

# Training Seasonal Employees in The Hospitality Industry

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**Petar, Vlastic**

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# **Training Seasonal Employees in The Hospitality Industry**

Petar Vlašić

Rochester Institute of Technology, Croatia  
Hospitality and Tourism Management

HSPT495 Hospitality Project Planning and Development

Mentor: Professor Milena Kužnin

Course Instructor: Professor Rebecca Charry Roje

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## **Abstract**

This research paper investigates the challenges faced by seasonal employees in the hospitality industry and the training needs to address these challenges. The study collected qualitative data through 5 interviews with hospitality experts and a focus group with 5 seasonal employees. The findings reveal that seasonal employees face significant challenges during peak seasons, including understaffing, burnout, language barriers, cultural sensitivity, and customer service. The research suggests that current training for seasonal employees in the hospitality industry is inadequate, with a lack of emphasis on personalized, motivational training. Some aspects that should be focused on during training include customer service, language skills, cultural sensitivity, and destination knowledge. The research highlights the need for hospitality companies to identify challenges and provide effective training to prepare seasonal employees for their roles, ultimately leading to higher guest satisfaction, employee retention, and increasing the destination standards.

### **Keywords:**

seasonal employment, hospitality industry, peak season, staff shortages, customer service, language skills, cultural sensitivity, burnout, motivation, training, management, guest satisfaction, employee support, mental health

## **Training Seasonal Employees in The Hospitality Industry**

As opposed to destinations such as New York or Paris, which have a constant flow of visitors throughout the year, destinations such as Dubrovnik rely on seasonal employees to meet the high demand during peak season. This makes their recruitment and training a crucial aspect of the industry. However, the author of this research finds that seasonal employees often lack the necessary skills and experience to provide high-quality service, which can potentially negatively impact the guest experience.

Seasonal employees hold a crucial position in the service industry, especially within the hotel sector. Their contributions to Mediterranean tourism are so significant that it is difficult to envision hotel and tourism operators managing their operations without these workers (Walker et al., 2020).

The need for training seasonal employees in the hospitality industry cannot be overstated (Poulston, 2008). Effective training programs can help develop the necessary skills and knowledge required to provide guests with exceptional service, as tourists continue to value human interaction in their travel experiences (Parteca et al., 2020). This type of training can not only improve the guest experience but also help to enhance the destination's reputation. This can lead to more return visits and increased revenue. By offering tailored training and mentoring programs, HR managers can address the lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment most often found among seasonal employees, helping them develop new skills and feel more engaged in their work in the process. (Guillaume et al., 2019).

This research paper aims to explore the impact, perception, and importance of training seasonal employees in the hospitality industry. The paper will delve into the various training programs and techniques used to develop the skills of seasonal employees, the impact of training on their job satisfaction and performance, and the role of supervisors in facilitating effective training.

