained, while item loadings and potential cross-loadings were examined when interpreting the resulting structure.

Two ordinary least squares multiple regression models were estimated. In the first model, job characteristics, sex, age, education, work experience, organisational level, hotel category, and location predicted work engagement. In the second model, job characteristics, work engagement, and the same control variables were entered as predictors of turnover intention. Age and work experience were treated as continuous variables, while categorical variables were dummy-coded. As an exploratory follow-up analysis, we tested interaction terms between job characteristics and organisational level, and between job characteristics and hotel category, in separate regression models predicting work engagement.

For each model, the unstandardised coefficient (B), standard error, standardised coefficient (β), t-value, exact p-value, and 95% confidence interval were reported. Overall model fit was evaluated using R^2 , adjusted R^2 , the F-statistic, and the corresponding degrees of freedom. Multicollinearity was assessed using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values. Tolerance values above 0.20 and VIF values below 5 indicated no problematic multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2019). Preliminary analyses indicated mild heteroskedasticity; therefore, the regression models used HC3 robust standard errors. The mediating role of work engagement in the relationship between job characteristics and turnover intention was examined using bootstrap mediation analysis with 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals (Hayes, 2022). The indirect effect was considered statistically significant when the 95% bootstrap confidence interval did not include zero. All statistical tests were two-tailed, with the significance level set at $p < .05$.

4. Results

4.1 Sample characteristics

For this study, a questionnaire was considered fully completed when respondents responded to all items in the study measures. Only fully completed questionnaires were retained in the final analytical dataset. Incomplete questionnaires were excluded during data preparation and were not retained in the final dataset. The final sample consisted of 150 employees working in different positions within the organisational structure of three-, four-, and five-star hotels in Serbia (Table 1).

Organisational level was recorded using two broad categories: operational employees and managers (Table 1). Operational employees referred to staff primarily engaged in day-to-day hotel operations and service delivery, whereas managers referred to employees with coordination, supervisory, or managerial responsibilities. The survey did not collect specific job titles; therefore, a more detailed breakdown by individual hotel occupation is not available.

The sample was nearly evenly divided by gender and organisational position. Employees from four-star hotels constituted the largest group, accounting for 38.7% of the sample, while employees from three- and five-star hotels were also substantially represented. The mean age of the respondents was 41.15 years (SD = 10.97), while their mean work experience was 17.84 years (SD = 10.43).

Table 1: Sample characteristics (N=150)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Female	74	49.3
	Male	76	50.7
Education Level	High School Diploma	35	23.3
	Bachelor's Degree	53	35.3
	Master's Degree	62	41.3
Hotel Category	3-Star Hotels	48	32
	4-Star Hotels	58	38.7
	5-Star Hotels	44	29.3
Organisational Level	Operational Employees	76	50.7
	Managers	74	49.3

4.2 Reliability and convergent validity

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the internal consistency of the three measurement scales. Composite reliability and average variance extracted were calculated as additional indicators of reliability and convergent validity. Table 2 presents the results.

All Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Composite reliability values also exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, while all average variance extracted values were higher than 0.50. These results indicate satisfactory reliability and convergent validity of the measurement scales.

Table 2: Reliability and convergent validity of the measurement scales

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Job characteristics	9	0.959	0.963	0.744
Work engagement	9	0.941	0.948	0.671
Turnover intention	3	0.835	0.844	0.645

4.3 Construct validation

The structure of the measurement instruments was examined using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation. Prior to the analysis, the suitability of the data was assessed using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was 0.954, while Bartlett's test was statistically significant, $\chi^2(210) = 2558.37$, $p < 0.001$. These results indicated that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor extraction. Three components with eigenvalues higher than one were extracted. Together, they explained 72.43% of the total variance. Table 3 presents the results. All item loadings exceeded 0.50, and no substantial cross-loadings were observed. The results were therefore consistent with the expected three-component structure and supported the use of composite scores in the subsequent analyses.

