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**A multidimensional study of employee loyalty in luxury hotels in Hungary
– the impact of organisational factors**

Dissertation – Thesis Book

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1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the global tourism and hospitality sector has faced structural and operational challenges that have fundamentally reshaped the way organisations operate and their relationship with their workforce. The crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent restructuring of the labour market, have had a particularly severe impact on the hotel industry, where operational continuity and service quality depend largely on the availability and quality of human resources (Baum, 2020). In the period following the pandemic, labour shortages, rising staff turnover and a decline in employee engagement have become some of the sector's most significant challenges (Deery & Jago, 2015). This is particularly true in the hotel sector, which is built on high standards of service, where human factors are not only crucial to internal operations but also have a direct impact on the guest experience and organisational effectiveness.

The service-profit chain model emphasises that internal service quality, staff satisfaction and organisational performance are closely interlinked (Heskett et al., 1994). The study of employee satisfaction and loyalty in the hotel industry is receiving increasing attention; however, a significant proportion of research has focused solely on individual sub-areas of the industry – such as organisational commitment, leadership style and employee satisfaction. Complex, multidimensional approaches that interpret loyalty at organisational, departmental and managerial levels within the context of the luxury hotel industry are only sparsely represented in the international literature (Leung & Lin, 2022).

International research shows that employee loyalty is closely linked to organisational performance, service quality and guest satisfaction (Hart & Thompson, 2007; Antoncic & Antoncic, 2011a; Kot-Radojewska & Timenko, 2018). However, research into employee loyalty features only to a limited extent in the Hungarian academic literature. Although a single previous empirical study did address the topic in the context of the Hungarian hotel industry, no systematic further development of this research has taken place (Ineson et al., 2013).

The aim of this thesis is to explore the structure, determining factors and organisational manifestations of employee loyalty amongst five-star hotels in Hungary, about the role of organisational commitment, workplace stress, managerial relationships and differences between employee groups. Accordingly, the central research question of the thesis is as follows:

K1: How can employee loyalty be interpreted within the context of the luxury hotel industry in Hungary? Furthermore, what factors influence staff loyalty in luxury hotels in Hungary, and how do these manifest themselves at different levels of the organisation?

The research question aims both to identify the factors that determine loyalty and to examine how these are structured at different levels of organisational operation, regarding the managerial, departmental and organisational dimensions. From a theoretical perspective, the question is significant because it can contribute to the conceptual clarification and multidimensional interpretation of employee loyalty. From a practical perspective, it is of particular importance because, in the luxury hotel sector, staff retention, operational stability and service quality are directly linked to the quality of organisational commitment. A deeper understanding of loyalty is therefore relevant not only from an academic perspective, but also from the points of view of management and organisational development.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study presented in this thesis tests the ‘Employee Loyalty Scale’ model developed by Stephan Meschke (2021) in a Hungarian context, whilst further refining it to take account of the specific characteristics of the luxury hotel environment. The research highlights that employee loyalty can be interpreted as a non-financial success factor that is closely linked to organisational performance and complements traditional KPI-based approaches. The research gap is summarised in *Table 1*.

Table 1: A structured summary of the research gap

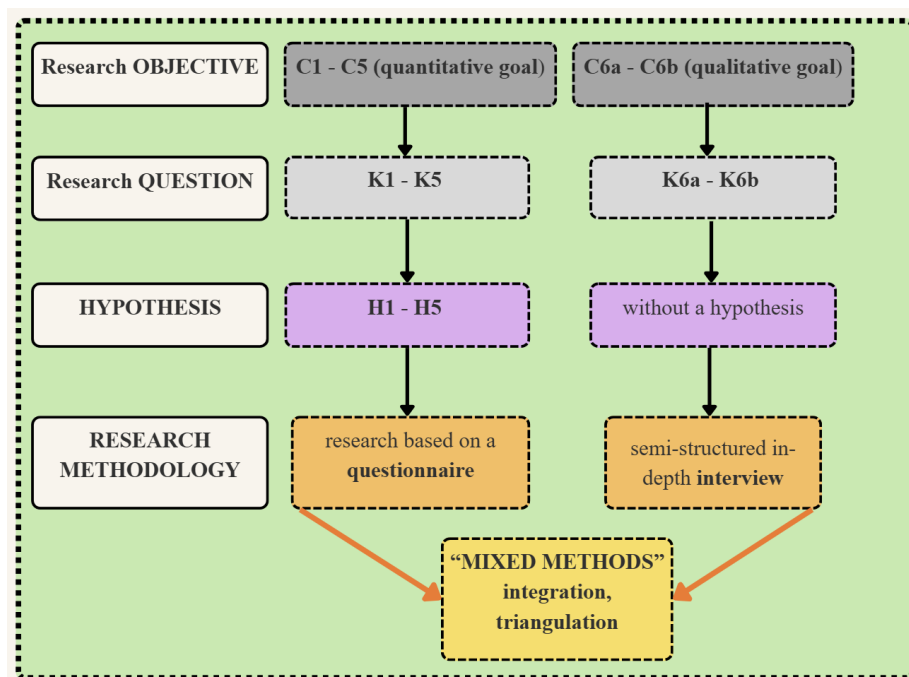
Dimensions of the study	Characteristics of the literature	Characteristics of the identified research gap	Contribution of the study
<i>Loyalty model</i>	One- or multi-dimensional approach; rare hospitality industry approach	The lack of an integrated model in the context of luxury hotels	Adaptation of the Meschke model to Hungarian luxury hotels
<i>Hotel industry context</i>	A predominantly general organisational approach	Analysis of the luxury segment is under-represented	Domestic luxury hotel category

<i>Differences between career stages</i>	Maximum factors examined separately	An element not included in the loyalty model	Integration of the career stage dimension
<i>Differences in job roles</i>	A rarely encountered test parameter	Lack of distinction between operational / non-operational roles	The ‘operations versus back-office’ approach
<i>Methodology</i>	Quantitative dominance	A few complex, up-to-date approaches	Explanatory mixed-methods approach
<i>Measuring instrument</i>	Self-developed or adapted model	Few ‘cross-sector’ adaptations	Meschke questionnaire & hotel-adaptation
<i>Performance-relationship</i>	KPI and/or HR separated items	Lack of integration	Employee loyalty as a non-financial KPI

Source: created by the author

Within the research structure, based on Saunders’ research onion model (Saunders, 2023), there is an interlinked system comprising research objectives, followed by research questions and hypotheses, then data collection and analytical procedures, and finally integration. The research framework is illustrated in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1: A Saunders-based model of the complex research framework



Source: created by the author

The specific hierarchy of objectives can be divided into three interrelated blocks. The first level consists of *C1–C5*, which are the interrelated but independent research objectives of the quantitative research phase. These lead to the quantitative results, ranging from the exploration of the structure of loyalty through its network of relationships to the differences between employee groups. The second level is *C6*, which encompasses the exploratory objective of the qualitative research and serves to provide a deeper understanding of the organisational, managerial and employee factors underlying the quantitative results.

