

“We are like a family!”: Flexibility and Intention to Stay in Boutique Hotels in Turkey

« Nous sommes comme une famille! » : flexibilité et intention de rester dans les hôtels-boutiques en Turquie

“¡Somos como una familia!”: Flexibilidad e intención de quedarse en los Hoteles Boutique de Turquía

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Article abstract

This study focuses on a unique type of small business—boutique hotels in Istanbul, Turkey—and aims to understand whether employers' use of internal flexibility strategies is associated with boutique hotel employees' intention to stay in their organization. Internal flexibility strategies refer to shiftwork, long workweeks, unpaid overtime, and working preferred hours.

Our study focuses on the experience of employees in boutique hotels in Turkey, which is one of the largest economies globally with its hospitality sector being the eighth largest in the world (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012a and 2012b). We test the conceptual model of internal flexibility strategies and intention to stay using data from 20 interviews and 122 surveys with employees in 32 boutique hotels.

As our qualitative and quantitative study shows, shiftwork decreases boutique hotel employees' intention to stay, but long workweeks and working unpaid overtime do not affect the intention to stay. Furthermore, as our qualitative study shows, the close family-like work environments that exist in boutique hotels contribute to the employees' intention to stay. As our respondents said in the qualitative part of the study: “We're like a family!” and cannot leave our ‘home!’”, despite not liking the shiftwork.

By examining the relationships between flexibility and intention to stay in small workplaces such as boutique hotels, our study contributes to both the academic literature on internal labour flexibility and to the model of intention to stay. For practitioners, this study provides evidence on the use of the type of internal labour flexibility strategies used in boutique hotels, contributing to the understanding of how boutique hotels can be successful in retaining valuable staff.

“We are like a family! ”: Flexibility and Intention to Stay in Boutique Hotels in Turkey

Banu S. Unsal-Akbiyik and Isik U. Zeytinoglu

This study examines the association between the internal labour flexibility of shiftwork, long workweeks, unpaid overtime, working preferred hours, and the intention to stay in boutique hotels in Turkey. We test the conceptual model using data from 20 interviews and 122 surveys with employees in 32 boutique hotels. Results from the interviews show that shiftwork and overtime are the internal labour flexibility strategies adopted, and employees provide flexibility to the employer because they like to work in a friendly, family-like environment. Results from the survey show that only shiftwork is associated with a decline in intention to stay. Conversely, a long workweek, unpaid overtime, and working preferred hours are not associated with the intention to stay. The study contributes to the understanding of the intention to stay in boutique hotels.

KEYWORDS: internal labour flexibility, intention to stay, boutique hotel.

Introduction

Flexibility is often studied in large firms with emphasis on the external flexibility of hiring part-time and temporary workers at the periphery with full-time employees at the core. The external flexibility conceptualization, however, might not apply to small-sized workplaces with few employees. Instead, internal flexibility strategies concerning temporal adjustments such as asking employees to work in shifts, working a long workweek, and unpaid overtime, might be used while considering employees' preferred hours of work. In addition, flexibility strategies that are more common in mature industrialized countries (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2009) might not apply to workplaces in newly industrialized countries such as Turkey that have a different labour market environment (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012a and 2012b). This study focuses on a unique type of small business—boutique hotels in Turkey—, and aims to understand whether employers' use of internal flexibility strategies are associated with boutique hotel employees' intention to stay in their organization.

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The hospitality sector is one of the largest employment sectors in Turkey. Within the hospitality sector, boutique hotels have grown significantly in number in the last few decades. Boutique hotels, as small businesses, differentiate themselves from larger chain/branded hotels and motels by providing personalized accommodation and services/facilities in a family-like environment (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2006). Small businesses apply primarily internal labour flexibility strategies to survive and succeed in the competitive world of work (Mihail, 2004). Examining flexibility in small firms is an emerging topic in the academic literature, despite the significance of these flexibility strategies globally in many firms (Gordon, 2014). The purpose of this study is to examine the association between internal labour flexibility strategies of shiftwork, a long workweek, unpaid overtime, along with working preferred hours, and the intention to stay for those employed in boutique hotels in Turkey.

This study contributes to the intention to stay model and practitioner knowledge in a few ways. First, it is now recognized that the theories developed specifically for large firms might not be transferred to smaller firms, and examining the theoretical applications in small firms can contribute to the enhancement of the theory (Matlay, 1999), making this study's findings important. This study contributes to the understanding of the intention to stay model (Holtom *et al.*, 2008; Steel and Lounsbury, 2009) by focusing on boutique hotels as unique examples of small businesses. Second, enhancing the understanding of why employees stay in their organizations and the effect of internal labour flexibility upon this decision in cultures outside the Anglo-Saxon culture has been advocated by several authors (Gelfand *et al.*, 2007; Holtom *et al.*, 2008; Kalleberg, 2000). Our study addresses this research gap by providing the experience of a newly industrialized country, Turkey, which is outside the Anglo-Saxon culture. Turkey is one of the largest economies globally, and its hospitality sector is the eighth largest in the world (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012a and 2012b). Third, country- and industry-specific analyses on flexibility practices is recommended since what might be a well-accepted flexibility practice in one country might not even exist in another country (Eurofound, 2014; Jung *et al.*, 2016). In this context, this study contributes to practitioner knowledge by showing evidence on how internal labour flexibility in Turkey's boutique hotels is used in retaining valuable staff.

Definitions

Labour flexibility

There are a variety of labour flexibility strategies (Jung *et al.*, 2016; Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2009). We focus on working time flexibility in the context of internal labour flexibility (Grenier *et al.*, 1997) that allows the firm to adjust to changing

circumstances through changes to the internal labour market to match the needs of the business (Kalleberg, 2001). In this study, internal labour flexibility refers to shiftwork, a long workweek, unpaid overtime, and, as we explain below, working preferred hours.