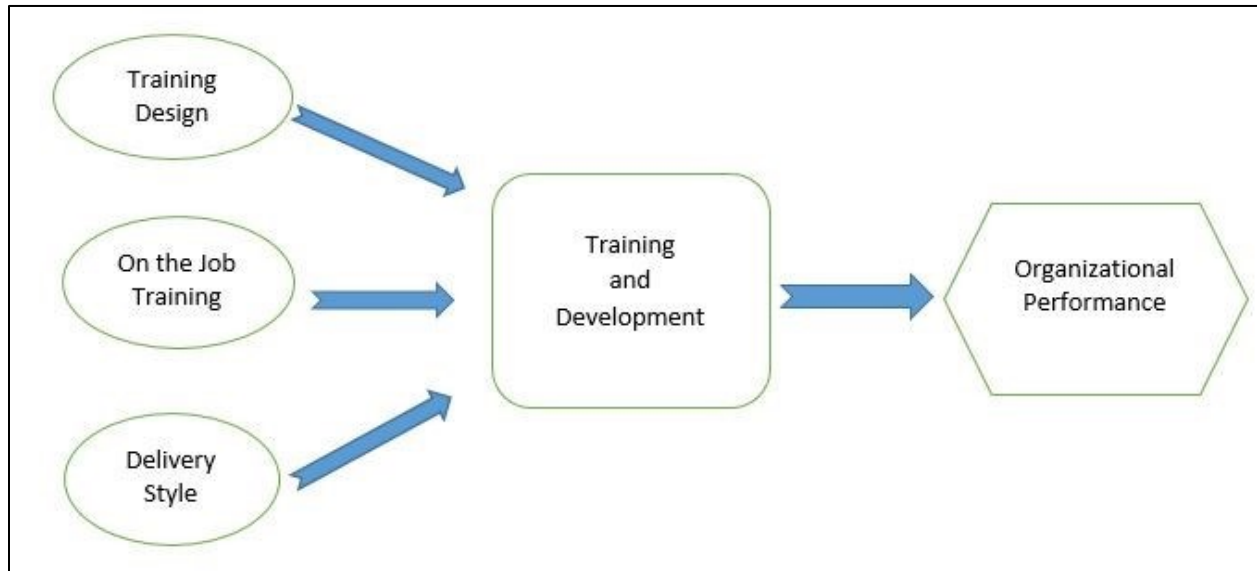


Figure 1 – Theoretical Framework (Khan, 2011)

Ultimately, the goal of this research paper is to highlight on the importance of training seasonal employees, especially within the hospitality industry, as well as the potential benefits it can bring to destinations like Dubrovnik.

## Literature Review

The hospitality industry relies heavily on seasonal employees to meet the demands of peak periods (Walker et al., 2020; Nicasio, 2022). Despite the rise of technology, the tourism industry still requires individuals with personal skills and human interaction abilities (Parteca et al., 2020).

Seasonal employees are instrumental to the service sector, particularly in the hotel industry (Walker et al., 2020). To address the needs of this workforce, businesses should focus on short-term results and task-specific training (Ažić et al., 2022).

Research indicates that seasonal employees may have lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment compared to their permanent counterparts (Guillaume et al., 2019). Addressing these disparities is crucial for maintaining a motivated and productive workforce. One approach is to offer mentoring programs, where returning seasonal workers mentor the new employees, allowing them to develop new skills and feel more engaged (Guillaume et al., 2019; Academy of Learning Career College (AOLCC), 2020).

Another effective strategy for integrating seasonal employees is pairing them with long-term staff members (Allen, 2020; Nicasio, 2022). This approach provides structure, guidance, and promotes a sense of teamwork and camaraderie. It also allows managers to evaluate the performance of seasonal workers for potential permanent employment, while also allowing them to delegate responsibility to the long-term staff members, testing them for potential promotions. (Allen, 2020).

Teambuilding training is also essential to improve the overall wellbeing and satisfaction of seasonal workers, as strong interpersonal relationships are crucial to their experience (Lundberg, 2009). Large group training sessions, web-based training, and mentoring systems can be utilized to foster an inclusive work environment and promote collaboration (AOLCC, 2020).

Performance objectives should be analyzed, and employees should be asked about their struggles and areas for improvement, allowing for effective feedback as well as the provision of relevant and practical training (Zoe, 2019). When employees see how their performance improves after implementing new skills learned in training, they are more likely to value and engage in future

training opportunities (Zoe, 2019). Offering incentives for achieving training goals, such as certificates, public recognition, or additional leave days, can also encourage employees to become self-motivated learners (Zoe, 2019).

The level of job satisfaction and perception of leadership among seasonal workers in the hospitality industry can be influenced by the leadership styles employed by managers (Kužnin & Walker, 2017). A study conducted in Croatia found a high correlation between transformational and transactional leadership styles among front desk managers in Dubrovnik hotels, suggesting that managers have developed a unique leadership style that allows them to adjust to individual situations and achieve equal levels of job satisfaction for both permanent and seasonal employees (Kužnin & Walker, 2017).

The increasing demand for skilled labor in the service industry necessitates a focus on the professional growth of employees, engaging them in the decision-making process, and staying updated with market trends and consumer preferences (Mušlek, 2021; Coulon, 2023). This emphasis on employee development is particularly relevant in the context of training seasonal employees in the hospitality industry.