Table 2 sets out the research objectives, questions and hypotheses, whilst *Table 3* outlines the data collection method and methodological principles.

Table 2: Objectives, research questions, hypotheses

Research objective	Research question	Hypothesis
I. Quantitative targets		
<i>C1 – Structural objective:</i> An exploration of the multidimensional structure of employee loyalty in luxury hotels in Hungary.	<i>K1:</i> <u>How can employee loyalty be interpreted within the context of the luxury hotel industry in Hungary?</u> What factors influence staff loyalty in luxury hotels in Hungary, and how do these manifest themselves at different levels of the organisation?	<i>H1:</i> Employee loyalty in domestic luxury hotels can be understood as a multidimensional construct, which can be broken down into organisational loyalty, loyalty to a work group or department, and loyalty to management.
<i>C2 – Connection goal:</i> Exploring the relationship between the dimensions of organisational commitment and loyalty.	<i>K2:</i> What relationship can be identified between the dimensions of organisational commitment and employee loyalty in Hungarian luxury hotels?	<i>H2:</i> Organisational commitment is significantly and positively correlated with various dimensions of employee loyalty in the case of luxury hotels in Hungary.

C3 – Connection goal: An investigation into the direction and strength of the relationship between workplace stress and loyalty.	K3: What is the nature and strength of the relationship between workplace stress and the dimensions of employee loyalty in luxury hotels in Hungary?	H3: A weak, negative correlation can be observed between workplace stress and the dimensions of employee loyalty amongst staff at luxury hotels in Hungary.
C4 – Group comparison objective: Exploring the differences between those in operational / non-operational roles.	K4: Is there a clear difference between employees in operational and non-operational roles at luxury hotels in Hungary?	H4: There is a significant difference between operational / non-operational staff in luxury hotels in Hungary in terms of organisational loyalty & workload.
C5 – Group comparison objective: A comparison of the dimensions of loyalty amongst employees at different stages of their careers.	K5: Is there a discernible difference in the dimensions of loyalty amongst employees at luxury hotels in Hungary across different career stages?	H5: Significant differences can be observed in certain dimensions of employee loyalty amongst staff at domestic luxury hotels at different stages of their careers.
II. Qualitative objective		
C6 – Exploratory and interpretative purpose: A qualitative exploration of the factors influencing loyalty and retention.	K6a: What factors influence employee loyalty from a qualitative perspective in luxury hotels in Hungary? K6b: Can the factors underlying employee loyalty and retention in luxury hotels in Hungary be understood in a complex manner, as the combined effect of several dimensions?	

Source: created by the author

Table 3.: Research strategy in reference to the research objectives, hypotheses and research questions

Aim & hypothesis / research question	Data collection method	Methodology for data analysis
<i>C1 / H1</i>	Quantitative research based on a questionnaire survey	Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), reliability analysis
<i>C2 / H2</i>	Quantitative research based on a questionnaire survey	Pearson's correlation analysis
<i>C3 / H3</i>	Quantitative research based on a questionnaire survey	Pearson's correlation analysis
<i>C4 / H4</i>	Quantitative research based on a questionnaire survey	Independent samples t-test
<i>C5 / H5</i>	Quantitative research based on a questionnaire survey	One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), with post hoc tests where necessary
<i>C6 / K6a-K6b</i>	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis; analysis of the frequency of codes and code groups; case and cross-case analysis

Source: created by the author

3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The interpretation of employee loyalty in the academic literature has emerged at the intersection of several academic disciplines; consequently, its concept and theoretical content cannot be regarded as uniform: classical approaches emphasise, above all, identification with the organisation, attachment to it, and the intention to remain a member of the organisation (Porter et al., 1974), whilst the multi-component model of organisational commitment provides a more nuanced picture of the employee's relationship with the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Allen & Meyer, 1996). In contrast, behavioural approaches focus on the consequences of loyalty as manifested in organisational behaviour, such as remaining with the organisation or the decision-making process between leaving and staying (Hirschman, 1970; Tett & Meyer, 1993), whilst the identification theory perspective emphasises the value- and identity-based relationship between the employee and the organisation (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986).

These approaches collectively suggest that loyalty cannot be reduced to either an exclusive attitude or a single behavioural indicator; however, due to the differing emphases of the various theories, the concept has long been presented in a fragmented manner in the literature. To resolve this, social exchange theory offers a further interpretative perspective, in that it interprets the relationship between the employee and the organisation as a social relationship based on the mutual exchange of resources and obligations, where the parties' commitment to and behaviour towards one another are shaped by previous interactions, reciprocity and perceived reciprocity (Blau, 1964). From this perspective, loyalty is not merely an internal characteristic or attitude of the employee but can also be understood as the result of the quality of the organisational relationship, in which working conditions, the way managers treat staff and the support provided by the organisation may all play a part.

Meschke's (2021) approach represents a particularly significant theoretical advance, as it operationalises loyalty as an independent, multidimensional construct, whilst simultaneously defining it as a relationship with multiple reference points – the organisation, the work group and the line manager – and thereby enables the distinction between the different forms of loyalty that emerge at various organisational levels. A comparison of the dimensions interpreted by Meyer and Allen (1991) authors primarily as components of organisational commitment and the reference points identified by Meschke (2021) therefore highlights a significant theoretical difference: whilst the former emphasises the nature of the employee's commitment, the latter also seeks to identify towards which organisational actor or level this commitment is directed. The model is particularly relevant in service-intensive sectors, where employee behaviour is an integral part of service delivery; consequently, the effectiveness of organisational operations may be directly linked to employees' attitudes and behaviour (Heskett et al., 1994; Yee et al., 2010; Chi & Gursoy, 2009). In this context, research in the hotel industry also emphasises the link between staff retention, loyalty and organisational performance, whilst in a sector characterised by high staff turnover and labour shortages, maintaining staff loyalty has become a challenge for organisations (Deery & Jago, 2015).