Boutique Hotels

The term "boutique hotel" emphasizes personalized accommodation, services, facilities, close attention to customers and offering services customized to their needs and preferences (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2006). Exceptional personalized service is one of the most important criterion that differentiates boutique hotels from all other kinds of hotels (Khosravi *et al.*, 2014). Boutique hotels have placed emphasis on multi-tasking and motivated employees who make customers feel unique (Khosravi *et al.*, 2014).

The conceptual model of intention to stay in boutique hotels

Retention of valuable employees is important for success as it contributes to customer loyalty (Alexandrov *et al.*, 2007). Being in the experience economy (Pine II and Gilmore, 2011), boutique hotels sell a unique experience and attention to customer needs in an individualized fashion, and employees of these hotels delivering this image are important for the hotels' success. Working conditions in the hospitality sector are often characterized as poor (Dawson *et al.*, 2011), with long work hours, shiftwork and overtime, often unpaid, contributing to a high turnover rate. Hence, there is a high turnover culture in the hospitality sector due to poor working conditions (Iverson and Deery, 1997). Employees leave their current workplace with the hope of finding better working conditions elsewhere, though it is rare in the hospitality sector. With high turnover of coworkers, those who stay in these hotels experience a further increase in their workload and hours worked.

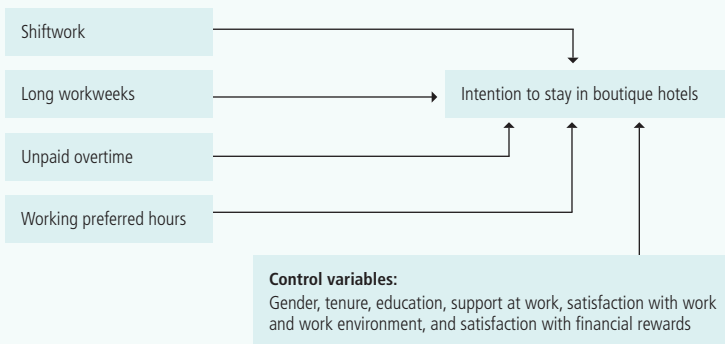
The intention to stay model (Holtom *et al.*, 2008; Iverson and Deery, 1997; Steel and Lounsbury, 2009) states a number of factors, ranging from individual demographic characteristics and attitudinal differences to organizational context, which can affect an individual's intention to stay. Empirical research on the hospitality sector shows that job attitudes such as job satisfaction, socio-demographic factors such as gender, tenure on the job, and education, and organizational factors such as organizational, supervisor and co-worker support are significant in affecting hotel employees' intention to stay (Alexandrov *et al.*, 2007; Cho *et al.*, 2009; Karatepe *et al.*, 2006; Tuzun and Kalemci, 2012). Males with longer tenure (Carberry *et al.*, 2003) and being lower educated (Trevor *et al.*, 2001) are all related to staying in the organization (Allen *et al.*, 2010).

In this study, we go beyond these factors and focus on the less studied internal labour flexibility factors of shiftwork, long workweeks and unpaid overtime, which can affect boutique hotel employees' intention to stay (see the conceptual model of our study presented in Figure 1). Employers use a variety of internal and external labour flexibility strategies (Grenier, Giles and Bélanger, 1997) to adjust to changing demands of the business (Kalleberg, 2000). Internal labour flexibility can be achieved through working time flexibility such as requiring employees to work in shiftwork schedules, long workweeks and overtime, often unpaid (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012a and 2012b). Conversely, external flexibility strategies relate to the firm's ability to adapt to the changing circumstances of business through numerical flexibility by hiring part-time and temporary workers or subcontracting (Grenier, Giles and Bélanger, 1997). In boutique hotels, knowledge of the unique aspects of the job and continuity in the quality of service provided are important for providing exceptional service. Thus, we argue, employers in boutique hotels would prefer to achieve flexibility with currently employed staff by requiring shiftwork and long hours (that is, long workweeks or unpaid overtime), rather than focusing on the flexibility achieved through part-time and temporary workers where training and administrative costs might be higher and the quality of service provided might be lower due to lack of training (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2009). We also examine workers' preferences about their work environment, particularly focusing on their preferred hours of work as a factor that can affect internal labour flexibility in boutique hotels. Those who work their preferred hours would be willing to go the extra mile in assisting their employer in times of need, willing to work a shift schedule, long workweeks and put in overtime hours, even if they are unpaid.

Shiftwork, long workweeks, and unpaid overtime are flexible working arrangements that are primarily demand driven and put in practice for employers'

FIGURE 1

The conceptual model of the associations between internal labour flexibility and the intention to stay in boutique hotels in Turkey



interest (Arrowsmith, 2007; Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2009). Shiftwork is an inherent need in much of the hospitality sector, as it is a continuous operation (Eurofound, 2009). However, shiftwork is shown to contribute to employee turnover (Stavrou and Kilaniotis, 2010). We argue that the deterrent effect of shiftwork on employees staying can also be seen in boutique hotels in Turkey. In accordance with this, we hypothesize the following:

HYPOTHESIS 1: Shiftwork will be negatively associated with Turkish boutique hotel employees' intention to stay.

Turkey has the highest weekly working time compared to European Union member and candidate countries (Eurofound, 2012). The average workweek is 45 hours and more than half of the employees work even longer (Toksoz, 2008). The average weekly working hours in the hotel and restaurant sector in Turkey is 63.5 hours and, compared to manufacturing and other service sectors, it is the sector where employees work the longest (Lee *et al.*, 2007). Long hours of work or overtime, often unpaid, remain the most important source of flexibility in organizations globally (Freyssinet and Michon, 2003). In the hospitality industry, reasons for turnover often include long working hours (Davidson *et al.*, 2011). With long hours of work in the hospitality sector reflected in boutique hotels in Turkey that provide the employer with internal labour flexibility, we argue that this also discourages workers from staying in their employing hotels. We therefore hypothesize that the long workweek, that is a high average hours of work per week, will have a negative effect upon boutique hotel employees' intention to stay.