Training is not only a requirement of due process when poor performance results in disciplinary action but also a means of raising performance standards (Poulston, 2008). By investing in the development and enhancement of seasonal employees' skills and expertise, hospitality organizations can ensure that these workers contribute significantly to achieving company objectives (Mušlek, 2021).

It is important for hospitality organizations to recognize the contextual nature of seasonal employment. As noted by Kužnin & Walker (2017), understanding the specific needs and

expectations of seasonal workers is essential for developing tailored training programs that address their unique challenges. This tailored approach can help to enhance job satisfaction and performance, ultimately leading to improved customer experiences (Kužnin & Walker, 2017).

Creating a supportive workplace culture is essential for the successful integration and satisfaction of seasonal employees (Nicasio, 2022). O'Dwyer (2019) highlights the importance of motivation in ensuring top performance from seasonal staff, as it directly affects productivity, the work environment, and the visitor experience. By fostering a positive work environment and promoting collaboration and communication among seasonal and permanent employees, hospitality organizations can create a sense of belonging and unity, which can positively impact employee morale, job satisfaction, and loyalty (Nicasio, 2022; O'Dwyer, 2019).

In addition to addressing job satisfaction and leadership, the training methods used in the hospitality industry should be carefully considered. A study by Leung et al. (2022) suggests that organizations can use different training methods, such as in-person demonstration or VR game training, depending on their goals and budget. VR game training can enhance trainees' brand attitudes, leading to positive outcomes like job satisfaction and loyalty, but may not be as effective for knowledge retention. Traditional video training is a more practical option for small organizations with limited budgets (Leung et al. 2022).

In essence, addressing the unique challenges faced by seasonal employees in the hospitality industry is essential for maintaining a motivated, satisfied, and productive workforce. Some of the effective strategies should include a combination of task-specific training, mentoring programs, and teambuilding exercises. The pairing of seasonal employees with long-term staff members offer accurate and timely feedback, ensuring positive results. Having a comprehensive approach to training seasonal employees, especially in the hospitality industry, should include a focus on



professional growth, offer some tailored training programs that address the unique needs of seasonal workers, and finally the promotion of a supportive workplace culture. After connecting the insights from various sources, it becomes clear that investing in the development and wellbeing of seasonal employees is essential for achieving success in the hospitality industry. An investment of this sort doesn't just help prepare seasonal workers to meet the demands of their roles and positions, but it also contributes to the overall satisfaction of both employees and customers.

## **Methodology**

During the study, two primary data collection methods were used. A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with hospitality managers and experts. Additionally, a focus group with seasonal employees was also conducted. The reasoning for selecting these methods is to gain a comprehensive understanding of both of the perspectives between managerial staff and seasonal workers in the hospitality industry. Their opinions and experience with training practices would offer great insight on the effects of training on service quality, as well as employee and customer satisfaction.

During the research, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This was done with a purposive sample of hospitality managers and experts. In the realm of this study, there an assortment of representatives amounted to two hotel general managers (interviews carried out on the 12th of April in 2023), two HR managers (interviews carried out on the 15th of April in 2023), and one front office manager (interview conducted on the 5th of April in 2023). These individuals were deliberately chosen because of their immense professional experience and expertise in the field, with a view to making sure they could provide an unequivocally valuable insight concerning the training process as well as professional and personal development of seasonal employees. Last but

not least, it is needed to mention that the semi-structured nature of the interviews was chosen purposely to create a balance that ensured specific research objectives were addressed while participants were granted the liberty to share their thoughts and experiences openly. The semi-structured nature of the interviews was chosen to create a balance between addressing specific research objectives, all while allowing participants the freedom to openly share their thoughts and experiences. This format allowed for adaptability in the questioning, which helped gather deeper insights into the training methods used across different hospitality contexts.

This adaptability led to a more thorough understanding of both the management and the seasonal employee perspectives, which made it possible to pinpoint the areas for improvement that would potentially boost training effectiveness. Promoting open communication of their experiences proved crucial in capturing a wide range of viewpoints regarding the impact of training practices on service quality and customer satisfaction.