The concept of loyalty is further nuanced by the perspective of emotional labour, according to which, in the provision of guest-oriented services, employees must also align their own emotions with organisational and service expectations (Hochschild, 1983); this characteristic is particularly significant in the hotel industry and can also determine the relationship between employees' attitudes, engagement and performance (Karatepe, 2013). The fragility of the research context is further exacerbated by the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has shed new light not only on the stability of employment and work organisation in the hotel

industry, but also on issues of employee trust, commitment and organisational security (Baum et al., 2020; Giousmpasoglou et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the international literature typically focuses on individual antecedents, dimensions or consequences of loyalty, and tends not to integrate the various organisational reference points of loyalty, the employee and organisational context, and the specific characteristics of service-intensive operations within a single interpretative framework. Based on a comparison of the models, approaches to organisational commitment primarily focus on the employee's psychological bond with the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1991), the social exchange theory focuses on the reciprocity mechanisms underlying loyalty (Blau, 1964), whilst the multi-focus approach broadens the interpretative framework by distinguishing between the various recipients of commitment (Becker, 1992). These models can therefore be interpreted not necessarily as mutually exclusive alternatives, but as complementary theoretical approaches with differing levels of focus and emphasis. From this perspective, Meschke's model is particularly relevant because it treats employee loyalty not as a single organisational attachment, but as a construct linked to multiple reference points (Meschke, 2021).

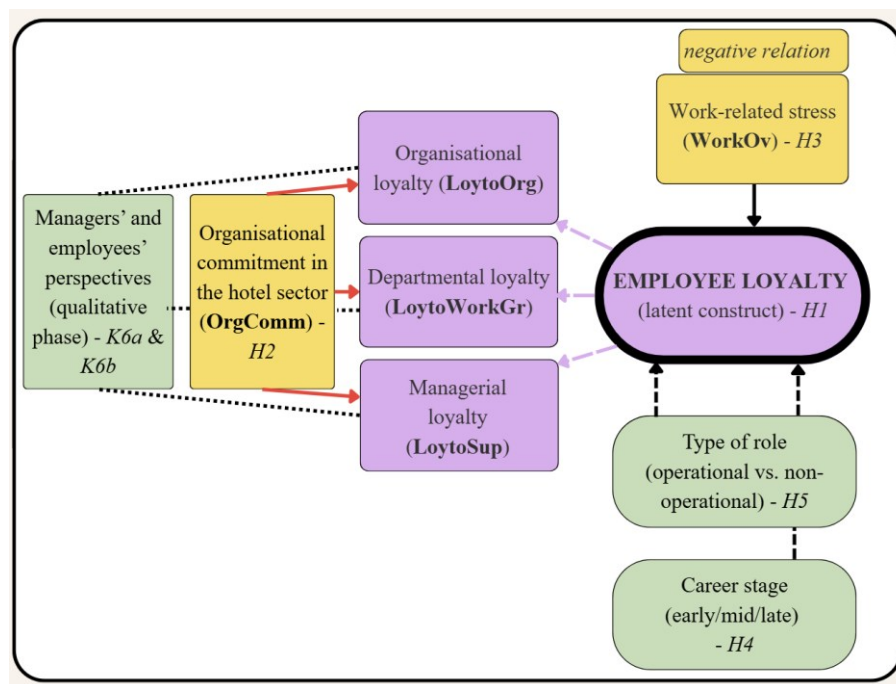
The key instrument for measuring loyalty in this study is the 'Employee Loyalty Scale' (ELS) developed by Meschke, which conceptualises loyalty as a multidimensional construct that can also be interpreted across cultures. The model is linked to attitude- and commitment-based approaches to organisational commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991; Mowday et al., 1979), whilst also considering the behavioural manifestations of loyalty (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Podsakoff et al., 2000). In this latter context, loyalty can also be linked to voluntary organisational contribution and organisational citizenship behaviour (Organ, 1988; Podsakoff et al., 2000).

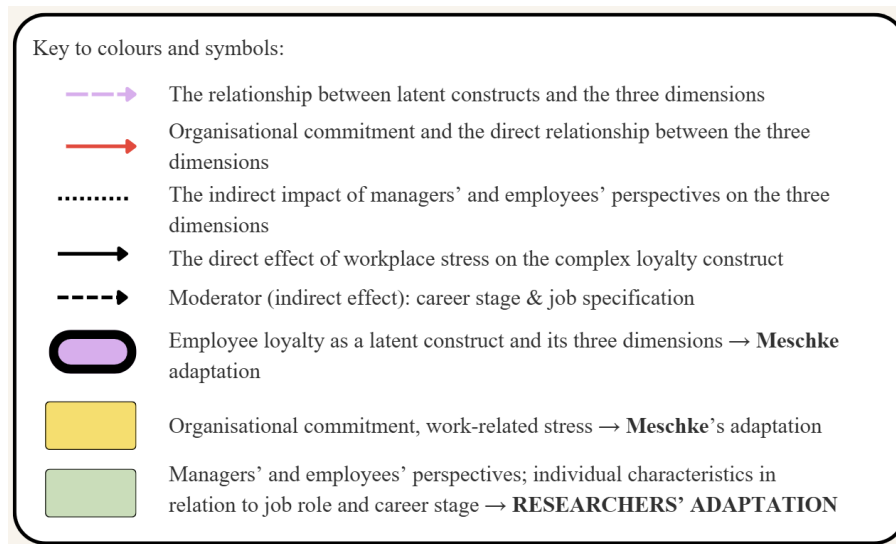
The theoretical framework of the ELS also incorporates the logic of social exchange and reciprocity, according to which the support and resources provided by the organisation influence the development of employees' attitudes and behaviours (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Perceived organisational support plays a decisive role in the development of both loyalty and organisational commitment (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), whilst the fulfilment or breach of the psychological contract can result in the strengthening or weakening of employee attachment (Rousseau, 1995; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). In this thesis, the ELS was adapted to the specific organisational and labour market environment of luxury hotels in Hungary; the model is presented in the following chapter.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Among organisational factors, organisational commitment plays a key role, emerging as one of the most important antecedent variables of loyalty. Commitment directly influences employees' relationship with the organisation and determines the development of long-term loyalty. At the same time, perceived organisational support and managerial practices act as mediating factors that can either strengthen or weaken this relationship. Among workplace factors, workload plays a particularly decisive role, as researchers hypothesise that it has a direct negative impact on employees' loyalty. Due to the differing value systems and motivational structures of different generations, loyalty does not manifest itself in a uniform manner, but varies according to career stages and life circumstances. This differentiation is particularly important in the hotel industry, where workforce heterogeneity is extremely high. Depending on organisational position, the differing operational logic of operational and non-operational roles results in different patterns of loyalty. The theoretical model of the research and the system of relationships between the variables under investigation are illustrated in *Figure 2*.