HYPOTHESIS 2: A long workweek will be negatively associated with Turkish boutique hotel employees' intention to stay.

Overtime working (paid or unpaid) is related to the requirements of the job, labour shortages, and co-worker/supervisor pressure (Campbell, 2002). Smaller firms, compared to larger ones, are more likely to use overtime as an internal labour flexibility measure providing cheaper and immediate solutions to the need to operate continuously (Smith and Zagelmeyer, 2010). The employees in Turkey have a low level of job security and the unemployment rate is high, much above the OECD average (OECD, 2014). In addition, workplaces with fewer than 30 employees are exempt from the job security provisions of the labour law and function in informal labour market conditions, without even being registered under the social security system (Gundogan, 2009). Since boutique hotels are small workplaces (generally with 30 or fewer employees), we argue that employees in these workplaces do not usually have the power to demand and receive their overtime pay, and many might work unpaid overtime. This can negatively affect their intention to stay. Thus, the hypothesis is as follows:

HYPOTHESIS 3: Unpaid overtime will be negatively associated with Turkish boutique hotel employees' intention to stay.

There is a growing body of research evidence that suggests work time mismatches are widespread, with the employees' interest in preferred hours of work differing from what employers offer (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012b; Reynolds and Aletraris, 2010; Souza Poza and Henneberger, 2002). Employees who are able to work the number of hours they prefer are more loyal to their employers, resulting in reduced turnover (Baltes *et al.*, 1999). We argue that for Turkish boutique hotel employees, working preferred hours can be a factor contributing to their intention to stay. Thus, we hypothesize that:

HYPOTHESIS 4: Working preferred hours will be positively associated with Turkish boutique hotel employees' intention to stay.

Method

Research design

This study uses a sequential mixed-methods research design. We started with a qualitative study to explore the flexibility phenomenon in Turkish boutique hotels, followed by quantitative data collection through a survey to examine the internal labour flexibility and intention to stay relationship. The qualitative part of the study was exploratory in nature and aimed to understand the flexible work arrangements that boutique hotel employees in Turkey experienced and how they related these experiences to the intention to stay in their workplaces. The quantitative part of the study was to test the flexibility strategies found in the qualitative exploratory analysis relating to the intention to stay. The triangulation of data collection enriches the understanding of the internal labour flexibility strategies used in boutique hotels in Turkey and their association with the intention to stay.

Data and data collection process

Data were collected with the cooperation of the Association of Historical and Boutique Hotels of Turkey (AHBH) after ethics approvals were obtained from each author's university ethics boards (McMaster Research Ethics Board protocol #MREB-2013-147; Kocaeli University Research Ethics Committee). The AHBH has 100 hotels as members and we conducted our study with 33 of those (5 for the qualitative study, 1 for the pilot testing of the questionnaire, and 27 for the quantitative study).

The process used for qualitative data collection was as follows: we made a list of boutique hotels ($n=49$) in Istanbul, Turkey (the city in which the first author who conducted the interviews was located). Upon ethics approval from both universities, we randomly selected five boutique hotels (10% of $n=49$) for interviews. The number of hotels could have changed depending on the saturation of

the data, though we found that 20 interviews with employees in these five hotels were sufficient, with similar themes emerging by the 20th interview. The qualitative study was conducted by the first author between January 2014 and March 2014 in five AHBH members located in Istanbul. As much as possible, employees from a variety of hotel departments, such as front desk, housekeeping, and general maintenance were targeted for interviews. Written informed consent was collected from all interviewees prior to interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author. The interviewees were all volunteers and were identified by a liaison person in each hotel. We used a scripted telephone message for contacting the liaison people (managers and/or owners). Once we developed the contact, we used a second scripted message inquiring about who could be our liaison person in the hotel, and whether they would allow us to go to the employee lunchroom to introduce the project and set up an interview time and location. We informed the owners/managers that they would get a summary report of results once both qualitative and quantitative parts of the study were completed. We also clearly informed them and the interviewees that the owners/managers would not know whether their employees agreed to be interviewed, and, if any agreed to be interviewed, their names or interview contacts would not be shared in a way that could identify the individuals. Interviews were carried out in the workplace during lunch hours or breaks. Interview questions were designed to identify the kinds of labour flexibility that existed in their workplaces, and to gain an insight into individual experiences with labour flexibility and how it affected their intention to stay. Interviews were audio recorded with the permission of participants and subsequently transcribed by the first author. Interview data were kept in a locked computer by the first author.

For the quantitative study, we developed a survey in the format of a print questionnaire. Pilot testing of the questionnaire was conducted in Istanbul in April 2014 in one of the boutique hotels that was not one of the hotels that participated in the qualitative part of the study. Seven employees participated in the pilot testing of the questionnaire. There were only minor changes in the wording.

For the survey, boutique hotel employees were reached with the help of AHBH and its member hotels. After excluding five hotels included in the qualitative study and the pilot hotel for the survey, we contacted a delegate of the AHBH in each boutique hotel and requested permission to distribute the survey in their hotel. This resulted in the distribution of the survey in 27 boutique hotels. Many employers stated that they had about 5-6 employees, but some said they had 10-15 employees. Based on the number of workers provided by our contacts, 181 questionnaires with self-seal envelopes were left with the general manager or owner to be distributed to all staff. Each questionnaire included a letter of information

about the research project, ensured the participants' confidentiality, and included instructions about how to seal the questionnaire in the envelope after responding, or instructed them to return the blank questionnaire in the same envelope if they chose not to respond. Questionnaires were collected by the researcher two weeks after their distribution. Data collection was completed in December 2014. A total of 153 sealed envelopes were returned; after eliminating those that were blank, 122 questionnaires were found usable giving a 67% response rate.