The questions, created by the author and based on the questions of previous research (Parteca et al. 2020), were designed to explore the participants' views on the importance of training seasonal employees, the current training methods used, and the potential improvements that could be made to enhance training effectiveness. Prior to the actual research, the interview and focus group questions were pilot tested and refined. The interviews were held in person or via video conference, which depended on the participant's schedule and availability. The duration of the interviews ranged from 20 to 30 minutes, and all participants gave their consent for recording purposes. The transcripts of these interviews were later analyzed as part of the study. On 12.04.2023, a focus group involving five co-op students and seasonal employees from the hospitality industry was conducted. Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of participants with diverse experiences, positions, and perspectives. The focus group aimed to gain insights into the training methods used,

the impact of training on customer satisfaction and service quality, as well as individual experiences. The session lasted about 60 minutes and was recorded upon consent of all participants. The recording was later transcribed for data analysis.

The data collected from both the semi-structured interviews and the focus group were analyzed using thematic analysis. This qualitative data analysis method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. The transcripts from the interviews and focus group were read multiple times to gain familiarity with the content, and then, initial results were generated based on the research questions and emerging patterns. The data was grouped into broader themes, which were reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and coherence. The final themes were then used to interpret the data and draw conclusions about the research topic.

The research was carried out in compliance with the ethical protocols for qualitative studies, taking care to procure the participants' voluntary assent by providing a clear and concise statement of the study's objectives and ensuring their confidentiality. Prior to the interviews and focus group discussion, all the participants provided informed consent, which was duly documented. All data obtained were depersonalized to maintain privacy and anonymity.

## **Results**

### **Interview Analysis:**

The first question aimed to establish the participants' roles and responsibilities within their organizations. Responses showed that they held roles in different areas of the hospitality industry, such as teaching seasonal workers, hotel management, and human resources management. Although the question itself may not require extensive analysis, it provides a context for the subsequent responses and highlights the diverse perspectives of the interviewees.

The responses to the second question illustrated the importance of seasonal employees in the hospitality industry, with all interviewees acknowledging their significant contributions, especially during peak periods. The main challenges identified include finding qualified candidates, adapting them to the organization's culture, and managing expectations related to compensation and opportunities for advancement.

The interviewed professionals shared their organizations' various training methods for seasonal employees. Analyzing the data, two out of five hospitality professionals emphasized the importance of on-the-job training for seasonal employees. Additionally, two out of five professionals mentioned the use of orientation and standard operational procedures as part of the training process.

Regarding the effectiveness of the training programs for seasonal employees, the interviewees expressed varying levels of satisfaction with their current training methods. Three out of the five interviewees believed that their training programs were effective to a certain extent, with room for improvement. Regarding specific examples of training's impact on customer satisfaction, three interviewees shared positive stories.

The opinions the interviewees shared on the potential impact of changes in seasonal employee training on overall destination standards showed that four out of the five participants believed that some form of improved training would positively affect the destination standards. The majority of the participants believe that bringing change into the process of seasonal employee training could positively affect overall destination standards. The participants, however, also acknowledged the challenges associated with training seasonal employees and emphasized the need for providing a “base” level of training and promoting respectful behavior.

The varied perspectives of the interviewees regarding training for seasonal employees in the hospitality sector were shared. Recommendations for specific training types and innovative techniques or instruments were also offered. Most interviewees concur that the adaptation of training to seasonal employees is essential and that various abilities like customer service, dialect, and cultural awareness ought to be incorporated. Additionally, the idea of examining the use of technology and motivational training emerged, aimed at improving seasonal employees' readiness for their positions within the hospitality industry.

### **Focus Group Analysis:**

#### 1. Training Experiences:

##### a. Types of training received by participants:

- On-the-job training: 4 out of 5 participants
- Classroom/in-class training: 1 out of 5 participants
- Online training (e.g., Zoom): 1 out of 5 participants
- Shadowing: 1 out of 5 participants

##### b. Adequacy of the training and preparedness for the role:

- Adequately prepared due to training: 1 out of 5 participants
- Adequately prepared due to prior experience or self-directed learning: 3 out of 5 participants
- Not adequately prepared: 1 out of 5 participants

Training Experiences: The focus group analysis revealed that a majority of the participants (4 out of 5) received some form of on-the-job training, while only one participant reported receiving classroom/in-class training. Online training and shadowing were each mentioned by one participant. In terms of adequacy, only one participant felt prepared due to the training they

received, while three participants attributed their preparedness to prior experience or self-directed learning. One participant did not feel adequately prepared for their role. In the interviews, participants mentioned varied training experiences, such as on-the-job training, online courses, and mentorship programs. However, there was no clear consensus on the most common or preferred form of training.

