

## ความพร้อมสำหรับแรงงานสูงวัยในอุตสาหกรรมโรงแรมของจังหวัดภูเก็ต ประเทศไทย: มุมมองของบุคลากรฝ่ายทรัพยากรบุคคล

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### Readiness for Senior Workers in the Phuket Hotel Industry, Thailand: Perspective of Human Resource Professionals

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#### บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจข้อได้เปรียบและข้อเสียของการจ้างงานให้กับผู้สูงวัย เพื่อสำรวจโอกาสและข้อจำกัดของงานของพวกเขา และเพื่อประเมินความพร้อมในการจ้างงานสำหรับผู้สูงวัยในอุตสาหกรรมโรงแรมมาจากมุมมองของบุคลากรทรัพยากรบุคคล การวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพนี้ใช้การสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้าง บุคลากรฝ่ายทรัพยากรบุคคลจากโรงแรมต่าง ๆ ในภูเก็ต จำนวนสิบราย ถูกเลือกในการทำวิจัยนี้โดยการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจง ผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นถึงโอกาสในการจ้างงานที่จำกัดสำหรับผู้สูงวัยเนื่องจากพลังงานของร่างกายลดลง ความยืดหยุ่นลดลง และค่าใช้จ่ายเพิ่มขึ้น อย่างไรก็ตาม โรงแรมที่มีประสบการณ์การดำเนินงานยาวนานมีแนวโน้มที่สูงขึ้นในการจ้างงานแรงงานสูงวัย การศึกษานี้เสนอว่านโยบายจากภาครัฐและบทบาทเฉพาะที่ได้เปรียบจากการใช้ประสบการณ์ของผู้สูงวัยอาจเสริมสร้างโอกาสในการหางานที่ดีขึ้น นอกจากนี้ การศึกษานี้ยังเสนอผลกระทบ ข้อจำกัดของการศึกษา และทิศทางสำหรับการวิจัยในอนาคต

#### Abstract

This study aimed to explore the advantages and disadvantages of employment for senior workers, to investigate their job opportunities and constraints, and to assess the readiness for senior employment in hotel industry, from a human resources professional's perspective. Using a qualitative approach with semi-structured interview, ten human resources professionals from different hotels in Phuket were recruited in this study based on a purposive sampling technique. Findings indicate limited employment prospects for senior workers due to decreased physical energy, flexibility, and increased costs. Notably, hotels with a longer history showed a greater inclination to hire seniors. The study recommends government interventions and the creation of specialized roles leveraging the experience of senior workers to enhance job prospects. The paper also addresses implications, study limitations, and avenues for future research.

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#### 1. Introduction

The global population is rapidly ageing, with the United Nations (2020) projecting an increase from 727 million individuals aged 65 and above in 2020 to over 1.5 billion by 2050. In Thailand, the ageing situation is evident, as of December 31, 2020, with 11.63 million residents aged 60 and older (Department of Older Persons, 2020). Projections

anticipate a continual rise in this demographic until 2050, with Thailand expected to rank second among ASEAN nations, with 23.1% of its population being older than 65 by 2035, trailing only Singapore (United Nations, 2020).

This demographic shift poses employment challenges for Thailand, aggravated by a declining birth reported by the World Bank (2021). Recently, the hospitality industry in Phuket is experiencing labor shortages, particularly in roles such as waiters, receptionists, housekeepers, and kitchen staff, respectively (Prasomthong, 2019; Shoowong, 2022). Prasomthong (2019) attributes the shortage to under qualified, inadequate wages, and insufficient provided welfare benefit. Industries heavily reliant on manpower, including hotels, are increasingly considering the senior demographic as a potential solution to impending labor shortages.

However, the implications of hiring senior workers, especially in the hotel sector, are actively being discussed and examined within the context of the hotel industry. There is no unanimous agreement among practitioners and scholars about the benefits and challenges posed by senior employment in this sector. This study delves into this subject, aiming to evaluate the potential job opportunities, constraints, benefits, and drawbacks of hiring senior workers in the hotel industry. Central to this inquiry is the perspective of human resources personnel, the strategists responsible for navigating the complexities of an evolving workforce.

Furthermore, Phuket has gained recognition as a globally acclaimed tourist destination, characterized by the highest total visitor expenditure per resident among all destinations worldwide and ranking within the top ten for international tourists' expenditures (Mastercard, 2019). This locale presents an exemplary context for examining the demand for labor in diverse accommodations. Consequently, this study has three objectives: to study the advantages and disadvantages of hiring senior workers from hotel HR perspectives, to investigate senior workers' job opportunities and constraints, and to evaluate readiness in diverse organizational structures in hotels.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Senior worker

Globally, demographic shifts, marked by an increasing ageing population and declining fertility rates, result from advances in medical practices enhancing longevity and the retirement of the baby boom generation (Van Droogenbroeck & Spruyt, 2016; Vigtel, 2018). In literature, the terms "mature worker" and "senior worker" are often used interchangeably, generally denoting individuals aged 50 and above (Andersen & Sundstrup, 2019; Kitamura et al., 2020; Koh et al., 2020). Despite a consensus on this age range, organizational studies exhibit variability in defining senior workers, with thresholds ranging from 40 and above to 60 and above (Kornadt & Rothermund, 2011; McGregor, 2007). Notably, in sectors like hospitality, senior workers are typically considered those over 50 due to the industry's lower average age (Cheung & Woo, 2021). Collectively, research predominantly refers to individuals aged 40 to 65 and above (Beehr & Bennett, 2014; Turek & Perek-Bialas, 2013).