Qualitative study (interview) questions

The interviews included questions on flexible work arrangements that were identified in the literature as well as practices that they considered as labour flexibility in their workplaces. We also asked them about their working time and working conditions and whether they would "intend to leave their employing hotel because of its working conditions or working time" or not, and whether they would "prefer to work in a big hotel" or not (where pay and working conditions are generally considered as more favourable than in small hotels).

The interview responses suggested the use of internal labour flexibility through temporal (working time) flexibility, rather than, for example, numerical flexibility by hiring part-time or casual employees in boutique hotels in Turkey. Responses showed that shiftwork, long workweeks, and unpaid overtime, along with employees working their preferred hours contributed to the flexibility strategies used in their workplaces, which were then included later in the questionnaire. Open-ended questions on the intention to stay or leave resulted in good comments being made on why they would stay with their current employer (boutique hotel). To maximize the validity of the qualitative study, we used a triangulation method and asked the same questions in a survey. Though we cannot generalize from the findings of this study, the triangulation method allowed a solid foundation for the validity and reliability of the study results.

Quantitative study (survey) instrument

The *New Health Care Worker Questionnaire* (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2007) with some questions adopted from other studies was used as the instrument for quantitative data collection with the permission of the questionnaire's first author. The questionnaire was originally written in English and was first translated by a professional translator into Turkish and then by a different professional translator into English to control for the accuracy of the terminologies used. It was first used in a study of Turkish service sector employees (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012a and 2012b). To validate the items used in the translated scales, the first author of this study, with Turkish as her first language, reviewed each question carefully and adjusted them to the hospitality sector.

Measures

All variables in the quantitative study (survey) that were on Likert-type scales were measured with responses ranging from '1 = strongly disagree' to '5 = strongly agree'. To create scores for each scale or sub-scale, responses to each item were summed. In creating the scales, some of the items were reverse-coded as suggested by the scale developer. Confirmatory factor analyses with 'varimax' rotation were conducted for all scales, and Cronbach's alphas were conducted for reliability testing.

For the *dependent variable* of intention to stay in boutique hotels, Lyons' propensity to leave scale (Lyons, 1971) was used, which included three positively worded items relating to the 'intention to stay'. For example, a sample question was "I would like to stay at this workplace for a long time". The Cronbach's alpha for this scale in the present study was 0.80, making it a reliable scale.

Shiftwork, long workweeks, unpaid overtime, working preferred hours were *independent variables* in this study. Responses to interviews showed these as common flexibility features in boutique hotels in Turkey. Shiftwork was coded '1=yes', '0=no'. A long workweek is measured as the average number of hours worked per week, and the higher the number above the legal 45-hour workweek, the longer the workweek. Unpaid overtime was measured by asking respondents if they had worked unpaid overtime in the last two-week pay period. Responses to this question were dichotomized with '1 = Yes, worked unpaid overtime', and '0 = No, not worked unpaid overtime'. Paid overtime was included in the questionnaire but is not covered in this paper since the responses showed that there were very few who worked paid overtime, and the data did not allow us to conduct a meaningful analysis. For working preferred hours, respondents were asked to indicate whether they would prefer to work more, the same or fewer hours with '1 = prefer more or fewer hours' indicating not working preferred hours and '0 = same' indicating working preferred hours.

Control variables were gender, tenure in the sector, education, support at work, and job satisfaction. They were coded as: gender ('1=male', '0=female'), tenure (years), education ('1=university degree or 2-year college degree', '0=high school or lower'). For job satisfaction, the *Job Satisfaction Survey* (JSS), developed by Spector (1997), was used. The JSS assesses nine facets of job satisfaction consisting of 36 items. However, when reliabilities of all nine facets were evaluated, the subscale 'rules and procedures' had a very low reliability and were omitted from the study. Based on Zeytinoglu *et al.* (2007), we measured job satisfaction along with its two components, 'satisfaction with work and work environment' and 'satisfaction with financial rewards'. The Cronbach's alphas for the scales showed good reliability ($\alpha = 0.80$ and 0.81 , respectively).

Satisfaction with work and the work environment consisted of 20 items that measure satisfaction with the supervisor, contingent rewards, coworkers, the nature of work, and communication. Satisfaction with financial rewards, using 12 items, was assessed as satisfaction with pay, promotion opportunities and fringe benefits. The support at work scale was from Denton *et al.* (2002) with organizational support and supervisor support (six-item scales) and peer support as a four-item scale. Sample items for each scale were: 'My workplace supports me in time of personal crisis, illness or needing time off to help care for other family members'; 'My supervisor appreciates my work'; 'The people I work with take a personal interest in me'. The scales showed a good reliability with high Cronbach's alphas ($\alpha = 0.73, 0.89, 0.91$, respectively).

Analysis

For the qualitative part of the study, a thematic analysis was undertaken by the first author to explore and identify the kinds of labour flexibility strategies the boutique hotels had. Content analysis of the interviews was also conducted by the first author to gain insight into the association between labour flexibility and the intention to stay in boutique hotels. Next, both authors met to review draft themes and relationships emerged from the interviews. The authors then established a coding scheme. With the coding scheme, the first author read and coded interview transcripts for emerging themes on labour flexibility and relationships, that is, the reasons they gave for their intention to stay and comparisons they provided regarding working in a small hotel versus working in a large hotel. Then both authors met and reviewed the themes and relationships that emerged and discussed possible quotes from the interviews. There was consensus between the authors on the emerging themes from the qualitative data (consensus at about 95% of the time). We followed standard qualitative research procedures to ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the analysis (Marshall and Rossman, 2016; Creswell, 2014). The triangulation of data sources, collecting rich data through direct quotes from the participants, and peer review of the analysis processes contributed to the soundness of the qualitative analysis.