## 2. Training Effectiveness:

- a. Most effective training methods or techniques:
  - Hands-on approach/on-the-job training: 4 out of 5 participants
  - Shadowing/learning from others: 2 out of 5 participants
- b. Areas for training improvement or expansion:
  - More practice: 1 out of 5 participants
  - Not specified: 2 out of 5 participants

Training Effectiveness: Most participants (4 out of 5) found a hands-on approach or on-the-job training to be the most effective method for learning their role. Shadowing or learning from others was mentioned by two participants. Regarding areas for improvement or expansion, one participant suggested that more practice would be helpful, while the remaining two participants did not specify any areas for improvement. Contrarily, during the interviews, the emphasis was on motivational training and the role of mentors in the learning process. Only one interviewee mentioned on-the-job training as an effective approach.

## 3. Training and Employee Integration:

- a. Training process impact on integration into company culture and work environment:

- Positive impact: 3 out of 5 participants
  - Neutral or no impact: 2 out of 5 participants
- b. Specific aspects of training that facilitated integration and collaboration:
- Learning from others: 1 out of 5 participants
  - Being thrown into the work from the beginning: 1 out of 5 participants

Training and Employee Integration: The training process had a positive impact on the integration into the company culture and work environment for 3 out of 5 participants, while 2 participants felt the training process had a neutral or no impact on their integration. Specific aspects of the training that facilitated integration and collaboration included learning from others and being thrown into the work from the beginning. In the interviews, the importance of effective communication, teamwork, and collaboration was highlighted for successful integration, but there was no direct mention of the impact of training on the integration process.

#### 4. Impact of Training on Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality:

- a. Opinion on the impact of training on customer satisfaction and service quality:
- Positive impact: 5 out of 5 participants
- b. Specific examples of training directly influencing a positive customer interaction:
- Knowledge of local history and facts: 2 out of 5 participants
  - Etiquette and professionalism: 1 out of 5 participants
  - Personalized approach to guest needs: 1 out of 5 participants

Impact of Training on Customer Satisfaction and Service Quality: All participants in the focus group agreed that proper training has a positive impact on customer satisfaction and service quality in the hospitality industry. They emphasized the importance of adequate training

techniques and methods, etiquette, professionalism, and motivation. In the interviews, participants also agreed that training plays a crucial role in customer satisfaction, with an emphasis on customer service skills, staff motivation, and building strong relationships with customers.

#### 5. The Role of Training in Raising Overall Destination Standards:

- a. Impact of seasonal employee training on overall destination standards:
  - Positive impact: 5 out of 5 participants
- b. Important aspects of training for achieving this goal:
  - Reducing turnover rate: 2 out of 5 participants
  - Extended and adequate training duration: 1 out of 5 participants
  - Stress management and mental health support: 2 out of 5 participants

The Role of Training in Raising Overall Destination Standards: All participants in the focus group agreed that proper training of seasonal employees could have a positive impact on overall destination standards. They highlighted issues such as high turnover rates in the hospitality industry and the need for extended, adequate training programs. In the interviews, participants discussed various factors that contribute to raising destination standards, including staff motivation, effective communication, and the provision of excellent customer service. However, the specific role of training in achieving this goal was not directly addressed.