Research consistently reveals prevalent negative perceptions of ageing in the work place. Senior workers, often not appreciated for their experience encounter assumptions linked to declining physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities (Koh et al., 2020; Smith, 2018). These stereotypes, emphasized in the literature (Koh et al., 2020; Vinstrup et al., 2021), lead to tangible consequences. Employers internalizing these biases impact decision-making, affecting senior workers' job prospects, promotions, training, welfare, and even decisions on termination and retirement. Rooted in the unfounded belief that age implies diminished capability and creativity, these biases manifest as "age discrimination" (Shore & Goldberg, 2004; Solem, 2015), an active form of prejudice, senior workers, subjected to such discrimination, face less

favorable judgments than younger counterparts, despite comparable competencies and skills. Beyond the professional realm, these stereotypes and biases take an emotional and psychological toll on senior workers, fostering feelings of powerlessness, diminished self-worth, and a sense of being unneeded or redundant (Kira & Klehe, 2016; Thomassen et al., 2009).

Contrary to prevailing biases, a plethora of studies highlight the benefits of senior workers, emphasizing their corporate knowledge, networking abilities, best practices, and key contributions to organizational culture (Hannon, 2017). Acting as balancing agents, senior workers harmonize the differing work styles across generations (Leopold, 2016). Wikström et al. (2018) stress the retention of valuable knowledge through senior workers who, as specialists, can transfer expertise to younger peers through mentoring and coaching (Napathorn, 2021), providing a competitive advantage for companies (Ann & Blum, 2020).

The literature suggests that senior workers could address impending economic and social challenges, especially concerning anticipated skilled labor shortages. However, capitalizing on this demographic requires organizations to adopt age-friendly environments and strategies, a shift not yet widespread in the commercial sector.

## **2.2 Understanding the motives and desires of senior workers**

With a rapidly ageing society, the motivations of senior workers to continue working have taken center stage in organizational studies. A multi-faceted approach shows that their motivations are driven by diverse factors ranging from health to life purpose. Sewdas et al. (2017) identified six key areas that motivate senior workers to continue working. These are: health, work characteristics, skills and knowledge, social influences, financial incentives, and purpose in life.

### **2.2.1. Health**

A primary motivation for individuals to work past their retirement age is the desire to maintain regular activities and secure financial stability, as indicated by Sewdas et al. (2017). Kadijk et al. (2019) and Lahti et al. (2017) highlighted that poor mental and physical health could impact productivity, making wellness a vital factor for those opting to work beyond their retirement years (Dingemans et al., 2016; Kooij et al., 2008; Sewdas et al., 2017). While certain health issues drive some senior workers to consider early retirement (as noted by de Wind et al., 2013; Sewdas et al., 2017), others in good health may opt for early retirement to relish their later years or pursue aspirations they could not accomplish earlier in life (de Wind et al., 2013; Pond et al., 2009). Moreover, studies by le Blanc et al. (2019), Reynolds et al. (2012), and Sewdas et al. (2017) suggest that continuing to work can enhance seniors' sense of well-being.

### **2.2.2. Work characteristics**

According to research by Napathorn (2021) and Sewdas et al. (2017), many senior workers lean towards part-time roles over full-time positions. This preference stems from their desire for a balanced work-life dynamic (Mauno et al., 2013; Napathorn, 2021; Reynolds et al., 2012) and a need for more flexible work arrangements (Sewdas et al., 2017; Ulrich & Brott, 2005).

### **2.2.3. Skills and knowledge**

Senior workers possess valuable professional expertise and knowledge that they can impart to younger colleagues, thus boosting company productivity (Ann & Blum, 2020; Hannon, 2017; Napathorn, 2021; Sewdas et al., 2017; Wikström et al., 2018). De Wind et al. (2013) pointed out that those actively involved in skills and knowledge enhancement often delay retirement. Furthermore, Tunney and Oude Mulders (2021) noted that companies tend to re-employ or hire senior workers largely due to their exceptional expertise and experience.

#### 2.2.4. Social influences

In terms of social influences, positive relationships with colleagues serve as a compelling reason for individuals to keep working instead of staying home in isolation (Sewdas et al., 2017; Voronina et al., 2019). Moreover, Ann and Blum (2019) highlighted that interactions with peers can play a role in job contentment and the decision to stay or leave a position, independent of one's age (Gellert & Schalk, 2012).

#### 2.2.5. Financial benefit

Regarding economic motivations, research by Fasbender et al. (2019) and Kooij et al. (2008) have found that many seniors are compelled to remain employed due to inadequate post-retirement savings. Additionally, Napathorn (2021) has emphasized the potential insufficiency of Thailand's social security offerings in sustaining the living standards of the elderly post-retirement. This leads to various financial challenges for seniors, such as decreased pension funds, rising living expenses, and continuing mortgage payments, as highlighted by both Napathorn (2021) and Sewdas et al. (2017).

#### 2.2.6. Purpose in life

According to the dimension of purpose in life, several ageing workers want to maintain their daily lives by working to ensure they have goals (Sewdas et al., 2017). Further, Rahn et al. (2021) investigated that a lack of social connections contributes negatively to the general well-being of senior people.

However, as highlighted by Tunney and Oude Mulders (2021), the majority of employers do not view hiring older workers as a hindrance to the younger workforce's opportunities. Even companies grappling with hiring challenges do not believe that employing seniors obstructs the career trajectories of the younger generation. Further, le Blanc et al. (2019) and van Dam et al. (2009) concur that a stimulating and rewarding workplace can make employees reconsider opting for early retirement. Additionally, if the job demands are moderate, older workers might be inclined to delay their retirement, as suggested by Zappalà et al. (2008).