For the quantitative part of the study, descriptive statistics, correlations and a hierarchical regression analysis were conducted. In the hierarchical regression first control variables were entered. In the second step, shiftwork, average weekly hours, unpaid overtime and working preferred hours variables were entered. The equal interval assumption was used for the Likert scale measurement of dependent, independent and control variables. To reduce missing data in the analyses, an item-level mean imputation method was used if the missing data were less than 5% in the item. Missing values in the unpaid overtime variable were coded as '0' meaning no unpaid overtime was done. To show the variance explained by the factors in the study, R^2 and adjusted R^2 were provided.

The subjectively assessed variables may not be completely independent from each other, and thus collinearity diagnostics were also conducted. Collinearity with the dependent variable was not found. We checked the Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) of all variables. The results showed that VIFs ranged between 1.18 and 2.60, which is well below the accepted cut-off value of 10. Therefore, we rule out any concerns about collinearity. Further, to test for common method variance (CMV), we ran Harman's single-factor test to point out if the majority of the variance can be explained by a single factor (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). None of the items have significant factor loadings for the CMV latent factor indicating that CMV is not a concern.

Descriptive statistics of respondents

For the qualitative data, thirteen interviewees were male. The job tenure of the interview participants ranged from 7 months to 8 years. Three were supervisors, and the rest were employees. Six interviewees had a Bachelor's or a two-year college degree, and the rest (14) had a high school degree or below. All of the interviewees had continuous full-time employment.

For the quantitative data, Table 1 provides descriptive statistics of all variables we use in the analysis. In terms of the demographic characteristics of respondents, the majority are male (70 %). Respondents' tenure in the sector range from 1 to 44 years, with the average tenure being 10 years. Sixty three percent of respondents had lower than a university degree or a two-year college degree. Referring to satisfaction, the satisfaction with work and work environment scale showed slightly more satisfaction than dissatisfaction ($M = 74.8$, $SD = 11.6$) and for the satisfaction with financial rewards scale, respondents were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their jobs ($M = 36.36$, $SD = 9.84$). Referring to support at work, their organization, supervisor and peers supported them at work ($M = 23.46$, $SD = 6.30$; $M = 24.24$, $SD = 5.16$; $M = 16.32$, $SD = 3.60$, respectively).

Results

Qualitative Results

In the interviews, we asked what kind of labour flexibility strategies applied in their workplaces. A substantial majority of interviewees work on a shift basis and work overtime (17 and 13 out of 20, respectively). Interviewees were asked how many hours of overtime they had worked in the last fifteen days. In response, they said, on average, more than 12 hours in a two-week period. Further, they were also asked whether they received any payment for their overtime hours. In response, they stated that they did not receive any payment for overtime work. During these interviews, we learned that the general approach of the

TABLE 1
Means, standard deviations and correlations between intention to stay, internal labour flexibility measures and control variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Intention to stay	10.44	3.09	-												
2. Shiftwork	61.00	-	-.116*	-											
3. Long workweeks	55.00	8.51	-.250	-.124	-										
4. Unpaid overtime	88.00	-	-.028	-.200*	-.170	-									
5. Working preferred hours	53.00	-	-.124	-.149	.299***	.153	-								
6. Organizational support	23.46	6.30	.225**	.000	-.368**	-.024	-.309**	-							
7. Supervisor support	24.24	5.16	.559**	.067	-.068	-.010	-.190*	.364**	-						
8. Peer Support	16.32	3.60	.443**	-.045	-.089	.165	-.148	.276**	.620**	-					
9. Satisfaction with work and work environment	74.80	11.6	.500**	.222*	-.353**	-.069	-.377**	.354**	.527**	.280**	-				
10. Satisfaction with financial rewards	36.36	9.84	.393**	.226*	-.242**	-.185*	-.321**	.529**	.577**	.398**	.657**	-			
11. Gender (Male)	70.00	-	.018	.255	.156	.157	.009	-.008	.106	.094	.050	-.135	-		
12. Tenure	10.32	8.99	.075	.018	.190*	-.108	-.109	-.081	.214*	.127	.201*	.260**	.155	-	
13. Education (lower than university degree or two-year college degree)	63.00	-	-.133	.133	-.266*	-.022	-.084	-.197*	-.056*	.075	-.086	-.043	.207*	.208*	-

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

interviewees is to accept the overtime work, often on an unpaid basis, as they consider overtime an expected component of their job and they are happy in their working environment regardless of being paid for overtime or not. As examples of this approach, they said:

Sometimes, I worked more than ten hours in a day. For example, my boss asked me to replace my friend who was sick or unable to come to work. I accepted this offer without thinking about the overtime payment as this does not matter to me. If the same thing happened to me, I would easily get permission from my boss. I do not want to ruin this family environment provided by my boss. He is very friendly.

Overtime working is very common; it is a norm in the hospitality sector so I do not even think about not working overtime. If I work in this hotel, I have to work overtime. We are not many here.

In light of the above given examples, there is evidence that the employees, being part of small firms such as boutique hotels, accept to work overtime without pay as they do not want to lose their jobs and affect the family environment. They said that unpaid overtime is not related to their intention to stay or leave. The employees tended to respect their employers as they think they are being treated well, like a family member, with employers caring for their wellbeing, and the relationships between employers, supervisors and co-workers are pleasant enough to do unpaid overtime work. The employees said the workplace resembles a family environment where everyone pitches in and supports each other in difficult times, such as times of illness.

We got mixed responses for shiftwork. Some interviewees said there were advantages to shiftwork while others stated the opposite.