#### 6. Challenges Faced by Seasonal Employees:

- a. Main challenges faced by seasonal employees in the hospitality industry:
  - Motivation during peak season: 2 out of 5 participants
  - Heavy workload due to understaffing: 3 out of 5 participants



b. Addressing challenges through training or other support mechanisms:

- Adequate staffing and resources: 3 out of 5 participants
- Management understanding and support: 3 out of 5 participants

Challenges Faced by Seasonal Employees: Seasonal employees in the focus group identified motivation during peak season and heavy workloads due to understaffing as their main challenges. To address these challenges, participants suggested ensuring adequate staffing and resources and having understanding and supportive management. In the interviews, participants expressed concerns about the motivational challenges faced by seasonal employees, emphasizing the need for training programs that focus on employee motivation, engagement, and personal development.

7. Future Training Needs and Recommendations:

- a. Thoughts on the current level of training provided to seasonal employees in the hospitality industry:
- Needs improvement: 4 out of 5 participants
- b. Specific types of training that should be provided:
- Customer service: 5 out of 5 participants
  - Language skills (English fluency): 3 out of 5 participants
  - Cultural sensitivity: 2

Future Training Needs and Recommendations: The focus group participants generally agreed that the current level of training provided to seasonal employees in the hospitality industry needs improvement. They identified customer service, language skills (English fluency), and cultural sensitivity as specific types of training that should be provided. In the interviews, participants highlighted the need for comprehensive and continuous training programs that cover a wide

range of topics, such as customer service, communication, and conflict resolution. They also emphasized the importance of incorporating motivational training for seasonal employees and adapting training approaches to the evolving needs of the hospitality industry.

## **Discussion**

The focus group results provide valuable insights into seasonal employees' training experiences, effectiveness, integration, and challenges in the hospitality industry. These findings are supported by and contrasted with existing literature.

Consistent with the focus group findings, Parteca et al. (2020) emphasized the irreplaceable role of human interaction in the tourism industry, highlighting the importance of training employees to provide a personal touch to travelers. Additionally, the majority of focus group participants found on-the-job training and a hands-on approach to be the most effective methods for learning their roles, aligning with Ažić et al.'s (2022) suggestion that businesses embracing seasonality should focus on brief, task-specific training for employees.

The focus group also revealed that most participants felt adequately prepared for their roles due to prior experience or self-directed learning rather than formal training. This finding is in line with Mušlek (2021), who highlighted the importance of investing in employees' professional growth and involving them in decision-making processes. Furthermore, the focus group identified motivation during peak season and heavy workloads due to understaffing as major challenges faced by seasonal employees. This supports Walker et al.'s (2020) assertion that seasonal workers are instrumental to the hotel industry and, as Guillaume et al. (2019) suggest, HR managers should consider job challenges and training opportunities for seasonal employees who seek more engagement.

Lundberg (2009) also found that teambuilding training improved seasonal workers' wellbeing and satisfaction, supporting the focus group's positive association between training and integration into company culture. In contrast, the interviews did not directly address the impact of training on employee integration. The focus group results confirmed Poulston's (2008) assertion that training is a means of raising performance standards and resonated with Leung et al.'s (2022) suggestion that different training methods can be employed depending on organizational goals and budgets.

Popular sources, such as Academy of Learning Career College (AOLCC) (2020), emphasized the importance of large group-training sessions and web-based training for quickly integrating seasonal employees, while Nicasio (2022) and Allen (2020) recommended pairing seasonal employees with long-term staff members for guidance and support. These strategies align with the focus group's findings on effective training methods, such as shadowing and learning from others.

Lastly, the focus group suggested improvements in current training, identifying customer service, language skills, and cultural sensitivity as areas of focus. Zoe (2019) also highlighted the importance of making training practical and relevant, with incentives and recognition for employee participation. This supports the need for comprehensive and continuous training programs, as suggested by the focus group and interview participants.

## **Limitations**

One important consideration in interpreting the findings of this study is the sample size. While the participants had significant experience in the hospitality industry, the small sample size of only five interviewees and five focus group participants limits the generalizability of the results to a wider population. Furthermore, the exclusive use of qualitative methods, while providing rich insights, does not yield numerical or statistically significant data.

## **Future Research Recommendations**

To overcome these limitations, future research should expand the sample size and incorporate greater diversity across hospitality sectors, regions, and cultural backgrounds. In addition, utilizing a mixed-methods approach employing both quantitative and qualitative methods would strengthen the conclusions drawn from the research. One potential area for future investigation could include exploring the role of technology, like virtual reality or mobile applications, in enhancing training for seasonal hospitality employees.