Figure 2: An integrated model of factors influencing employee loyalty





Source: created by the author

As illustrated in the figure, it can be concluded that loyalty can be understood as a multidimensional construct, comprising a system of interrelated factors. The diagram shown is directly linked to the hypotheses and specific research questions of the thesis, and it illustrates both the original variables of the Meschke model (employee loyalty and its three dimensions, organisational commitment, and job strain) and the author's own research adaptations (managerial and employee perspectives, characteristics by job type and career stage). The positive effect of organisational commitment on the dimensions of loyalty (*H2*) and the negative effect of job strain on the latent construct (*H3*) is supported by both the literature and the present study. Generational differences (*H5*) and variations according to organisational position (*H4*) emerge as further differentiating factors and so-called group effects, which add nuance to the interpretation of loyalty.

The first phase of the research is based on a quantitative questionnaire survey following deductive logic, with Meschke's (2021) loyalty model serving as its theoretical starting point. The model interprets employee loyalty in relation to the triple reference point. Its application enables the structured measurement of loyalty; however, the study also aims to further develop the model in a context-specific manner by integrating generational differences, job-specific characteristics and factors arising from the luxury hotel environment (Parry & Urwin, 2011; Twenge et al., 2010; Meschke, 2021). Structured data collection ensures the comparability of respondents' perceptions, the operationalisation of variables and the statistical analysis of the relationships between them, which is particularly justified in the case of attitude-based, multidimensional constructs (Bryman, 2016).

The aim of the qualitative study, which follows the quantitative phase, is to explore how the statistically identified correlations manifest themselves in organisational practice, and how they are interpreted by the various organisational actors. The qualitative approach is based on content analysis of transcripts from semi-structured interviews (six case studies) and is primarily designed to uncover the meanings, mechanisms and organisational relationships underlying the findings. This is particularly relevant in the hotel industry, where employee attitudes are closely intertwined with service quality and the guest experience; thus, loyalty emerges not merely as a measurable variable, but as an organisational phenomenon to be interpreted (Deery & Jago, 2015; Karatepe, 2013). This study focuses on luxury hotels in Hungary, which, due to their service-intensive operations, high-quality expectations and the significant presence of emotional labour, are well-suited to a complex examination of loyalty. Hotel ratings should not be interpreted solely as a marketing tool; they also emerge as a factor influencing economic value (Nalley et al., 2019).

4.1 Quantitative research phase

The quantitative data collection was carried out using a questionnaire, the aim of which was to empirically identify the dimensions of employee loyalty and to explore the relationships between the variables under investigation. The target population of the study consisted of employees of five-star and five-star superior hotels operating in Hungary and classified according to the Hotelstars Union system.

The survey covered the entire population; however, data collection was based on voluntary participation, resulting in a non-probability sampling procedure. During the questionnaire-based survey, 211 valid responses were analysed. Although this may be considered a low response rate relative to the total population, given the specific characteristics of the sector – in particular high staff turnover, heavy workloads and labour shortages – the data provide a meaningful sample suitable for analysis, which is consistent with the sampling limitations of empirical research in the hospitality sector (Deery & Jago, 2015; Karatepe, 2013; Baum, 2020).

The sample included both employees in operational and non-operational roles, as well as respondents at different stages of their careers, which enabled comparative analyses between the groups. However, it is important to emphasise that voluntary participation and the self-selection mechanism limit the generalisability of the results in a statistical sense.

A key consideration in the design of the measurement instrument was the use and context-specific adaptation of scales validated in the international literature. The questionnaire

was based on multi-item, Likert-scale constructs suitable for measuring latent variables. Loyalty was operationalised along three dimensions, in line with the theoretical framework of the research model. Organisational commitment and work-related stress were also measured using multiple indicators, ensuring the reliable assessment of the constructs.

The questionnaire was adapted using a forward-backward translation procedure (Brislin, 1980), which helped to ensure measurement validity. Data analysis was carried out in several stages following the analysis of the data distribution. Exploratory factor analysis enabled the empirical identification of the dimensions of loyalty, whilst reliability testing ensured the internal consistency of the scales. Correlation analysis revealed the direction and strength of the relationships between the variables under investigation, whilst group comparison procedures made it possible to identify differences between employee groups.

4.2 Qualitative research phase

The results of the quantitative phase do not, on their own, provide a complete picture of how loyalty works; therefore, a qualitative study was carried out in the second phase of the research. Qualitative data collection took the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews, a method that allows for both comparability and flexibility.

A total of 18 interviews were conducted as part of the qualitative research, across six different hotels and at three organisational levels: senior management (General Manager), middle management (department head) and operational staff. This sampling strategy enabled the examination of loyalty across multiple organisational levels, as well as the comparison of different perspectives.

The interviews were structured around thematic blocks covering, amongst other things, career paths, organisational experiences, assessments of leadership practices, factors influencing staff retention, and the role of workload and organisational support. This ensured that the interviews were both structured and open to the exploration of individual narratives. The interviews were analysed using thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006), during which recurring patterns and structures of meaning were identified. The analysis paid particular attention to differences between roles, as well as to the similarities and differences between the individual case studies. The use of a multiple case study approach (Yin, 2017) enabled the analytical generalisation of the findings.

4.3 Integration of the methodological approach

A key element of the research was the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings. During this integration, the interpretation of statistical correlations was supplemented by the mechanisms revealed by the qualitative findings, which enabled a deeper and more context-sensitive understanding of loyalty. This approach helped to ensure that loyalty was presented not merely as a measurable phenomenon, but as one that could be interpreted.