A married woman commented:

It is an advantage for me to be a part of a small firm because I can arrange my shifts in accordance with the times suitable for me. For example, if I have a morning shift I can be at home in the afternoon and spend some time with my family. Also, if I have something to do in the morning, I can work the afternoon shift by only requesting it from my boss.

This remark shows that shiftwork can be preferable for some workers. On the other hand a married man with two children explained just the opposite:

It is a disadvantage for me to work at shifts as the times for shift work may be unsocial times. In other words, I may work during the weekend or in the evenings and cannot spend time with my family as all of my family members are only available at those times. Further, sometimes, I am also required to work overtime at another shift due to reasons such as absence of one of the employees. I cannot say no to my employer when he asks me to work to cover for the absent employee.

Quantitative results

First focusing on the *descriptive statistics*, as we present in Table 1, the intention to stay was high among respondents (M=10.44, SD=3.09)). In terms of the independent variables, 61% of respondents were involved in shiftwork. Respondents worked, on average, 55 hours per week and 88% reported working unpaid overtime in the last 2-week period and 53 % worked hours that were not their preference.

Correlations, as presented in Table 1, revealed that the intention to stay is significantly and negatively correlated with shiftwork (-.116, $p<.05$). Long workweeks, unpaid overtime and working preferred hours did not demonstrate a significant relationship with the intention to stay.

Regression analysis

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis are presented in Table 2. The conceptual model, after hypothesis testing and incorporating the qualitative study findings, is included in Figure 2. Gender, educational level, tenure, support at work and job satisfaction were entered as control variables in the first step. The results showed that gender, educational level and organizational tenure did not contribute significantly to the association of intention to stay. Supervisor, peer support, and satisfaction with work and work environment were significantly and positively associated with the intention to stay. These variables in the model contributed to 34% of the variance explained for the intention to stay (Adj. $R^2=.338$, $p<.001$).

Hypotheses 1 stated that shiftwork will be negatively associated with boutique hotel employees' intention to stay. Table 2, step 2 of the hierarchical regression

FIGURE 2
The revised conceptual model, after hypotheses testing, of the associations between internal labour flexibility and the intention to stay in boutique hotels in Turkey

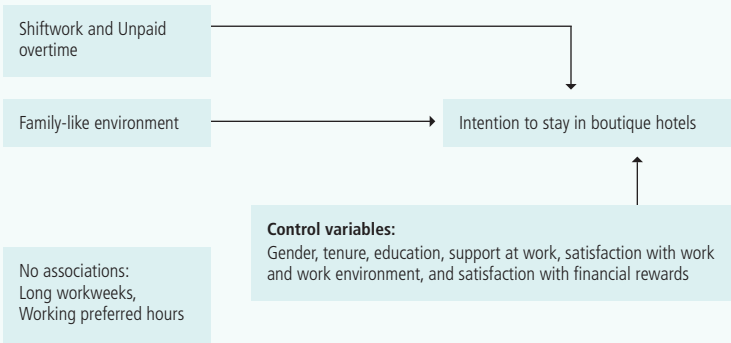


TABLE 2

Internal labour flexibility factors and intention to stay for boutique hotel employees in Turkey (Hierarchical regression analysis controlling for demographic, support at work and job satisfaction)

Variables	1 st Step	1 st Step	2 nd Step	2 nd Step
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Constant	-.052	.539	-.147	.652
Gender	-.042	.171	.054	.175
Tenure	-.008	.009	-.012	.009
Education	-.241	.169	-.254	.170
Organizational support	-.137	.091	-.163	.092
Supervisor support	.297*	.133	.265*	.132
Peer support	.226*	.107	.212*	.108
Satisfaction with work and work environment	.082**	.131	.119**	.131
Satisfaction with financial rewards	.546	.202	.713	.206
Internal labour flexibility factors				
Shiftwork	-	-	-.496**	.171
Long workweeks	-	-	.007	.011
Unpaid overtime	-	-	-.160	.197
Working preferred hours	-	-	.029	.172
R ²	.381	-	.436	-
Δ R ²	-	-	.055	-
Adj. R ²	.338	-	.377	-

*p<0.05; **p<0.01

analysis shows that Hypothesis 1 was supported. Those who worked in shifts did not have the intention to stay. The magnitude of β for the shiftwork variable ($\beta = .235$, $p < .01$) showed that following job satisfaction with work and work environment ($\beta = .310$, $p < .01$) and supervisor support ($\beta = .249$, $p < .05$), shiftwork was a significant factor in explaining the intention to stay or leave for boutique hotel employees in our study. (The magnitudes are not shown in Table 2, However, the full table is available from the first author.)

Hypothesis 2 stated that long workweeks will be negatively associated with boutique hotel employees' intention to stay. Hypothesis 3 stated that unpaid overtime will also be negatively associated with boutique hotel employees' intention to stay. Furthermore, hypothesis 4 stated that working preferred hours

will be negatively associated with boutique hotel employees' intention to stay. However, results showed that none of these variables were associated with intention to stay, and the null hypotheses cannot be rejected. The shiftwork variable and the other internal labour flexibility variables added 5.5% variance in explaining the intention to stay, with all variables included explaining 38% ($\text{Adj. } R^2 = .377$, $p < .001$).

Discussion and conclusions

The results show that employees in our study seem to consider shiftwork as an undesirable characteristic of their work that is negatively associated with the intention to stay in the organization. Shiftwork is particularly associated with the disruption to family life, health, and social life (Lee *et al.*, 2007). Shiftwork being a factor in decreasing employees' intention to stay in boutique hotels in Turkey is in line with findings from other studies (Stavrou and Kilaniotis, 2010). As shiftwork is an inherent need in much of the hospitality industry, including the boutique hotels, the employees are aware of shiftwork expectations when they are recruited to a position in a hotel. Despite that, the boutique hotel employees foresee shiftwork as a restriction on their lives when they do not have control over when they work, and cannot manage their family obligations and personal life demands.