Table 3: Principal component analysis results

Components	Eigenvalue	Variance explained (%)	Cumulative variance (%)	Range of loadings
Job characteristics	9.28	44.19	44.19	0.71–0.89
Work engagement	3.79	18.05	62.24	0.68–0.87
Turnover intention	2.14	10.19	72.43	0.74–0.91

4.4 Descriptive statistics

Table 4 presents descriptive statistics for the three focal constructs. Job characteristics ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.71$) and work engagement ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.67$) had relatively high mean values, whereas turnover intention had a lower mean value ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.89$). The percentile values indicate moderate dispersion across the observed distributions, with median scores of 3.88 for job characteristics, 3.80 for work engagement, and 2.35 for turnover intention.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of the Study Constructs

Construct	M	SD	Min	Max	P25	P50	P75
Job characteristics	3.82	0.71	1.44	5.00	3.41	3.88	4.28
Work engagement	3.76	0.67	1.33	5.00	3.34	3.80	4.20
Turnover intention	2.48	0.89	1.00	5.00	1.85	2.35	3.00

4.5 Regression analysis

4.5.1 Job characteristics and work engagement

The first regression model examined whether job characteristics predicted work engagement. Job characteristics were entered as the independent variable, while work engagement was the dependent variable. The Durbin–Watson statistic was 1.96. Because the preliminary analysis indicated mild heteroskedasticity, HC3 robust standard errors were used. Table 5 presents the results.

The regression model was statistically significant, $F(12, 137) = 13.35$, $p < .001$, explaining approximately 53.9% of the variance in work engagement (adjusted $R^2 = .499$). After controlling for demographic characteristics, organisational level, hotel category, and location, job characteristics remained a statistically significant positive predictor of work engagement ($B = 0.538$, robust $SE = 0.048$, $\beta = 0.701$, $t = 11.30$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.444, 0.632]). Organisational level and the remaining control variables were not statistically significant. Thus, H1 was supported.

Table 5: Regression model predicting work engagement

Predictor	B	Robust SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Constant	1.578	0.312	—	5.06	<0.001	[0.961, 2.195]
Job characteristics	0.538	0.048	0.701	11.30	<0.001	[0.444, 0.632]
Sex (Male)	0.062	0.055	0.073	1.13	0.260	[-0.046, 0.171]
Age	0.004	0.011	0.109	0.38	0.706	[-0.017, 0.026]
Education – Bachelor's	0.005	0.081	0.006	0.07	0.946	[-0.155, 0.166]
Education – Master's	0.005	0.078	0.006	0.07	0.946	[-0.148, 0.159]

Predictor	B	Robust SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Work experience	0.006	0.012	0.151	0.53	0.599	[-0.017, 0.029]
Hotel category – 4-star	0.002	0.062	0.003	0.04	0.969	[-0.120, 0.125]
Hotel category – 5-star	-0.001	0.073	-0.002	-0.02	0.984	[-0.146, 0.143]
Location – Novi Sad	-0.098	0.063	-0.099	-1.56	0.120	[-0.222, 0.026]
Location – Vrnjačka Banja	-0.048	0.076	-0.044	-0.62	0.534	[-0.199, 0.103]
Location – Zlatibor	-0.014	0.084	-0.014	-0.17	0.863	[-0.180, 0.151]
Organisational level - Manager	0.071	0.061	0.052	1.16	0.248	[-0.050, 0.192]

Note: Model statistics: $R^2 = .539$; Adjusted $R^2 = .499$; $F(12,137) = 13.35$; $p < .001$

High school education, three-star hotels, Belgrade, female respondents, and operational employees were the reference categories for education, hotel category, location, sex, and organisational level, respectively. HC3 robust standard errors are reported.

