

## Development of HR Practice Model for Four-Star Hotel Industry in Yunnan Province during COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

This study explores the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on human resources in the four-star hotel industry in Yunnan Province, explores the role of human resource practices in four-star hotels in Yunnan Province during COVID-19 pandemic, and proposes a model of human resource practices in the hotel industry. This study used qualitative research as the research design, constructivist as the research paradigm, and grounded theory methodology to investigate the role of human resource practices in four-star hotels in Yunnan Province. The data collection method of this study was in-depth interviews, and data information was collected from 20 human resource practitioners in four-star hotels in Yunnan Province. The data were manually coded and then analyzed. The research results indicate that COVID-19 pandemic has caused human resource impacts and challenges in Yunnan Province. Reasonable implementation of human resource practices can help hotels cope with these impact and reduce hotel losses.

**Keywords :** *human resource practices, hotel industry, COVID-19 pandemic*

## Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) a global epidemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). The virus spread rapidly and led to numerous infections and deaths worldwide. This huge crisis caused the global hotel industry to experience an unprecedented low. During the COVID-19 outbreak, many hotels in China had closed (HNN, 2020). From May to September 2020, the willingness to travel dropped by about 50% in Asia and about 30% in the Americas and Europe (Gallego & Font, 2020). Over the past few years, the total number of Chinese travelers has only reached about 50% of what it was in 2019 due to the epidemic. Many tourists had to postpone or even cancel their travel plans and the hotel industry was greatly affected.

Health, social and economic crises inevitably lead to organizational changes and may pose a threat to employees (Meyer et al., 2017). The hotel industry is very vulnerable to health crises, disasters and other risks. COVID-19 pandemic not only have a huge impact on the revenues of the hotel industry, but it also poses a number of human resource challenges to the hotel industry (Jung et al., 2021). Some hotels could only reduce their labor costs by layoffs in order to maintain their operations. The psychological effects of layoffs and COVID-19 pandemic can lead to stress, depression and loneliness (WHO, 2020). This can make some hotel employees feel threatened and create job insecurity (Baum et al., 2020) reducing employee motivation (Iqbal et al., 2011). Although the root cause of job insecurity in such crises is external problems, employees also attribute job insecurity to internal problems of the organization (Van Hootegeem et al., 2018). As hotel employees are exposed to a large number of customers, which increases the risk of infection, employees may experience negative emotions such as stress, anxiety and fear. Lack of protective knowledge, awareness and equipment can increase the health risk of employees and even endanger their lives. At the same time, COVID-19 pandemic has changed people's work environment and work patterns. Maintaining social distance is a way to cope with coronavirus, and some employees are reluctant to change their work patterns. (Atkeson, 2020).

Research on the impact of incidents on the hotel industry usually points to consumers and managers (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). However, there is little discussion on how these incidents affect hotel employees and organizations, and how HR practices can help hotels face these incidents. As the COVID-19 pandemic global situation improves and the Chinese government removes most of the anti-epidemic restrictions in 2023, the tourism and hotel industry gradually begin to recover. (CCTV, 2023). But this does not mean that COVID-19 pandemic is no longer a continuing global health threat (WHO, 2023); re-infections still occur and people should not let their guard down (AMA, 2023).

Emerging HR issues have become prominent in organizations when conducting risk management oversight (Cooke et al., 2020). HR practices during the COVID-19 pandemic period are critical to the organization and contingency plans must be developed to manage HR-related risks (Carnevale and Hatak, 2020). Therefore, it is important to explore the hotel industry's HR practices and propose a model of HR practices accordingly. As four- and five-star hotels are more comprehensively staffed than other star hotels, they better reflect the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on hotel human resources. In Yunnan Province, there are more four-star hotels, so this study chooses four-star hotels as the research object. This study can help HR managers to understand the HR impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the hotel industry and the role of hotel HR practices in COVID-19 pandemic, and provide a reference for HR practice patterns in the hotel industry under the influence of COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To explore the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on human resource management for the four-star hotel in Yunnan province.
2. To study the role of HR practices for the four-star hotel industry in Yunnan province in dealing with COVID-19 pandemic.
3. To study the HR practice of a four-star hotel in Yunnan province during COVID-19 pandemic.
4. To propose a model of HR practices for the four-star hotel in Yunnan province during COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the human resource management for the four-star hotels in Yunnan province?
2. How did the four-star hotel industry in Yunnan province respond to COVID-19 pandemic in the early and middle stages of the pandemic?
3. What are the HR practices of the four-star hotel industry in Yunnan province during COVID-19 pandemic?
4. What does the model of HR practice for a four-star hotel in Yunnan province look like?