Based on the literature (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012a, 2012b and 2009), we argued that long workweeks, unpaid overtime, and not working preferred hours would be undesirable job characteristics that would negatively contribute to employees' intention to stay. However, when the effects of other factors are controlled, we found no significant relationship between these adverse job characteristics and employees' intention to stay in boutique hotels in Turkey. This might be perhaps because unpaid overtime and long workweeks are common in the boutique hotels sector in Turkey. These are expected features of the work environment in such hotels, as our respondents said in the interviews. The non-significant associations between these undesirable job characteristics and employees' intention to stay in this sample might be related to the organizational culture of the hospitality industry, where employees are expected to work long and irregular hours (Yavas *et al.*, 2004) and employees form their expectations accordingly. Moreover, employees might accept these working conditions even if they are not their preferred hours of work because many of these hotels, as small workplaces, are exempt from labour law in Turkey (Gundogan, 2009). Knowing the insecurity provided by the legislation, employees in boutique hotels might agree to work long workweeks and cannot claim overtime due to a fear of jeopardizing their future employment opportunities. These employees are aware of the fact that if they had worked in another boutique hotel they could not claim their overtime

payment either. Thus, employees might consider their working conditions acceptable and do not associate these conditions as factors in their decision to stay in the organization.

In addition, other factors such as support at work and job satisfaction, which we included to control for their known effects on intention to stay (Alexandrov *et al.*, 2007; Cho *et al.*, 2009; Karatepe *et al.*, 2006; Tuzun and Kalemci, 2012), showed a positive association with the intention to stay for these boutique hotel employees. In particular, supervisor and peer support at work and satisfaction with work and the work environment are important factors influencing Turkish boutique hotel employees' intention to stay. The supervisor is usually the hotel's owner or manager in the boutique hotels. They are the main agents responsible for managing the hotel and act as organizational representatives (Maertz *et al.*, 2007). A supportive supervisor may be able to cover for the shortcomings of a boutique hotel's work environment and contribute to the retention of good quality workers (Maertz *et al.*, 2007). As our qualitative study showed, relationships with peers are important in boutique hotels where employees are dependent on each other to handle their tasks and replace each other when one is not available at work. They enjoy good relations with the owners/managers and co-workers because of the informality and interdependence with each other. It is, as in many other small firms (Ram and Edwards, 2003), an environment analogous to a family unit. Thus, employees intend to stay in their workplaces.

Contributions to the intention to stay model and practice in boutique hotels

This study contributes to the understanding of the intention to stay model (Holtom *et al.*, 2008; Iverson and Deery, 1997; Steel and Lounsbury, 2009) by focusing on the internal labour flexibility strategies of employees in boutique hotels, as an example of small workplaces. The study showed that shiftwork was a significant flexibility strategy that is negatively associated with the intention to stay in boutique hotels in Turkey. In addition to the undesirable work factor of shiftwork as a deterrent relating to the intention to stay, we also examined other internal labour flexibility strategies, namely, the long workweeks, unpaid overtime and working preferred hours. Our study showed none of these were related to employees' intention to stay, at least for employees in Turkish boutique hotels, contributing to the conceptual understanding of the intention to stay.

For practitioners, particularly for employers in boutique hotels or similar small firms, this study contributes to the understanding that internal labour flexibility strategies that are associated with employees' intention to stay are different from those traditionally thought to have an effect, such as long workweeks, working paid or unpaid overtime, or working preferred hours. These strategies have no

association with employees' intention to stay or leave their workplaces. Shiftwork is the only strategy that affects workers' intention and the effect is negative for the intention to stay. As our qualitative study showed, employees stay with their employers if they consider the workplace to be like a family environment where people care for each other and look after each other. Perhaps practitioners in boutique hotels and similar small businesses might want to capitalize on these 'family-like work environment' feelings as a means of retaining their valuable employees. Additionally, selecting individuals who consider shiftwork as a positive aspect of the work environment, as some of our respondents said because it allows them to spend time managing the other demands on their lives, can contribute to retaining valuable employees.

Limitations and future research suggestions

There are some limitations to our study that must be taken into consideration. First, as it is limited to boutique hotels in Turkey and has a small sample size, results cannot be generalized to all Turkish hospitality sector employees or similarly situated hospitality sector employees in other countries. Second, this is a cross-sectional study conducted in a natural environment with no control group. Thus, we are able to show associations between variables and cannot discuss causal inferences. We recommend further studies on the topic in different hospitality sector workplaces, sectors and countries, to substantiate the results. In addition, future research could also examine the association between organizational culture in boutique hotels and the intention to stay relationship, in Turkey and in other countries.

Conclusion

This study examines the association between internal labour flexibility comprising of shiftwork, long workweeks, unpaid overtime, and working preferred hours, and the intention to stay in boutique hotels in Turkey. As our qualitative and quantitative study shows, shiftwork decreases boutique hotel employees' intention to stay but long workweeks and working unpaid overtime are not related to the intention to stay. As our qualitative study shows, friendly, family-like work environments in boutique hotels contribute to the employees' intention to stay. The study contributes both to the academic literature on internal labour flexibility as well as to the model of intention to stay by examining the relationships between flexibility and the intention to stay in the small workplaces of boutique hotels. For practitioners, this study provides evidence on the type of internal labour flexibility strategies used in boutique hotels contributing to the understanding of how boutique hotels can be successful in retaining valuable staff.

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SUMMARY

“We are like a family!”: Flexibility and Intention to Stay in Boutique Hotels in Turkey

This study focuses on a unique type of small business—boutique hotels in Istanbul, Turkey—, and aims to understand whether employers’ use of internal flexibility strategies is associated with boutique hotel employees’ intention to stay in their organization. Internal flexibility strategies refer to shiftwork, long workweeks, unpaid overtime, and working preferred hours.