The ‘mixed methods’ approach of the research enabled the correlations identified by the quantitative analyses to be given a deeper organisational and relational interpretation through the qualitative findings. Whilst the statistical analyses identified the main correlations relating to employee loyalty, the interviews revealed the underlying operational mechanisms behind them.

The qualitative findings substantiated the positive relationship between organisational commitment and loyalty by highlighting the role of managerial support, trust, the quality of communication and perceived organisational justice. The findings are consistent with the social exchange theory approach (Blau, 1964; Saks, 2006) and the theory of perceived organisational support (Eisenberger et al., 1986); furthermore, the prominent role of support from a competent manager is also in line with the findings of Singh and Natal (2025).

In the case of workplace stress, the quantitative analysis did not confirm a clear negative relationship with loyalty, whilst the qualitative findings indicated that its effect depends on managerial support, job autonomy and recognition. This is consistent with the demand–control–support theory (Karasek, 1979; Karasek & Theorell, 1990) and the job demands–resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Furthermore, the qualitative findings highlighted the mediating role of leadership, the practical significance of career-stage-specific differences, and the conditional nature of younger employees’ loyalty. Triangulation thus not only confirmed the quantitative findings but also created an integrated interpretative framework in which organisational, departmental and managerial factors interact to shape employee loyalty.

5 RESULTS

The results of the qualitative and quantitative research are presented in relation to the hypotheses, theses and research questions.

- An examination of the multidimensional nature of loyalty (**H1**)

H1 hypothesis: *Employee loyalty in domestic luxury hotels can be understood as a dynamic and multidimensional construct; it can be broken down into organisational loyalty, loyalty to a work group or department, and loyalty to management.*

H1 hypothesis: ACCEPTED, as the quantitative analysis statistically confirmed the distinctiveness of the loyalty dimensions, whilst the qualitative findings confirmed their interpretability in organisational practice and their interrelationships.

➔ **Quantitative analysis:** Exploratory factor analysis and reliability testing confirmed the distinctiveness of the loyalty dimensions in the sample under study. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated adequate internal consistency.

➔ **Qualitative results:** The interview findings confirmed that organisational, departmental and managerial loyalty are, in practice, distinct yet closely interrelated factors. The managerial dimension emerged as a particularly significant mediating factor.

1. thesis (H1 accepted) – Employee loyalty can be understood as a multidimensional construct – comprising organisational, departmental and managerial dimensions – in luxury hotels in Hungary.

- An analysis of the relationship between organisational commitment and loyalty (**H2**)

H2 hypothesis: *Organisational commitment is significantly and positively correlated with various dimensions of employee loyalty in the case of luxury hotels in Hungary.*

H2 hypothesis: ACCEPTED, the quantitative findings statistically confirmed the positive relationship between organisational commitment and the dimensions of loyalty, the qualitative findings confirmed it at the level of organisational experiences and relational dynamics.

➔ **Quantitative analysis:** Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a significant, moderately strong positive relationship for all three dimensions of loyalty ($p < 0,001$).

➔ **Qualitative results:** Based on the interviews, managerial support, a sense of security, recognition and the provision of opportunities for development play a decisive role in the development of commitment.

2. thesis (H2 accepted) – Organisational commitment is one of the key factors determining staff loyalty in Hungarian hotels with a five-star or five-star superior rating.

- The relationship between work-related stress and loyalty (**H3**)

H3 hypothesis: *A weak, negative correlation can be observed between workplace stress and the dimensions of employee loyalty amongst staff at luxury hotels in Hungary.*

H3 hypothesis: PARTIALLY ACCEPTED, as the quantitative results confirmed a weak relationship between workload and loyalty; however, the presumed negative direction of this relationship was not unequivocally confirmed. Based on the qualitative results, the relationship can be interpreted as indirect and influenced by organisational factors.

- ➔ **Quantitative analysis:** The correlation analysis revealed a weak relationship ($r = 0,156$; $p = 0,023$); however, the negative correlation was not clearly confirmed.
- ➔ **Qualitative results:** Based on the interviews, the impact of workload depends mostly on managerial support, perceived fairness and organisational trust. This relationship can be interpreted as mediated and context dependent.

3. thesis (H3 partially accepted) – The relationship between work-related stress and the loyalty of employees at luxury hotels in Hungary is mediated, non-linear and not negative.

- Differences between operational and non-operational staff (**H4**)

H4 hypothesis: *A significant difference can be observed between operational and non-operational staff in luxury hotels in Hungary in terms of organisational loyalty and workload.*

H4 hypothesis: ACCEPTED, whilst the quantitative results confirmed a significant difference between operational and non-operational staff, the qualitative results corroborated and interpreted this from the perspective of job structures and organisational characteristics.

- ➔ **Quantitative analysis:** The independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference in organisational loyalty ($t = 2,614$; $p = 0,010$) and work-related stress ($t = 2,797$; $p = 0,006$). Non-operational staff exhibited higher levels of organisational loyalty in the sample studied.
- ➔ **Qualitative results:** Based on the interviews, operational roles are characterised by a greater physical and time-related workload, less flexibility and increased work pressure, whilst non-operational areas are characterised by a higher degree of control and predictability.

4. thesis (H4 accepted) – The structural characteristics of operational and non-operational roles have a significant influence on the loyalty of staff working in luxury hotels in Hungary.

- An examination of the differences between career stages (**H5**)

H5 hypothesis: *Significant differences can be observed in certain dimensions of employee loyalty amongst staff at domestic luxury hotels at different stages of their careers.*

H5 hypothesis: PARTIALLY ACCEPTED, as the quantitative results revealed a significant difference between career stages only in the dimension of organisational loyalty. The qualitative results highlighted that the nature of loyalty and its motivational underpinnings vary according to generation and career stage, thereby further nuancing the interpretation of the hypothesis.

- ➔ Quantitative analysis: Welch's analysis of variance revealed a significant difference in organisational loyalty ($F = 8,832$; $p < 0,001$). Employees in the early stages of their careers exhibited lower levels of organisational loyalty. No significant differences were found for the other dimensions of loyalty.
- ➔ Qualitative results: Based on the interviews, younger employees' loyalty is more conditional and more closely linked to opportunities for development and individual career goals. In later stages of their careers, greater emphasis is placed on stability and job security.