## Literature Review

**Human Resource Practices:** Human resource management practices are a process of attracting, motivating, and retaining employees to ensure organizational survival (Schuler & Jackson, 1987). HRM practices include facilitating workforce participation, assessment, knowledge application and competency preparation, employee training, retention, and management issues (Singh et al., 2020). Training and development: training is a way of providing new or existing employees with the skills they need to do their jobs (Dessler, 2011). Through learning, planning and coaching, individuals are enabled to achieve the level of knowledge and skills required to work effectively (Armstrong, 2006), improve current or upcoming competencies (Jackson & Schuler, 1999) and thereby improve organizational performance (Coffey et al., 1994). Investing in training can lead to favorable outcomes for the organization (Bartel, 1994). **Recruitment:** the general purpose of recruitment is to provide the organization with potentially qualified applicants (Gamage, 2014) and to obtain the quantity and quality of employees needed to meet the organization's strategic objectives at the lowest possible cost (Ofori & Aryeetey, 2011). The efficiency of recruitment has a direct impact on the quality of the organization's human resources (Gamage, 2014). **Benefits and compensation:** compensation strategies play an important role in recruiting and retaining skilled employees (Frye, 2004). Effective human resource management strategy is the combination of performance and compensation system to increase the willingness and efficiency of employees to work (Wright & Gardner, 2002). Performance-based pay has a positive impact on employee performance (M. P. Brown et al., 2003). **Career planning:** Career planning is the process of planning one's life and work by setting career goals and identifying ways to achieve them (Wright & Snell, 1998). Career planning activities contribute to career satisfaction (Lee & Heard, 2000). Employees are more likely to join organizations where they have ample opportunities to pursue their career goals and reach their full potential (Gardner et al., 2011).

**Human Resource Management and COVID-19 Pandemic:** COVID-19 pandemic poses human resource challenges to the hotel industry (Jung et al., 2021). The fear of COVID-19 pandemic infection has become a concern that impairs the emotional and cognitive responses of hotel employees (Shehata & Selem, 2021). Various jobs in the tourism and hotel industries are particularly susceptible to the disease (Chinazzi et al., 2020). COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new workplace hazards (Hecker, 2020), as well as significant stress for employees (Shaw et al., 2020).

Job insecurity can cause organizations to move in a bad direction, and risky work behavior can lead to a decrease in employee job satisfaction. (Bajrami et al., 2021). COVID-19 pandemic aggravated will create negative work attitudes, job insecurity, burnout and other negative emotions among employees. (Agarwal, 2021).

COVID-19 pandemic forces the organization to take a series of proactive human resource management measures to curb the adverse effects of COVID-19 pandemic (Gigauri, 2021). Training plays an important role in times of crisis such as pandemics (Devyani et al., 2020). It helps to develop the skills needed by employees, raise awareness about COVID-19 pandemic, reduce the risk of virus transmission, and prevent mental health problems (Quaedackers et al., 2020). In addition to training, COVID-19 poses a significant challenge to career development in organizations, resulting in significant career impacts (Akkermans et al., 2020). In addition, in workplaces with a high risk of contamination, many employees may decide to leave the organization if they are not adequately compensated for the high risk of the workplace (Hecker, 2020).

Therefore, it can be concluded that COVID-19 pandemic has HR implications for the hotel industry, such as potentially exposing employees to health hazards, negative emotions, and stress, and affecting training and career development. Taking good HR measures can help hotels to cope with these impacts.

### Research Methodology

In this study, a qualitative approach was chosen as the research design. Creswell (2007) suggests that grounded theory should be interviewed with 20-30 individuals to “saturate” the categories and elaborate on the theory. In order to obtain qualified candidates who can provide the most reliable information for the study, the researcher used a purposive sampling method to identify suitable participants and study sites, so data were collected by interviewing 20 participants, include human resource staffs and managers from four-star hotels in Yunnan Province using in-depth interviews, and conclusions were drawn by understanding and interpreting the results of the analysis of the interview data. The researcher developed an interview guide from the literature review and related studies, which was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Burapha University. Interview responses were recorded through audio recordings and short notes with the permission of each interviewee.

### **Data analysis and interpretation**

This study used interview data and analyzed the data manually. The researcher compiled and analyzed the data and then wrote the research report. This study used qualitative research methodology to draw conclusions from understanding and interpreting the results of analyzing the interview data.

The research adopted by Charmaz (2006) consisted of the following four steps. Step 1: Initial coding: verbatim analysis to explore and identify any possibilities in the data. Step 2: Focused coding: synthesis more meaningful and directional data; Step 3: Axial coding: relate categories to subcategories. Axial coding specifies the attributes and dimensions of the categories. Step 4: Theoretical coding: Theoretical coding is conceptualized and specifies how all the categories relate to each other to generate a new theory or model.

### **Trustworthiness**

In order to ensure the credibility of this qualitative study, the researcher adopted trust strategies including 1) The researcher sent the collected research data and results to the researcher's supervisor and co-supervisors for review, thus ensuring the accuracy of the findings and conclusions and preventing bias and factual errors; 2 ) Clear documentation including details and clear descriptions of data collection, recorded conversations, observations, and explanations of the data collection; 3 ) Reflective notes - each researcher's reflective summary of the data analysis process.