Our study focuses on the experience of employees in boutique hotels in Turkey, which is one of the largest economies globally with its hospitality sector being the eighth largest in the world (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012a and 2012b). We test the conceptual model of internal flexibility strategies and intention to stay using data from 20 interviews and 122 surveys with employees in 32 boutique hotels.

As our qualitative and quantitative study shows, shiftwork decreases boutique hotel employees’ intention to stay, but long workweeks and working unpaid overtime do not affect the intention to stay. Furthermore, as our qualitative study shows, the close family-like work environments that exist in boutique hotels contribute to the employees’ intention to stay. As our respondents said in the qualitative part of the study: “‘We’re like a family!’ and cannot leave our ‘home!’”, despite not liking the shiftwork.

By examining the relationships between flexibility and intention to stay in small workplaces such as boutique hotels, our study contributes to both the academic literature on internal labour flexibility and to the model of intention to stay. For practitioners, this study provides evidence on the use of the type of internal labour flexibility strategies used in boutique hotels, contributing to the understanding of how boutique hotels can be successful in retaining valuable staff.

KEYWORDS: internal labour flexibility, intention to stay, boutique hotel.

RÉSUMÉ

« Nous sommes comme une famille! » : flexibilité et intention de rester dans les hôtels-boutiques en Turquie

Cette étude, qui se concentre sur un type unique de petites entreprises, les hôtels-boutiques à Istanbul, en Turquie, vise à cerner si l’utilisation de stratégies de flexibilité interne par les employeurs est associée à l’intention des employés de tels hôtels de demeurer dans leur organisation. Les stratégies de flexibilité interne réfèrent à l’utilisation de quarts de travail, à la semaine de travail allongée, au temps supplémentaire non rémunéré et aux heures de travail préférées par les employés.

Notre étude est centrée sur l’expérience des employés dans des hôtels-boutiques en Turquie, l’une des grandes économies globales dont le secteur de l’hôtellerie est

le huitième au monde (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012a et 2012b). Nous y testons le modèle conceptuel des stratégies de flexibilité interne ainsi que l'intention de rester en utilisant les données de 20 entretiens et 122 questionnaires recueillis auprès des employés de 32 hôtels-boutiques.

Comme le montre notre étude à la fois qualitative et quantitative, le recours aux quarts de travail réduit l'intention des employés des hôtels-boutiques de rester, tandis que le recours à la semaine de travail allongée et aux heures supplémentaires non rémunérées n'ont aucune incidence sur l'intention de rester. De plus, notre volet qualitatif montre que les environnements de travail de type familial ou avec recours aux proches contribuent à l'intention de rester. Comme nos répondants l'ont exprimé dans la partie qualitative de cette étude : « 'Nous sommes comme une famille!' et ne pouvons pas quitter notre 'maison'! », même s'ils n'approuvent pas le recours aux quarts de travail.

En examinant les relations entre la flexibilité et l'intention de rester dans de petits milieux de travail tels que les hôtels-boutiques, notre étude contribue tant à la littérature académique sur la flexibilité interne du travail qu'au modèle d'intention de rester dans un emploi. Pour les praticiens, cette étude fournit des données empiriques sur l'utilisation du type de stratégies internes de flexibilité du travail utilisées dans les hôtels-boutiques, contribuant ainsi à la compréhension de la façon dont les hôtels-boutiques peuvent réussir à retenir leur personnel de valeur.

MOTS-CLÉS: flexibilité interne du travail, intention de rester, hôtel-boutique.

RESUMEN

"¡Somos como una familia!": Flexibilidad e intención de quedarse en los Hoteles Boutique de Turquía

Este estudio enfoca un tipo único de pequeño negocio — los hoteles boutique en Estambul, Turquía —, y busca comprender si el uso de estrategias de flexibilidad por los empleadores está asociado con las intenciones de los empleados de hoteles boutique de permanecer trabajando en esas organizaciones. Las estrategias de flexibilidad interna se refieren al trabajo por turnos, largas semanas de trabajo, horas extraordinarias no remuneradas y horarios de trabajo preferentes.

Nuestro estudio se centra en la experiencia de los empleados de hoteles boutique en Turquía, que es una de las economías más grandes del mundo, cuyo sector hotelero es el octavo más grande del mundo (Zeytinoglu *et al.*, 2012a y 2012b). Nos inspiramos del modelo conceptual de estrategias de flexibilidad interna y la intención de permanecer utilizando datos de 20 entrevistas y 122 encuestas con empleados en 32 hoteles boutique.

Nuestro estudio cualitativo y cuantitativo pone en evidencia que el trabajo por turnos reduce la intención de los empleados de hoteles boutique de quedarse, pero las largas semanas de trabajo y las horas extraordinarias no remuneradas no

afectan la intención de quedarse. Además, nuestro estudio cualitativo muestra que los entornos de trabajo casi familiares que existen en los hoteles boutique contribuyen a la intención de los empleados de quedarse. Como dijeron nuestros entrevistados en la parte cualitativa del estudio: «¡Somos como una familia! ¡Y no podemos abandonar nuestro 'hogar'!», a pesar de que no les guste el trabajo por turnos.

Al examinar las relaciones entre la flexibilidad y la intención de permanecer en pequeños lugares de trabajo, como los hoteles boutique, nuestro estudio contribuye tanto a la literatura académica sobre la flexibilidad laboral interna como al modelo de intención de permanecer.

Para los profesionales, este estudio proporciona evidencias sobre el uso del tipo de estrategias internas de flexibilidad laboral utilizadas en los hoteles boutique, lo que contribuye a la comprensión de cómo los hoteles boutique pueden tener éxito en la retención de personal valioso.

PALABRAS CLAVES: flexibilidad laboral interna, intención de permanecer, hotel boutique.