5. thesis (H5 partially accepted) – The loyalty of staff at domestic luxury hotels can be interpreted as a construct that evolves across different career stages; amongst the dimensions of loyalty, the relationship between organisational loyalty and the early career stage is significant.

Table 4 summarises the results in the light of the hypotheses, highlighting the qualitative contribution of the research to the quantitative findings; furthermore, in the light of the hypotheses, specific conclusions are also formulated.

Table 4: Summary table of hypotheses and theses

Result	Qualitative contribution & integrated interpretation	HYPOTHESES	THESES
<i>H1 - accepted</i>	In-depth study & a dynamic, multi-level system	Employee loyalty in domestic luxury hotels can be understood as a multidimensional construct, which can be broken down into organisational loyalty, loyalty to a work group or department, and loyalty to management.	Employee loyalty can be understood as a multidimensional construct – comprising organisational, departmental and managerial dimensions – in luxury hotels in Hungary.
<i>H2 - accepted</i>	Concretisation & experience-based commitment	Organisational commitment is significantly and positively correlated with various dimensions of employee loyalty in the case of luxury hotels in Hungary.	Organisational commitment is one of the key factors determining staff loyalty in Hungarian hotels with a five-star or five-star superior rating.
<i>H3 – partially accepted</i>	Reinterpretation & non-linear, mediated relationship	A weak, negative correlation can be observed between workplace stress and the dimensions of employee loyalty amongst staff at luxury hotels in Hungary.	The relationship between work-related stress and the loyalty of employees at luxury hotels in Hungary is mediated, non-linear and negative.
<i>H4 - accepted</i>	Explanation & structural differences	A significant difference can be observed between operational and non-operational staff in luxury hotels in Hungary in terms of organisational loyalty and workload.	The structural characteristics of operational and non-operational roles have a significant influence on the loyalty of staff working in luxury hotels in Hungary.

<i>H5 – partially accepted</i>	Nuance & the transformation of loyalty	Significant differences can be observed in certain dimensions of employee loyalty amongst staff at domestic luxury hotels who are at different stages of their careers.	The loyalty of staff at domestic luxury hotels can be interpreted as a construct that evolves across different career stages; amongst the dimensions of loyalty, the relationship between organisational loyalty and the early career stage is significant.
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Source: created by the author based on the research findings

It was only possible to answer the research questions following the primary research, which employed a mixed-methods approach; an analysis of these follows in turn.

- Understanding employee loyalty (**K1**)

K1 research question: *How can employee loyalty be interpreted within the context of the luxury hotel industry in Hungary?*

ANSWER: Employee loyalty in the domestic luxury hotel industry can be understood as a dynamic, multi-level and relationally defined construct.

- ➔ Quantitative analysis: Exploratory factor analysis and reliability testing confirmed that employee loyalty can be broken down into organisational, departmental and managerial dimensions.
- ➔ Qualitative results: Based on the interviews, loyalty can be interpreted as both a relational and a contextual phenomenon, shaped by managerial relationships, organisational culture and work experiences.

- The relationship between organisational commitment and employee loyalty (**K2**)

K2 research question: *What relationship can be identified between the dimensions of organisational commitment and employee loyalty in Hungarian luxury hotels??*

ANSWER: Organisational commitment is one of the key factors in employee loyalty, which is manifested through relational and experience-based mechanisms.

- ➔ Quantitative analysis: Correlation analyses revealed a significant, moderate positive relationship between the dimensions of organisational commitment and loyalty.
- ➔ Qualitative results: According to the interviews, commitment strengthens loyalty through managerial support, trust, opportunities for development and fair treatment.

- The relationship between workload and employee loyalty (**K3**)

K3 research question: *What is the nature and strength of the relationship between workplace stress and the dimensions of employee loyalty in luxury hotels in Hungary?*

ANSWER: The relationship is mediated and context-dependent; the development of loyalty is significantly influenced by organisational support and managerial behaviour.

- ➔ Quantitative analysis: A weak, non-unidirectional relationship can be observed between workload and loyalty.
- ➔ Qualitative results: The impact of workload is felt through managerial and organisational factors; in a supportive environment, even a high workload does not necessarily reduce loyalty.

- Identifying differences – operational and non-operational roles (**K4**)

K4 research question: *Is there a measurable difference between employees in operational and non-operational roles at luxury hotels in Hungary??*

ANSWER: The differences stem primarily from job roles and organisational structures, which have a direct influence on the development of loyalty.

- ➔ Quantitative analysis: A significant difference can be observed between operational and non-operational staff in terms of organisational loyalty and workload.
- ➔ Qualitative results: Operational roles are characterised by a heavier workload and less flexibility, whilst non-operational areas are characterised by greater control and predictability.

- Exploring differences – early, middle and late career stages (**K5**)

K5 research question: *Can a difference be detected in the dimensions of loyalty amongst employees at luxury hotels in Hungary across different career stages??*

ANSWER: Yes, there is a discernible difference in the loyalty of employees in the early, middle and late stages of their careers; however, this is primarily evident in the dimension of organisational loyalty. The nature of loyalty and its motivational underpinnings cannot be defined as a static phenomenon throughout a career path, as it undergoes significant transformation.

- ➔ **Quantitative analysis:** Significant differences can be observed between career stages, particularly in terms of organisational loyalty (in the early career stage).
- ➔ **Qualitative results:** The meaning of loyalty and the motivational factors behind it vary depending on the stage of one's career; for younger employees, development is the dominant factor, whilst in later stages, stability and emotional attachment take precedence.

- Factors influencing employee loyalty and retention (**K6a & K6b**)

K6a research sub-question: *What factors influence employee loyalty from a qualitative perspective in Hungarian luxury hotels?*

K6b research sub-question: *The loyalty of staff at luxury hotels in Hungary and the factors underlying their retention can be understood in a complex manner, as the combined effect of several dimensions?*

ANSWER: Employee loyalty is influenced by a combination of numerous individual, relational and organisational factors within the luxury hotel sector. Indeed, employee loyalty and retention can be understood as a complex, multidimensional and context-dependent phenomenon in which various factors interact with one another.