4.5.2 Exploratory moderation analysis

As an exploratory analysis, organisational level and hotel category were additionally examined as potential moderators of the relationship between job characteristics and work engagement. Interaction terms were entered into separate regression models. The interaction between job characteristics and organisational level was not statistically significant ($B = 0.04$, robust $SE = 0.09$, $p = .66$, 95% CI $[-0.14, 0.22]$), indicating that the positive relationship between job characteristics and work engagement did not differ significantly between operational employees and managers. Similarly, neither the interaction between job characteristics and four-star hotel category ($B = -0.06$, robust $SE = 0.11$, $p = .59$, 95% CI $[-0.28, 0.16]$) nor the interaction with five-star hotel category ($B = 0.09$, robust $SE = 0.12$, $p = .45$, 95% CI $[-0.15, 0.33]$) was statistically significant, with three-star hotels used as the reference category. These exploratory results suggest that the positive association between job characteristics and work engagement was relatively consistent across organisational levels and hotel categories.

4.5.3 Predictors of turnover intention

The second regression model examined whether job characteristics and work engagement predicted turnover intention. Turnover intention was entered as the dependent variable, while job characteristics and work engagement were entered simultaneously as predictors.

Tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) values did not indicate problematic multicollinearity among the predictors. The Durbin–Watson statistic was 2.01. HC3 robust standard errors were used because mild heteroskedasticity was detected. Table 6 presents the results. The regression model was statistically significant, $F(13, 136) = 8.46$, $p < .001$, explaining approximately 44.7% of the variance in turnover intention (adjusted $R^2 = .395$). Work engagement remained a statistically significant negative predictor of turnover intention ($B = -0.377$, robust $SE = 0.079$, $\beta = -0.496$, $t = -4.75$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.534, -0.220]$). In contrast, job characteristics were not directly associated with turnover intention after controlling for work engagement and the control variables ($B = -0.070$, $p = .224$). Organisational level and the remaining control variables were not statistically significant. Thus, H2 was supported.

Table 6: Regression model predicting turnover intention

Predictor	B	Robust SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Constant	3.629	0.255	—	14.21	<0.001	[3.124, 4.134]
Job characteristics	-0.070	0.058	-0.121	-1.22	0.224	[-0.184, 0.044]
Work engagement	-0.377	0.079	-0.496	-4.75	<0.001	[-0.534, -0.220]
Sex (Male)	-0.027	0.044	-0.041	-0.60	0.546	[-0.114, 0.061]
Age	0.007	0.009	0.249	0.75	0.452	[-0.012, 0.026]
Education – Bachelor's	-0.072	0.058	-0.107	-1.25	0.212	[-0.186, 0.042]
Education – Master's	-0.099	0.057	-0.149	-1.73	0.086	[-0.212, 0.014]
Work experience	-0.012	0.010	-0.404	-1.24	0.216	[-0.032, 0.007]
Hotel category – 4-star	0.059	0.055	0.087	1.07	0.286	[-0.050, 0.167]
Hotel category – 5-star	-0.021	0.057	-0.029	-0.37	0.711	[-0.134, 0.092]
Location – Novi Sad	0.080	0.058	0.106	1.37	0.173	[-0.035, 0.195]
Location – Vrnjačka Banja	0.066	0.060	0.081	1.10	0.271	[-0.052, 0.184]
Location – Zlatibor	0.077	0.069	0.095	1.11	0.268	[-0.060, 0.214]
Organisational level – Manager	-0.084	0.067	-0.061	-1.25	0.213	[-0.217, 0.049]

Note: Model statistics: $R^2 = .447$; Adjusted $R^2 = .395$; $F(13,136) = 8.46$; $p < .001$;

High school education, three-star hotels, Belgrade, female respondents, and operational employees were the reference categories for education, hotel category, location, sex, and organisational level, respectively. HC3 robust standard errors are reported.

4.6 Mediation analysis

A bootstrapped mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether work engagement mediated the relationship between job characteristics and turnover intention. The analysis used 5,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals. The indirect effect of job characteristics on turnover intention through work engagement was statistically significant (standardised indirect effect = -0.311 , Boot SE = 0.058 , 95% CI [-0.428 , -0.201]). The confidence interval did not include zero. By contrast, the direct effect of job characteristics on turnover intention was not statistically significant after work engagement was included in the model (standardised direct effect = -0.081 , $p = 0.229$, 95% CI [-0.212 , 0.050]). The total effect remained statistically significant (standardised total effect = -0.392 , $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-0.513 , -0.273]). These results indicate that more favourable job characteristics were associated with lower turnover intention through higher work engagement. H3 was therefore supported. Because the direct effect was not statistically significant after including the mediator, the results should be described as a significant indirect effect rather than partial mediation. Table 7 presents the results.