### 2.3 Senior workers' situation in Thailand

According to data from the World Bank in 2021, Thailand had a working-age population of 57 million in 2019. However, only 67 percent of this demographic actively participated in the labor market, totaling approximately 38 million individuals. Furthermore, it is projected that the working-age population, typically aged between 15 and 65 years, will decrease from 71 percent in 2020 to 56 percent of the total population by 2060, resulting in a substantial reduction to just 21 percent over the next four decades. In contrast, the proportion of people aged 65 years and above is expected to increase from 13 percent in 2020 to 31 percent of the total population by 2060, doubling its share from 2000 to 2020 and poised to double again by 2040, accounting for 26 percent of Thailand's total population compared to 2020 (World Bank, 2021).

Additionally, a report from Euromonitor International in 2020 revealed a continuous increase in the number of Thai individuals aged between 50 and 59 years, rising from approximately 9.83 million in 2015 to 10.68 million in 2020. Simultaneously, the number of retirees aged between 60 and 64 years also saw an upward trend, growing from about 3.48 million in 2015 to 4.36 million in 2020. However, the number of people aged between 15 and 49 years experienced a gradual decline, decreasing from 35.75 million in 2015 to 34.15 million in 2020. Consequently, it is evident that older individuals hold significant potential to become a vital labor force within Thailand's job market in the foreseeable future.

Moreover, findings from the 2017 Thailand Elderly Survey indicate that approximately 38 percent of individuals aged 60 and older were engaged in work during the past 12 months. Notably, this figure had decreased from 41 percent

in 2014, although it remained nearly unchanged from 2007 (UNFPA, 2019). This trend underscores that as individuals age, their likelihood of remaining in the workforce diminishes. Among the elderly, 31 percent reported that their primary source of income came from employment, while 35 percent relied on financial support from their children. Consequently, senior workers continue to express a willingness to sustain their careers to ensure financial stability.

However, a report addressing the challenges of an ageing labor market in Thailand raises concerns regarding the readiness of seniors, both presently and in the future, to adapt to evolving work dynamics. An analysis of occupational job concentration suggests that older workers may face difficulties in the future as upcoming job roles demand fewer manual skills and more cognitive capabilities (The World Bank, 2021). Consequently, it is imperative for Thai firms and companies to comprehend effective strategies for managing, motivating, and harnessing the potential of their ageing workforce (Ng & Feldman, 2008; Truxillo & Fraccaroli, 2013).

#### **2.4 Human Capital Theory**

In the pursuit of expanding employment prospects for senior workers, organizations must contemplate revising their policies and structures to foster an inclusive working environment for older workers or, at the very least, adopt age-neutral policies and practices to prevent age-based discrimination. Extensive research reveals that older individuals face limited job opportunities due to age-related biases and stereotypes, along with potential deficits in contemporary skills like digital literacy. Nevertheless, this demographic is poised to constitute a significant portion of the labor force, playing a pivotal role in sustaining both social and economic growth in the years to come (Van Droogenbroeck & Spruyt, 2016; Vigtel, 2018).

This study places considerable emphasis on the Human Capital Theory, underscoring the importance of senior workers' investments in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and health. This human capital is a vital resource upon which the success of an organization hinges. Fundamentally, Human Capital Theory underscores the notion of investing in individuals to reap economic and societal rewards.

Becker (2009) notably highlights the centrality of human capital in contemporary societies. The economic prosperity of individuals, organizations, and entire nations is intrinsically tied to the extent and effectiveness of their investments in human resources. With the transition towards an ageing society, the well-being of businesses is increasingly dependent on the contributions of senior workers. However, persistent biases and stereotypes about older workers persist. Research in academia and policy circles reveals that many employers harbor misconceptions, believing that older workers are averse to change, resist instructions from younger supervisors, struggle to adapt to new technologies, prefer shorter work hours, and are averse to embracing technology (Wallace et al., 2013). These perceptions, however, contradict findings by Leopold (2016), which suggest that individuals can continue to develop and contribute positively well into their seventies. Supported by Napathorn's research (2021), it becomes evident that senior workers can enhance their abilities and competencies through participation in on-the-job training programs, including job rotations (depending on individual health conditions) and classroom-based training in areas like language and computer skills.

Therefore, the application of Human Capital Theory at the organizational level underscores the importance of enhancing the knowledge, skills, and overall well-being of employees, concurrently mitigating biases and age-related discrimination. Bowman et al. (2016) argue that training and re-skilling should serve as key policy pillars to unlock the potential of senior workers, enabling them to remain in their professions for longer durations. This approach stands to benefit both senior workers and employers alike.

Human capital investments primarily encompass two critical domains: health and education (Schultz, 1981). Schultz (1981) further elaborates that education contributes to enhancing individuals' capabilities. In the workplace context, education can be delivered through on-the-job training (Mincer, 1974). Therefore, organizations, after extending job opportunities to senior workers, should prioritize two essential components: health support and on-the-job training. Existing literature consistently demonstrates a positive correlation between investments in human capital and equal employment opportunities. Additionally, investing in education and health facilities serves as a protective measure against age-based discrimination within the workplace.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Key informants and data collection

In this study, a qualitative research approach was utilized, employing in-depth interviews with semi-structured questions. The interview questions were developed based on existing literature and study objectives, following expert assessment by specialists recommended by Kaliio et al. (2016). A set of nine finalized questions covered participant qualifications, understanding of senior workers and situations in Thailand, advantages, disadvantages, and opportunities of employing senior staff, suitable positions for seniors, and readiness for recruiting ageing individuals. These interviews constituted the foundation for collecting valuable data.