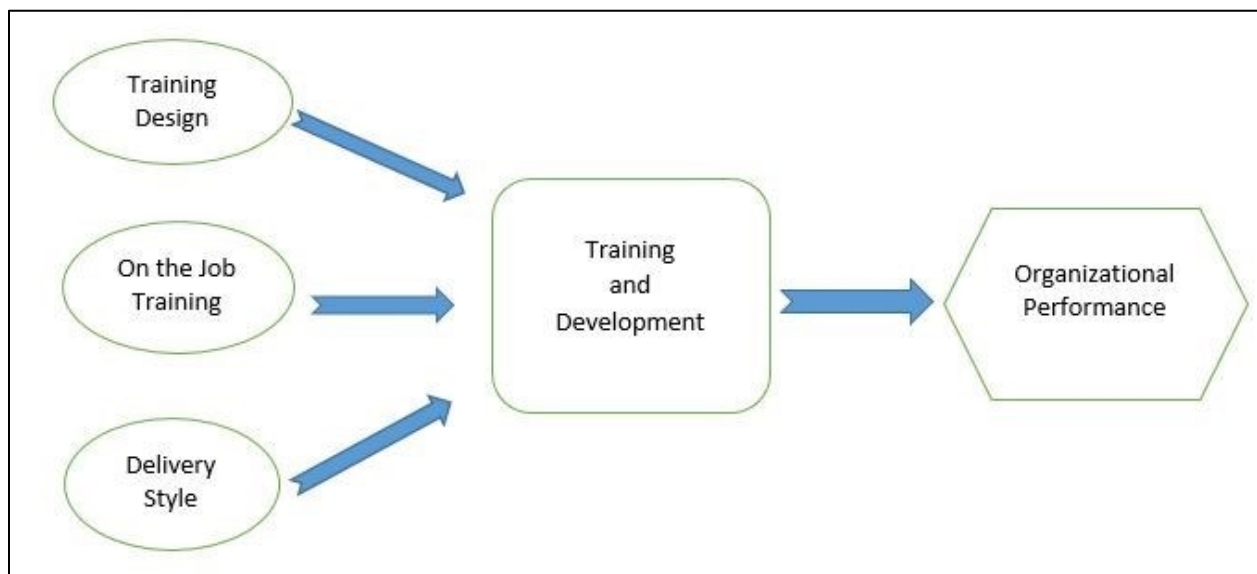
## **Conclusion**

The study aimed to investigate the experiences and challenges encountered by hospitality industry seasonal employees and examine the efficacy of various training methods for this workforce segment. The research provided important insights into seasonal employees' needs and concerns and highlighted the critical role of training in enhancing their job satisfaction and performance, through numerous interviews and a focus group discussion with seasoned professionals. Adequate training and support for seasonal employees were deemed important as they contribute to their job satisfaction and overall performance in the hospitality industry, aligning with literature on employee development investments, as pointed out by Mušlek (2021), while implying involving workers in the decision-making process. Lundberg (2009) has suggested that team-building training could improve the well-being of seasonal workers, as confirmed by these findings. Mentorship programs were also identified as valuable, such as those suggested by Guillaume et al. (2019), and pairing seasonal employees with long-term staff members, as recommended by Allen (2020) and Nicasio (2022), could potentially offer similar benefits. Nevertheless, the small sample size and qualitative methods present limitations in this

study, requiring further research to provide a more exhaustive understanding of seasonal employees' experiences and training needs in the hospitality industry, by adopting larger, diverse samples and different methodological approaches.

In summary, the research underscores the significance of investing in the training and development of seasonal employees in the hospitality industry to ensure their job satisfaction, performance, and retention. By focusing on the continuous improvement of training methods and understanding the unique needs of this workforce segment, hospitality businesses can ensure the provision of exceptional customer service, raise destination standards, and maintain their competitive edge in the ever-evolving tourism landscape.

## Appendix:



**Figure 2 – Theoretical Framework (Khan, 2011)**

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