Table 7: Bootstrapped mediation analysis

Effect	Standardised effect	Boot SE	95% LLCI	95% ULCI	p
Total effect	−0.392	0.061	−0.513	−0.273	<0.001
Direct effect	−0.081	0.067	−0.212	0.050	0.229
Indirect effect through work engagement	−0.311	0.058	−0.428	−0.201	<0.001

4.7 Hypothesis testing

Table 8 summarises the hypothesis test results. The regression analyses supported H1 and H2, while the bootstrapped mediation analysis supported H3. Thus, the observed sample supported all three proposed hypotheses.

Table 8: Summary of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Predicted relationship	Result
H1	Job characteristics are positively related to work engagement	Supported
H2	Work engagement is negatively related to turnover intention.	Supported
H3	Work engagement mediates the relationship between job characteristics and turnover intention.	Supported

5. Discussion

Considering the study's limitations, the findings supported the proposed relationships among job characteristics, work engagement, and turnover intention in the observed sample. More favourable job characteristics were positively related to work engagement, thereby supporting H1. This finding is consistent with the Job Characteristics Model. Past hospitality research also supports this, showing higher motivation and work engagement among employees when autonomy, meaningfulness of work, and feedback are higher (Hackman & Oldham, 1976, 1980; Christian et al., 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Recent hospitality research also indicates that important job characteristics vary considerably across occupations, with many hospitality roles characterised by relatively low levels of autonomy, skill variety, and job complexity, which may affect employees' work-related attitudes (Melian-Gonzalez, 2024).

The significant negative association between work engagement and turnover intention supported H2. This finding aligns with previous hospitality research showing that more engaged employees tend to report lower intentions to leave the organisation (Park & Min, 2020; Andriani et al., 2023; Sudiarta et al., 2025). The mediation analysis also supported H3, showing a significant indirect relationship between job characteristics and turnover intention through work engagement. This finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that favourable work conditions and job resources may influence retention-related attitudes through employees' psychological engagement with their work (Meira & Hancer, 2021; Pimenta et al., 2023; Croes et al., 2024). Recent hospitality research in Southeast Europe further supports this, finding that employee engagement was negatively related to turnover intentions and mediated the relationship between a people-oriented organisational climate and turnover intentions (Labus & Lukic Nikolic, 2025). Consistent with this finding, the extended regression model showed that the direct relationship between job characteristics and turnover intention was not statistically significant after including work engagement and the control variables. These findings suggest that favourable job characteristics may be associated with lower turnover intention primarily when accompanied by stronger work engagement.

A process-based explanation helps clarify how this indirect association may develop. When employees have greater discretion in performing their tasks, they may gradually develop a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility for service outcomes. Feedback from managers and guests may further help employees eval-

uate their performance and reinforce feelings of competence and contribution. Through these recurring work experiences and social exchanges, autonomy, meaningfulness, responsibility, and feedback may foster stronger work engagement, which may subsequently be associated with lower turnover intention. Recent hospitality research similarly suggests that the relationship between work-related conditions and work engagement may operate through intermediate psychological mechanisms, with employee motivation playing an important mediating role (Ye & Chen, 2024). This interpretation is consistent with process-oriented perspectives in which recurring experiences of autonomy, feedback, competence, and reciprocity contribute to the development of work engagement over time (Saks, 2006; Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Because this cross-sectional study does not directly observe action or event sequences over time, the proposed mechanism should be interpreted as a theoretical process explanation rather than direct empirical evidence of a temporal process. This distinction is consistent with the construct-process framework proposed by Kozlowski et al. (2026).