The study employed a purposive sampling approach, engaging with ten human resources professionals in the hotel industry in Phuket, Thailand, selected based on stringent criteria to ensure significant experience and a deep understanding of the subject matter (Boyce & Neale, 2006). A prerequisite of a minimum of five years of experience with the human resources domain was established, aligning with the study's specific purpose of interviewing professionals with substantial expertise. The selected professionals represented a spectrum of hotel organizational structures, including both chain and non-chain hotels, aiming to capture diverse perspectives on senior job opportunities within the hotel industry (see Table 1).

The interview commenced with an introduction of the study's objectives and a concise overview. Subsequent interviews were conducted online via MS Teams, with explicit consent obtained for audio recording. Following the interviews, transcriptions were generated and later the audio records were removed. Participants were encouraged to express their perspectives and respond to questions freely during the session, each lasting an average of forty-five minutes, facilitating the acquisition of detailed and extensive data.

#### 3.2 Data analysis

The analysis of the interview data was conducted using a thematic analysis approach, a well-established method for examining respondents' viewpoints and uncovering commonalities and disparities in their opinions (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is recognized for its reliability in categorizing and deriving themes through an iterative process.

The initial step involved dissecting the data into distinct categories aligned with the research objectives. Subsequently, themes corresponding to each research objective were discerned by organizing the interview transcripts into categories or themes that encapsulated similar codes. This process culminated in the aggregation of data into overarching themes that shared common ideas or perspectives.

Before presenting the findings, both the procedures and results underwent independent review by the researchers to uphold the validity of the process and outcomes. Minor adjustments were made as necessary to enhance the accuracy and rigor of the analysis.



#### 4. Results

This study engaged ten human resources professionals as key informants, selected based on predetermined criteria. Referring to Table 1, the key informants, aged between 32 and 40 years old, comprised six males and four females. They collectively possess a professional tenure in the human resources field ranging from six to sixteen years. Seven participants were affiliated with chain hotels, while the remaining three were associated with non-chain hotels.

**Table 1**

*Characteristics of respondent*

Initial	Gender	Age	Role	Working Experience	Hotel organizational structure
HR1	Male	38	Assistant Human Resources Manager	15 years	Chain hotel
HR2	Female	33	Human Resources Executive	7 years	Non-chain hotel
HR3	Male	35	Training Manager	12 years	Non-chain hotel
HR4	Female	35	Human Resources Manager	10 years	Chain hotel
HR5	Female	32	Acting Manager Network Training	6 years	Chain hotel
HR6	Male	34	Assistant Manager in Learning and Development	7 years	Chain hotel
HR7	Male	40	Area Learning and Development Manager	16 years	Chain hotel
HR8	Male	32	Assistant Human Resources and Training Manager	7 years	Chain Hotel
HR9	Female	37	Assistant Human Resources Manager	12 years	Chain Hotel
HR10	Male	39	Human Resources Manager	9 years	Non-chain hotel

This study delineated the classification of individuals as “senior” based on a chronological age criterion of 40 years and above. Particularly noteworthy was the early identification of those engaged in customer-facing roles including front office staff, waiters, and hostesses, as “senior” compared to counterparts involved in back-of-the-house and administrative responsibilities. Interviews with human resources professionals revealed concerns about the declining physical conditions of senior workers, which could impact their suitability for immediate customer needs. This perception influenced their classification as “senior” and guided their assignment to specific roles.

The investigation also brought attention to the retirement age within the Phuket hotel industry, which was found to be shorter than the national retirement age of 55 years old. Nevertheless, active senior workers had the flexibility to extend their retirement age, either until 60 years old or through continued employment on yearly contracts until 65 years old.

A notable finding was the limited influence of hotel organizational structures on the extension of job opportunities for senior workers. Instead, the study identified the duration of a hotel's operation as a pivotal factor influencing the acceptance and expansion of job opportunities for senior workers. Hotels with longer operational histories showed a greater inclination to extend or offer job opportunities to senior workers, likely attributable to a higher prevalence of senior workers within their workforce. Consequently, such hotels tended to adopt more senior-friendly environments and policies. This observation suggests potential avenues for future research to explore the correlation between a hotel's operational period and its propensity to accept senior workers.

#### 4.1 Objective 1: To Study the Advantages and Disadvantages of Hiring Senior Workers from Hotel HR Perspectives.

Following the transcription of interviews, a rigorous manual coding and sorting procedure was systematically undertaken to organize and identify key themes addressing the three research objectives. The outcome revealed five distinct themes highlighting advantages associated with the hiring and retention of senior workers. These advantages encompassed experience and skills, maturity, knowledge sharing, time and budgeting saving, and loyalty, as displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Advantages of having senior workers in the hotels*

Initial Perception	Experience and skills	Maturity	Knowledge sharing	Time and budgeting saving	Loyalty
HR1	/		/		
HR2	/			/	
HR3	/	/	/		
HR4	/	/			/
HR5	/		/		
HR6	/	/	/		
HR7	/				
HR8	/		/		
HR9	/		/	/	/
HR10	/	/	/		/

##### 4.1.1 Experience and skills

Informants unanimously regarded the experience and skills of senior workers as invaluable asset, unique and challenging to replicate by younger generations. These accumulated capabilities were perceived as personal treasures that significantly contribute to an organization's overall success. As one of the informants has shared:

*"Experience and skills acquired over the course of their careers enable senior workers to consistently deliver high-quality work. Moreover, their knowledge can serve as a valuable resource for others, facilitating performance improvement across the organization."* (HR3, personal communication, February 8, 2023)