- ➔ **Quantitative analysis:** The quantitative findings identified the role of organisational commitment, workload, job characteristics and career stage in shaping the loyalty of hotel industry employees. The results indicated the combined effect of several interrelated factors on the various dimensions of loyalty.
- ➔ **Qualitative results:** Based on the interviews, personal motivation, managerial relationships, trust, communication, organisational culture and opportunities for development are all key factors. The analysis revealed the interplay between individual, relational, organisational dimensions, mediating role of managerial relationships.

5.1 Summary of scientifically new and innovative findings

Based on an integrated empirical examination of the research questions and the associated hypotheses, employee loyalty in the Hungarian luxury hotel sector can be interpreted not as a one-dimensional and static attitude, but as a complex, multi-level, relational and context-sensitive construct. The quantitative results confirmed the distinctiveness of the organisational, departmental and line manager-related dimensions of loyalty, reinforcing the validity of the multi-reference-point approach (Meschke, 2021; Meschke, 2023). The qualitative results, however, highlighted that these dimensions do not operate independently of one another, but rather interact with one another. The scientific contribution of this thesis is therefore not the identification of a new dimension of loyalty, but rather the empirical validation of this network of relationships; the results are summarised in a categorised form in *Table 5*.

Table 5: A summary of the scientifically new and original findings of the thesis

Result	Classification	Scientific significance
1. Development and empirical validation of an integrated, three-dimensional loyalty model (<i>Figure 2</i>)	New scientific finding	Loyalty is a multi-level, non-one-dimensional attitude; rather, it is a construct comprising loyalty to the organisation, to a department and to one's superiors.
2. Identifying the mediating role of the leadership dimension (<i>Figure 3</i>)	New scientific finding	Manager plays a key & mediating role in the relationship between organisational support, operational performance and loyalty experienced by employees.
3. A mutually embedded system of three dimensions of loyalty	New scientific finding	This is not a question of interpreting dimensions that exist in parallel, but rather of a structural and relational system.
4. The application of Meschke's 'Employee Loyalty Scale' model and the empirical validation of the three-dimensional structure of loyalty in the context of Hungarian luxury hotels	Scientifically novel finding	Empirical confirmation of the distinctiveness of organisational, departmental and managerial loyalty when applying the original model in the context of domestic luxury hotels, and an extension of the relational and contextual interpretation of these dimensions.

5. Re-examining the Relationship between Work-Related Stress and Loyalty	Scientifically innovative result	It is important to emphasise the role of organisational and managerial resources, whilst challenging the linear and negative logic of relationships.
6. An integrated interpretation of the differentiating role of generational and job-related characteristics	Scientifically innovative result	Establishing a differentiated operational model of loyalty across different job roles (operational/non-operational) and life stages (early/middle/late).
7. The use of ‘mixed methods’	Methodology - scientifically innovative	By supplementing statistical correlations with organisational and experiential mechanisms, and by synthesising qualitative and quantitative findings.
8. Sample under study: an empirical study of domestic luxury hotels with a specific, unique focus	New empirical approach	A comprehensive examination of loyalty, based on the available academic publications, reveals only a limited presence.

Source: created by the author

A key finding is that the line manager plays a decisive mediating role in the development and maintenance of loyalty. Through communication, trust, support, fairness and employee involvement, the manager conveys how employees experience the organisation’s operations. This finding refines the theoretical approaches to perceived organisational support and social exchange by showing that the day-to-day mechanisms of organisational support and reciprocity are largely perceived through the relationship with the line manager (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Eisenberger et al., 1986; Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

The significant, positive correlation found between organisational commitment and employee loyalty confirmed previous theoretical links; at the same time, the qualitative findings also revealed the role played by recognition, managerial attention, opportunities for development and predictable organisational functioning. In contrast, the relationship between workplace workload and loyalty did not prove to be a simple, linear negative correlation. Based on the qualitative findings, the effect of workload on loyalty is context-dependent and mediated, with control, managerial support and other available resources playing a decisive role. (Bakker

& Demerouti, 2007; Karasek, 1979; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; Karatepe, 2013).

Another novel finding is the differentiation of loyalty according to job role and career stage. The differences between operational and non-operational roles can be linked to the specific characteristics of workload, performance expectations, guest interactions and emotional labour (Baum, 2007; Baum, 2015; Hochschild, 1983; Nickson, 2013). Differences across career stages suggest that the loyalty of younger and early-career employees is more conditional and development-oriented, whilst the attachment of those with a longer organisational history is more strongly linked to emotional and identity-based factors. However, these differences cannot be regarded as deterministic, as they develop in interaction with the organisational and job environment (Giousmpasoglou & Nguyen, 2025; Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Twenge et al., 2010).

This research contributes to expanding existing knowledge in the hospitality industry literature by interpreting loyalty within the context of retention, managerial behaviour, workload, job characteristics and the employee experience. This is particularly relevant in the luxury hotel environment, which demands a high standard of service and intensive human interaction, where employee attitudes and organisational functioning are also linked to service quality and organisational performance (Baum, 2015; Baum et al., 2020; Chi & Gursoy, 2009; Deery & Jago, 2015; Yee et al., 2010).

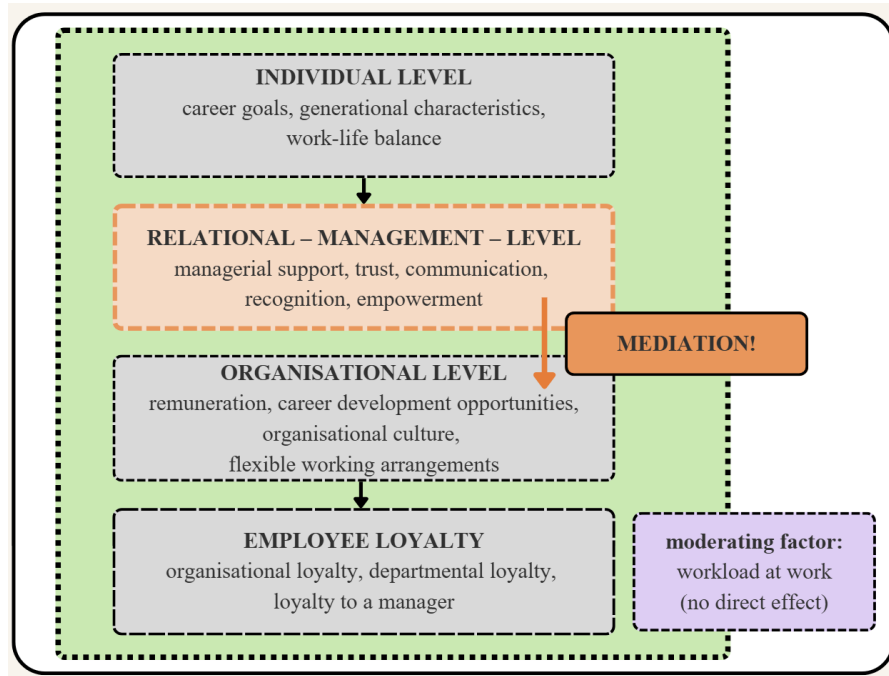
From a methodological perspective, the mixed-methods approach made it possible to supplement the statistical correlations identified in the quantitative analysis with deeper organisational and contextual connections, using qualitative case studies. The integration of the two research phases and the use of triangulation strengthened the explanatory power of the findings and contributed to a more complex interpretation of the organisational embeddedness of loyalty (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013).