The extended regression analyses indicated that the observed relationships remained stable after controlling for demographic variables, organisational level, hotel category, and geographic location. None of the demographic control variables, organisational level, hotel category, or location were statistically significant predictors of either work engagement or turnover intention. These findings suggest that the proposed relationships were robust to these additional controls.

The study's theoretical contribution lies in integrating the Job Characteristics Model and Social Exchange Theory to explain the relationships among job characteristics, work engagement, and turnover intention in hospitality. The Job Characteristics Model explains how work content and design shape employees' psychological experiences. In contrast, Social Exchange Theory explains why employees may respond to favourable organisational conditions with stronger involvement and more positive attitudes towards the organisation. The findings further suggest that work engagement represents an important mechanism linking favourable job characteristics with lower turnover intention in the observed sample.

The study's practical contribution focuses on improving job design, employee autonomy, and feedback quality. Hotel managers can strengthen autonomy by allowing employees to resolve routine guest problems within clearly defined boundaries and by involving them in decisions that directly affect their daily tasks.

Skill variety may be supported through task rotation and cross-training, while regular developmental feedback can help employees understand how their work contributes to guest experience and hotel performance. Because the direct relationship between job characteristics and turnover intention was not statistically significant after including work engagement, job redesign initiatives should be evaluated based on whether they strengthen employees' work engagement.

This study's limitations include convenience sampling and a cross-sectional design. Consequently, the findings cannot be statistically generalised to all hotel employees in Serbia, and the temporal or causal order of the examined relationships cannot be established. The mediation analysis tests an indirect relationship rather than providing direct evidence of a process unfolding over time. In addition, all three constructs were measured through employee self-reports collected in a single survey, which may have increased the risk of common method bias. The study was also limited to hotels in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Vrnjačka Banja, and Zlatibor and measured turnover intention rather than subsequent turnover behaviour.

Future studies should examine additional organisational and external factors associated with turnover intention. One limitation of the present study is that it did not measure job satisfaction. Although job satisfaction and work engagement are related, they represent conceptually distinct employee attitudes and may each help explain turnover intention. Future research may therefore examine job satisfaction alongside work engagement, including models that treat the two constructs as correlated mediators between job characteristics and turnover intention. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which employees' perceptions of their jobs relate to their intention to remain with or leave an organisation. Larger and more representative samples, longitudinal research designs, and multiple data sources would also provide a stronger basis for examining temporal ordering and reducing common method bias. Future research could additionally investigate leadership styles, perceived organisational support, and emerging forms of employment as potential antecedents of work engagement and turnover intention in hospitality.

Conclusion

Based on the study findings, employees' perceptions and experiences of their jobs were related to their work engagement and turnover intention. Employees who perceived their job characteristics more positively also reported higher work engagement and lower turnover intention. Moreover, the results indicated a significant indirect effect of job characteristics on turnover intention via work engagement; however, the direct effect was not statistically significant. The main relationships remained statistically significant after controlling for demographic characteristics, organisational level, hotel category, and location.

Job characteristics remained a significant positive predictor of work engagement, whereas work engagement remained a significant negative predictor of turnover intention. None of the demographic control variables, organisational level, hotel category, or location variables were statistically significant predictors in either regression model. Clear task characteristics, greater autonomy, and constructive managerial feedback may contribute to stronger work engagement.

These results suggest that hotels should develop a proactive human resource management strategy, especially when they wish to retain employees. In practical terms, the findings may help hotel organisations develop HRM strategies that improve job design and work engagement and support employee retention. Improvements in the work environment, feedback quality, and opportunities for employee development and empowerment may contribute to greater retention and workforce stability.

Finally, this research provides empirical evidence from Serbia, emphasising the role of work engagement and the relationship between job characteristics and employees' turnover intention. Future research should examine other organisational and psychological factors associated with work engagement and turnover intention in transitional and labour-intensive contexts such as the Serbian hospitality industry.

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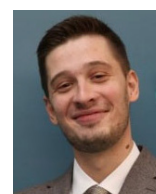


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