##### 4.1.2 Maturity

In this study, maturity pertains to senior workers' ability to handle emotions, feelings, and stress. Life experiences contribute to an increased sense of maturity and discretion, making senior workers more composed and adept at understanding and navigating complex situations. Their accumulated experiences also make them less prone to stress, allowing for quicker problem-solving compared to less-experienced counterparts. As reported by one of the informants:

*"Their maturity and composure are notable attributes of senior workers, promoting organizational harmony and the discreet resolution of issues. Furthermore, they display a willingness to offer support to others."* (HR10, personal communication, February 19, 2023)



#### 4.1.3 Knowledge sharing

Senior workers in hotels, drawing on their extensive experience, were regarded as valuable knowledge repositories and specialists in their fields. Their role involved imparting and transferring knowledge and professional skills to younger colleagues. This knowledge-sharing dynamic was seen as crucial for preserving critical organizational knowledge, recognized as the most valuable resource. Below is what one manager has pointed out:

*"Senior workers possess a wealth of experience and can be regarded as experts in their domains. They are eager to share their experiences and techniques, benefiting others in their professional growth and easing the burden of perceived challenging tasks."* (HR9, personal communication, February 17, 2023)

#### 4.1.4 Time and budget saving

Extending job opportunities to senior workers was viewed as a cost-effective strategy for organizations, avoiding the expenses and time associated with recruitment and training. The hotel industry in Phuket, Thailand, facing a persistent high turnover rate, acknowledged the finite nature of time and money. The informants highlighted the challenges of training new staff emphasizing the costs and time constraints involved in ensuring effective job performance. The following has shown this perception:

*"Senior workers, possessing extensive career experience, bring heightened expertise to the table, resulting in significant savings in both time and budget allocated for training. Furthermore, the recruitment of new staff entails considerable costs, with training programs essential to meet performance standards."* (HR2, personal communication, February 8, 2023)

#### 4.1.5 Loyalty

Senior workers were perceived as exhibiting greater loyalty to organizations by extending their careers with a single employer. Their commitment was viewed as protective of the organization's interests and characterized by unwavering support for the business. One informant noted that:

*"Senior workers tend to demonstrate remarkable loyalty to the organization, displaying less inclination to change employers. Additionally, they prioritize the organization's welfare."* (HR4, personal communication, February 9, 2023)

In addition, the findings of this study elucidate six discernible themes delineating the disadvantages experienced by senior workers engaged in hotel employment as perceived by human resources professionals. These disadvantages include cognitive decline, low flexibility, physical degradation, higher expense, and generation gap as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Disadvantages of having senior workers in the hotels*

Initial Perception	Cognitive decline	Low Flexibility	Low Digital literacy	Physical degradation	Higher expense	Generation gap
HR1	/	/		/	/	/
HR2			/			
HR3			/	/		/
HR4	/		/	/		
HR5	/	/				

Initial Perception	Cognitive decline	Low Flexibility	Low Digital literacy	Physical degradation	Higher expense	Generation gap
HR6						/
HR7				/	/	
HR8		/				/
HR9	/			/	/	
HR10	/		/	/		/

#### 4.1.6 Cognitive decline

The interviews uncovered a common perception concerning senior workers, notably related to their physical and cognitive capabilities. This perception encompassed aspects such as diminished reasoning, slower cognitive processing, reduced learning agility, and memory decline. Consequently, it was believed that these cognitive limitations might adversely affect the job performance of senior workers. One manager highlighted the following:

*"Senior workers are often seen as having diminished learning capacity and a reluctance to embrace new concepts due to their perceived expertise in their respective careers."* (HR1, personal communication, February 6, 2023)

#### 4.1.7 Low flexibility

A prevailing perception surrounding senior workers pertained to their limited adaptability to change and, at times, a pronounced sense of self-assuredness rooted in their experience and beliefs. This perceived inflexibility raised concerns about potential conflicts within teams, particularly when younger supervisors were involved, potentially hindering goal achievement. The subsequent information reflects this perception:

*"They tend to exhibit discomfort with organizational changes, often requiring extensive clarification and communication regarding these changes. Moreover, their adjustment to new circumstances appears to be more time-consuming."* (HR5, personal communication, February 10, 2023)

#### 4.1.8 Low digital literacy

In the contemporary business landscape, digital literacy has become a critical skill set, integral to various operational facets. However, senior workers were perceived as having relatively lower familiarity and proficiency in digital technologies. This perceived deficiency in digital literacy was linked to notions of reduced productivity and slower task execution. Consequently, hotels were compelled to allocate resources for extensive training efforts to equip senior workers with essential digital skills and knowledge. As indicated by a manager:

*"In today's business environment, technology underpins operations across the board, including the hotel industry. Adapting to this technological shift can pose a substantial challenge for senior workers."* (HR3, personal communication, February 8, 2023)

#### 4.1.9 Physical degradation

Stereotypes regarding physical decline among senior individuals were prevalent and constituted a critical factor affecting the extension of job opportunities to this demographic. Physical deterioration was viewed as a limiting factor in career advancement, as it could lead to reduced work output and performance capabilities. Additionally, senior workers were perceived to be at a higher risk of workplace injuries compared to their younger counterparts. As reported by one of the informants:

*"The physical condition of senior workers may restrict their career prospects, particularly in roles requiring strenuous physical tasks such as room attendants, waiters, and guest service agents, which could lead to an increased risk of injuries."* (HR4, personal communication, February 9, 2023)

#### **4.1.10 Higher expenses**

The inclusion or retention of senior workers was regarded as entailing increased expenses for organizations. These expenditures encompassed various aspects, including training, health-related support, facility enhancements, and severance pay. Consequently, hotels were required to allocate substantial financial resources to create age-friendly working conditions. The following demonstrates this perspective:

*"Similar to considerations for staff with disabilities, hiring or retaining senior workers necessitates substantial investments in facilities enhancements to cater to their needs, including walkways, restroom facilities, nutritious meals, and in-house medical clinics, incurring significant costs."* (HR7, personal communication, February 13, 2023)

#### **4.1.11 Generation gap**

Within the organizational context, the coexistence of multiple generations with differing traits and attitudes gave rise to concerns about generational disparities. These disparities, often referred to as a generation gap, were viewed as having adverse effects on organizational functioning, potentially leading to conflicts rooted in misunderstandings, as well as challenges related to teamwork and cohesion among team members. As one of the informants has shared:

*"Differing thought patterns and mindsets across generations can introduce complications within organizations, resulting in reduced overall staff performance."* (HR6, personal communication, February 13, 2023)

### **4.2 Objective 2: To Investigate Senior Workers' Job Opportunities and Constraints.**

Referring the information given by the key informants, opportunities and constraints were addressed from the perspective of human resources professionals in Phuket hotels.

#### **4.2.1 Job opportunities**

Effective implementation of career extensions for senior workers has the potential to increase access to back-of-the-house roles, administrative tasks, positions requiring substantial experience, and roles with limited physical exertion. Another determinant of expanded job opportunity for senior workers is the philosophical stance of the hotel's ownership or management towards the inclusion of senior workers.

Interviews revealed that hotels with lengthier operational histories were more open to hiring senior workers compared to newer establishments. Senior job seekers found more opportunities in hotels with operational histories exceeding 15 or 20 years, indicating a direct correlation between a hotel's extended operational duration and increased prospects for recruiting senior workers. However, even within senior-friendly hotels, interviewees expressed a preference for younger recruits when given the choice. This perception is evident in the following details:

*"For instance, our hotel has been in operation for over 34 years, and many of our employees have been with us since its inception. Consequently, most of our staff are over 45 years old and continue to contribute effectively. This experience suggests that age may not be the primary factor considered in recruitment decisions, as long as performance remains strong."* (HR2, personal communication, February 8, 2023)

#### 4.2.2 Constraints

The findings of this study revealed three constraints of hiring senior workers to work in the hotels discussed among the human resources professionals. These constraints include lack of up-to-date knowledge, age and physical health conditions, and costs of hiring senior workers.

##### 4.2.2.1 Lack of up-to-date knowledge

As previously emphasized, the acknowledged strengths of senior workers lie in their extensive experience and expertise, attributes that their younger counterparts may require additional time to acquire. Nevertheless, a noteworthy concern raised by interviewees revolves around the contemporaneity of senior workers' knowledge, with perceptions suggesting potential misalignment with the demands of contemporary work contexts. Furthermore, senior workers were observed to demonstrate relatively lower levels of digital literacy, posing a competitive disadvantage for businesses. As a result, hotels considering the integration of senior workers found it imperative to establish training programs focused on imparting current knowledge, placing particular emphasis on enhancing digital literacy skills. As reported by one of the informants:

*"A notable challenge associated with employing senior workers in the hotel industry is their often-limited familiarity with technology and digital competencies."* (HR2, personal communication, February 8, 2023)

##### 4.2.2.2 Age and physical health conditions

Age significantly influenced human resources management decisions in the hotel industry, closely tied to considerations of physical health. Informants unanimously agreed that perceptions of ageing varied based on specific job roles. In customer-facing positions like receptionists and food and beverage attendants, and physically demanding roles such as housekeeping, where regular customer interaction, responsiveness, and adaptability are crucial, individuals aged over 40 were commonly labeled as "senior". Conversely, in back-of-the-house roles without direct customer interaction, like cooks and accountants, extensive experience and expertise were more important than physical performance. For these roles, employees were typically considered "senior" upon reaching the age of 45 or 50. One manager highlighted the following:

*"For positions such as receptionists, candidates aged above 40 are generally not preferred, and age can be a disqualifying factor for these roles."* (HR1, personal communication, February 6, 2023)

##### 4.2.2.3 Costs of hiring senior workers

The financial considerations associated with employing senior workers emerged as a significant constraint inhibiting hotels from opting for such hires. The costs involved encompassed various aspects, including the following:

###### 4.2.2.3.1 Retired pension

One notable challenge in hiring new senior workers revolved around the legal obligation to provide retired pension benefits when employees reach the age of 60. This requirement presented a compelling reason for hotels to lean towards recruiting younger personnel. As indicated by a manager:

*"When a candidate is 50 years old, the hotel can employ them for just 5 or 10 years, after which the hotel is obligated to provide retirement pension benefits, adding to the overall cost of employing senior workers."* (HR1, personal communication, February 6, 2023)

#### 4.2.2.3.2 Training

Given the dynamic nature of business operations, contemporary skill sets, and knowledge were deemed essential. However, senior workers were perceived as experiencing a decline in cognitive abilities. Consequently, hotels contemplating their inclusion needed to invest in training programs to update their skills and knowledge. This necessitated additional expenditure, both in monetary and non-monetary terms. The following demonstrates this perspective:

*"The hotel mandates a multi-skilled workforce, but the definition of multi-skills has evolved over time. Technology now plays a pivotal role in enhancing worker effectiveness, necessitating an increased emphasis on training programs."* (HR5, personal communication, February 10, 2023)

#### 4.2.2.3.3 Facilities and other benefits for senior workers

Employers were obligated to provide facilities tailored to the needs of senior workers, such as restroom accommodations equipped with supplementary tools, suitable working environments, access to nutritious meals, and on-site medical facilities. The provision of these facilities entailed additional costs for hotels, potentially presenting a formidable constraint on the hiring of senior workers. According to one of the informants:

*"Compared to hiring staff with disabilities, hotels must contemplate the provision of facilities to accommodate the needs and well-being of senior workers, including amenities like specially equipped restrooms and nutritious meal options, incurring additional expenses."* (HR7, personal communication, February 13, 2023)

### 4.3 Objective 3: To Evaluate the Readiness in Diverse Organizational Structures in Hotels.

A half of our respondents (HR1, HR4, HR6, HR7, and HR9) expressed firm reservations about their hotels being prepared to employ senior individuals, regardless of their organizational structures. A consensus among them was that they preferred hiring younger workers, unless there was a government policy mandate. In stark contrast, two informants (HR5 and HR8) highlighted that their properties had been operational for more than two decades, with nearly half of their current workforce consisting of senior workers. Consequently, they believed that their hotels were well-equipped and ready to embrace senior employment. This observation suggests a potential correlation between the duration of a business's operation and its readiness to employ senior individuals.

Additionally, the interviews unveiled several other following factors influencing the readiness to extend job opportunities to senior workers:

#### 4.3.1 Government policies

The interviews emphasized the significant role that government policies and practices could play in encouraging establishments to prepare for the impending trend of senior employment. However, most hoteliers indicated that they were awaiting concrete government announcements and policies regarding senior employment and welfare. Some HR personnel drew parallels between senior worker employment and employment practices for individuals with disabilities. This perception is evident in the following details:

*"We are eagerly awaiting official government announcements regarding senior employment, senior worker welfare, and minimum wage regulations. Such directives would incentivize hotels to actively engage in senior worker recruitment, akin to the provisions made for employing individuals with disabilities."* (HR6, personal communication, February 13, 2023)

#### 4.3.2 Employment contract extensions

The interviews suggested that, in general, hotels in Phuket leaned toward offering short employment contracts, often on a yearly basis, for senior workers. While there was an openness to extending contracts based on individual merit, a significant proportion of senior workers were inclined to retire and enjoy their personal lives with family and friends. The subsequent information reflects this perception:

*"Contract extensions are considered on a case-by-case basis, usually with yearly contracts in mind, particularly for senior workers. Their decisions regarding contract extension are closely tied to their personal preferences."* (HR2, personal communication, February 8, 2023)

#### 4.3.3 Age-neutral policies and practices

An interesting observation from the interviews was the preference for age-neutral policies and practices over comprehensive ageing-specific policies. Respondents acknowledged the presence of a diverse workforce spanning various generations within their organizations. They emphasized the importance of promoting equality within the workplace by designing policies that were inclusive and treated all employees equally. This approach aimed to ensure that senior workers did not feel marginalized or distinct from their colleagues. As reported by one of the informants:

*"Our organization's approach leans toward implementing age-neutral policies and practices. We organize activities where both younger and older workers can participate together, fostering a sense of inclusivity among all employees."* (HR4, personal communication, February 9, 2023)

#### 4.3.4 Internal employment policy development

Regarding policy development within their organizations, most informants identified key stakeholders as the HR department and the management team. Additionally, in certain hotels, final approval rested with the Managing Director (MD) when government policy changes were involved. Below is what one manager has pointed out:

*"In the event of concrete government policies on senior employment, our HR department and property management team collaborate to formulate guidelines for a senior employment plan."* (HR6, personal communication, February 13, 2023)

This practice was consistent with HR1, HR3, HR4, and HR5.

### 5. Discussion

This study provides valuable insights into senior workers, specifically in the hotel industry. The categorization of senior workers' age within this industry depends on their job roles, with direct customer-facing positions like front office staff, waiters, and hostesses often being considered senior earlier in their careers. This perception is rooted in biases assuming they may not adequately respond to immediate guest needs or project the desired hotel image. Broadly, senior workers in the Phuket hotel industry are generally identified as individuals aged 40 years and above, even lower than the overall retirement age. This finding aligns with Cheung and Woo's (2001) work, highlighting that senior workers in the hospitality sector tend to be younger compared to other industries.

The study revealed several positive attributes associated with hiring senior workers in the hotel industry. Senior workers are considered invaluable assets due to their sophisticated experience and skills, aligning with the findings of Ann and Blum (2019), Hannon, 2017, Sewdas et al. (2017), and Wikström et al. (2018) who emphasized the valuable professional expertise and knowledge that elderly workers bring, facilitating effective knowledge transfer to young colleagues. The maturity of senior workers also contributes to balancing and harmonizing different work styles across

generations (Leopold, 2016). They play a crucial role in knowledge sharing with junior peers, akin to the findings of Napathorn (2021), who highlighted the effective transfer of expertise through mentoring and coaching. Moreover, reemploying senior workers aids in reducing and training new staff. Interestingly, contrary to Tunny and Oude Mulders' (2021) findings, hiring older workers does not hinder opportunities for the younger workforce. Additionally, the study discovered that senior workers are more likely to demonstrate loyalty to the organization and exhibit less inclination to change employers.

In contrast, this study identified negative stereotypes and perceived limitations related to senior workers. Cognitive decline is evident in tasks, manifested as slower processing, reduced learning agility, and memory decline, aligning with Smith's (2018) assertion of senior workers experiencing declines in physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities. Senior workers are observed to exhibit low flexibility and encounter a generation gap when collaborating with younger generations, in contrast to Leopold (2016) and Tunny and Oude Mulders (2021), who highlight senior workers as harmonizing agents within teams. Additionally, senior workers face challenges in adapting to new technology, indicative of low digital literacy, as noted by Wallace et al. (2013). Physical degradation is evident, limiting career advancement opportunities for senior workers, corroborating findings by Shore and Goldberg (2004), and Solem (2015), who identified challenges in promotions, training opportunities, welfare provisions, and termination for senior workers. Surprisingly, hiring seniors was found to contribute higher expenses in various company support systems, including training, health-related support, facility enhancements, and severance pay.