Overall, the most significant academic contribution of this thesis is the demonstration that employee loyalty in Hungarian luxury hotels is not merely multidimensional, but rather a relational and context-sensitive system based on the interaction of these dimensions. The findings refine Meschke's approach by considering the mediating role of the line manager, alongside organisational and job-related factors, workload, and career stages. This synthesis also lays the foundations for a more nuanced managerial and HR-oriented approach to loyalty within luxury hotel organisations.

As a synthesised outcome of the research, an integrated, multi-level and dynamic framework for interpreting loyalty (*Figure 3*) can be summarised, which is suitable for providing a complex explanation of employee loyalty within the Hungarian luxury hotel sector.

The model includes both the mediating role of management and workplace stress, although the latter plays a role without a direct effect on employee loyalty.

Figure 3: A multi-level, integrated framework for understanding employee loyalty



Source: created by the author based on the research findings

6 Summary, practical implications, limitations and avenues for further research

Based on the findings of this thesis, employee loyalty in luxury hotels in Hungary cannot be interpreted as a one-dimensional, static employee attitude, but rather as a complex, multi-level, relational and context-sensitive construct. Loyalty is structured around relationships with the organisation, the work group and the line manager, whilst these dimensions form an interconnected system. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings has highlighted that the development and maintenance of loyalty cannot be attributed to a single organisational or employee-related factor but is rather the combined result of several interrelated influences.

One of the most important findings of the research is the identification of the key role played by the line manager. Managerial communication, trust, support, feedback, perceived fairness and the involvement of employees in organisational operations emerge as mechanisms that link organisational performance to employees' experience of loyalty. Based on our findings, strengthening loyalty is therefore not solely an HR task, but a strategic issue affecting organisational and managerial operations. This realisation is particularly significant in the luxury hotel sector, where, due to high service expectations, an intense workload and the need for constant personal presence, retaining a suitably trained and committed workforce is a key prerequisite for operations.

Another important finding of the research is that there is no simple, direct and linear negative relationship between workplace stress and loyalty. The impact of stress depends on the organisational and managerial resources available, as well as on working conditions. This finding is consistent with the demand–control–support model of workplace stress (Karasek, 1979; Karasek & Theorell, 1990), as well as the job demands–resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Appropriate managerial support, predictable communication, flexible work organisation and opportunities for development can therefore mitigate the negative consequences of a higher workload.

In practical terms, this means that retaining staff requires a comprehensive organisational approach. A supportive working environment, a positive team atmosphere, opportunities for development, appropriate feedback and predictable managerial behaviour can all contribute to maintaining loyalty. Previous research also confirms the link between employee satisfaction and loyalty: employees who are more satisfied with their working environment, their managers and organisational support are more likely to remain loyal to the organisation (Abdullah et al., 2009). In management practice, it is therefore particularly

important to explain the reasoning behind decisions, to involve employees and to continuously monitor their workload. The research findings relating to career stages also suggest that maintaining loyalty requires a differentiated managerial approach, particularly in the case of younger employees, for whom opportunities for development, feedback and a predictable working environment may be more important.

When interpreting the results, however, the limitations of the research must be considered. The quantitative study was based on a comprehensive survey; however, due to voluntary participation, the sample cannot be regarded as a probability sample, and therefore the generalisability of the results is limited (Etikan et al., 2016). The response rate of 5,71% represents a further limiting factor; however, in the case of organisational questionnaire-based research and a comprehensive search, this still ensures that the results are interpretable (Baruch & Holtom, 2008). In the future, a longer data collection period, stronger managerial support and the use of targeted incentives may also play a role in increasing willingness to participate (Singer & Ye, 2013).

A further methodological limitation is the cross-sectional research design, which captures employees' perceptions at a single point in time; it is therefore not suitable for unequivocally establishing causal relationships or tracking changes over time (Bryman, 2016). In the case of the qualitative findings, the number of interviewees and the context-dependence of the study limit statistical generalisability; however, it was precisely the combined examination of managerial and employee perspectives that enabled a deeper understanding of the organisational mechanisms underpinning loyalty. From a theoretical perspective, a limiting factor is that employee loyalty is not uniformly defined in the international literature; furthermore, the research was limited exclusively to five-star and five-star superior hotels in Hungary. The results can therefore only be generalised to a limited extent to other hotel categories or other service sectors.

These limitations also highlight the most important directions for further research. It would be worthwhile to extend the study to other hotel categories, other types of accommodation and international contexts, as well as to conduct longitudinal research to explore changes in loyalty over time. It may be particularly important to further examine the relationship between work-related stress and loyalty by incorporating mediating and moderating variables – such as managerial support, organisational justice or employee experience. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) can be used to further validate the factor structure developed in this study, whilst structural equation modelling (SEM) can facilitate the examination of the complex interrelationships between loyalty, organisational commitment and

work-related stress.

Overall, the academic contribution of the thesis lies in its interpretation of employee loyalty within the context of luxury hotels in Hungary as an integrated, multi-level and relational system, and in its refinement of Meschke's approach by taking into account managerial mediation, organisational factors, workload, job characteristics and career stages.

The most important conclusion of the thesis is that employee loyalty in the Hungarian luxury hotel industry is not a given, but rather a complex organisational resource that can be consciously shaped, examined across multiple levels and along three dimensions, and whose understanding and management are one of the key determinants of future competitiveness..

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