Furthermore, the study unveiled limited job opportunities for senior workers in the Phuket hotel industry, contingent upon specific functional attributes and individualized assessments. Senior workers, due to declining physical, emotional, and cognitive abilities, were potentially suited for roles in the back of the house, administrative tasks, positions requiring extensive experience, and roles not demanding heavy physical exertion, as indicated by Smith (2018). However, constraints were identified in hiring seniors, including concerns about up-to-date knowledge, age, physical health condition, and associated costs. Scholars such as Kadijk et al. (2019), Lahti et al. (2017), Sewdas et al. (2019), and Smith (2018) highlighted the potential impact of poor mental and physical health on staff productivity. Nevertheless, Bowman et al. (2016) argued that training and re-skilling could enhance senior workers' knowledge, skills, and overall well-being.

Additionally, the study revealed that a relatively low readiness of the hotel industry in Phuket, Thailand, to embrace senior workers. Most hotels awaited government policies, akin to those for individuals with disabilities, with particular anticipation surrounding social insurance welfare for workers aged over 60. Concerns about inadequate social security benefits for post-retirement livelihood, echoing Napathorn (2021), and the substantial additional costs associated with senior employment, including severance pay, pension provisions, health insurance, and specialized facilities, were key factors influencing this readiness. Contrary to studies like Sewdas et al. (2017) and Voronina et al. (2019) indicating seniors' desire for prolonged working lives, historical trends showed few seniors expressing interest in continued employment post-retirement, favoring early retirement programs. Moreover, in the hotel industry, HR personnel perceived a pronounced preference for younger workers, especially in customer-facing roles, aligning with Lawrence's (1988) observation that senior workers are often viewed less favorably than their younger counterparts. However, the study noted that hotels with longer operational histories tend to adopt more senior-friendly policies and welfare.

In conclusion, the study's findings shed light on the complex dynamics surrounding senior employment in the hotel industry, emphasizing the need for a nuanced approach that considers both the potential contributions and limitations



of senior workers in this context. Further research and policy development are warranted to address these challenges and promote greater inclusivity within the industry.

## 6. Implications and Future research

### 6.1 Theoretical implications

This study pioneers research on the readiness of the hotel industry in Phuket, Thailand, to extend job opportunities to senior workers, as perceived by human resources personnel. It explores potential job prospects and constraints in light of the impending global labor shortage due to demographic. The categorization of senior workers within the hotel industry is dynamic, dependent on specific job characteristics. Frontline staff engaging intensively with guests are perceived as seniors from the age of 40, contrasting with back-of-the-house roles initiating at 45. This nuanced perspective differs from prior studies categorizing older hospitality workers at 50 or older (Canning, 2011; Jenkins & Poulton, 2014; Loretto & White, 2006).

The study contributes to existing literature on advantages and disadvantages associated with senior workers, delving comprehensively into human resources include experience, skills, maturity, knowledge sharing, time and budget saving, and loyalty, the study emphasizes the significance of an energetic personality, particularly for frontline staff. However, senior workers are found to have cognitive decline, low flexibility, low digital literacy, physical degradation, higher expense, and generation gap, which potentially impacting hotel image and guest experience management.

### 6.2 Managerial implications

This study offers crucial insights for hotel business management seeking to extend career opportunities for senior workers, aligning with Human Capital Theory. Emphasis should be placed on education and health domains to create an age-friendly working environment. Investing in tailored training programs is essential. Hotels can collaborate with training professionals to create tailored programs focusing on the latest industry trends and digital tools. Regularly assess employees' skill levels and provide ongoing training sessions. Encourage self-paced learning through online resources to boost digital literacy among senior staff. Special attention to the distinct health needs of senior workers is paramount, urging hotels to implement health support programs, including dietary options, comprehensive health insurance, and facilities tailored to their requirements.

Strategic role allocation is advised, favoring back-of-the-house, administrative, experience-dependent, and physically undemanding positions for senior workers. This targeted placement optimizes their expertise. In conclusion, this study provides pragmatic insights for cultivating an inclusive and age-diverse hotel workforce. Adhering to Human Capital Theory, prioritizing education and health initiatives, and aligning roles with senior workers' strengths can effectively harness their potential, create a supportive working environment, and ensure sustained success. Policy makers should consider these findings for a balanced integration of senior workers, fostering workplace equality and eliminating discrimination.

### 6.3 Limitations and future research

This study has limitations that warrant acknowledgement. Firstly, the findings are derived solely from the viewpoints of human resources professionals in the hotel industry, representing a singular organizational perspective that may not fully capture the entirety of operational dynamics. Future research should encompass a broader array of perspectives within hotels for a more comprehensive understanding. Secondly, the study is confined to the specific context of Phuket, Thailand. Consequently, caution is needed in generalizing the conclusions beyond the geographical boundaries

of the research. While the study establishes a foundational exploration of senior employment within the Thai hotel industry, particularly in Phuket, it serves as a starting point for more in-depth analyses.

To enhance future research, efforts could be directed toward expanding the scope of inquiry by incorporating diverse perspectives from various roles and departments within hotels. Investigating the impact of cultural and political factors on senior employment policies and practices, including differences in organizational culture and policies between Thai and non-Thai owned hotels, could offer valuable insights. Researchers might also explore senior employment dynamics in different geographical contexts to discern commonalities and disparities, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of this complex issue.

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