### **Research Results**

To conduct the qualitative study, in-depth interviews were used to collect data. Specifically, 20 human resource practitioners from four-star hotels in Yunnan Province were selected as informants, which included hotel deputy general managers, human resource directors, human resource managers and deputy managers, and human resource staff. The researchers analyzed the role of HR practices in four-star hotels in Yunnan Province through the data collected from the interviews and proposed the following three themes based on the research objectives and questions of this study. As shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Themes**

NO.	Theme
1	Human resource impact
2	Role of HR Practices
3	Effective HR Practices

**Human resource impact:** To answer the first question, the researchers analyzed the data and came up with the appropriate themes and categories. As shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Theme 1, Human resource impact**

Theme 1	Category
Human resource impact	C1.1 Training issues
	C1.2 Recruitment pressure
	C1.3 Working pressure
	C1.4 Negative emotions
	C1.5 Human resources shortage
	C1.6 Employee Health

The results of the study found that COVID-19 pandemic faced various human resource impact brought about by COVID-19 pandemic on the four-star hotels in Yunnan Province selected in this study, including:

**C1.1 Training issues:** the study found that during COVID-19 pandemic, training methods were changed to online training and some training courses had to be suspended. It is difficult to assess the effect of training. " ... Most of the training was conducted online. The effectiveness of some specialized skills training is difficult to assess..." (P13)

**C1.2 Recruitment pressure:** This study found that in the face of COVID-19 pandemic improvement and tourism recovery, the hotel industry has experienced a sudden increase in hiring demand and an increase in recruitment workload. " ... Recruitment pressure was indeed high at that time because many people in the hotel industry had switched careers in the last three years, resulting in a relatively small talent pool in this industry..." (P1)

**C1.3 Working Pressure:** This study found that COVID-19 pandemic brought economic pressure and some hotel employees' livelihoods were not secured. The shortage of manpower during the resumption of work led to an increase in the workload of the remaining employees, resulting in work pressure. "... At that time, the workload of our entire hotel staff was relatively high, and the pressure increased..." (P5).

**C1.4 Negative Emotions:** COVID-19 pandemic has caused some negative emotions among the hotel employees, who are worried about their health and working environment, which leads to negative emotions such as nervousness, anxiety and panic. "... There is still some concern and anxiety about health, and we meet different customers every day. So there is still some risk..." (P19)

**C1.5 Human Resource Shortage:** this study found that some hotels lost some of their employees to control their human resource costs due to COVID-19 pandemic, and some of the hotel industry is losing its talent: "...COVID-19 pandemic brought probably the biggest problem to the industry... So during that period, it also led to a lot of personnel turnover...." (P3)

**C1.6 Employee Health:** COVID-19 pandemic brought some health issues to the hotel industry, and as and when the hotel industry began to recover and the number of tourists increased, so did the health risks to hotel employees. " ... It was still difficult for us at that time. Because of the sudden wave of peak times, a lot of staff got sick..." (P9)

**Role of HR Practices:** To answer the second question, the researchers analyzed the data and came up with the appropriate themes and categories. As shown in Table 3

**Table 3: Theme 2, Role of HR Practices**

Theme 2	Category
Role of HR Practices	C2.1 Enhance employee skills
	C2.2 Reduce Human resources shortages situation
	C2.3 Taking care of employee health

**Table 3: Theme 2, Role of HR Practices(continue)**

Theme 2	Category
Role of HR Practices	C2.4 Motivating employees
	C2.5 Alleviate negative emotions



The study found that HR practices in selected four-star hotels in Yunnan Province play a vital role in addressing and resolving HR impact caused by COVID-19 pandemic. This includes:

**C2.1 Enhance Employee Skills:** the study found that during COVID-19 pandemic, training could enhance employee skills, equip employees with skills related to health protection, and develop their potential with multiple job skills. " ... During the epidemic, our main goal was to expand the skills of our employees, leading to versatility and specialization..." (P10)

**C2.2 Reduce human resources shortages situation:** in the face of human resource shortages due to COVID-19 pandemic, participants compensated for staff shortages in certain areas by flexibly redeploying staff, while developing staff's multi-skills. "... We encourage employees in all departments to help each other and to develop and learn various skills..." (P14)

**C2.3 Taking care of employee health:** the participants provide some protective measures for the health of the hotel employees by providing the necessary protective equipment and disinfecting tools to provide a certain level of protection for the health of the employees. " ... At that time the hotel stored a lot of supplies. It was a focus of our work to ensure the safety and health of employees ..." (P6)

**C2.4 Motivating employees:** the study found that with increased workloads and understaffing, participants motivated employees to work better and improve their working passion through remuneration packages. "... There were a few overtime assignments when work resumed. At this time, we not only encouraged the employees, but also set up some incentives to give them some compensation..." (P3)

**C2.5 Alleviating Negative Emotions:** In the face of the negative emotions caused by COVID-19 pandemic to hotel employee, participants created a good working atmosphere, cared for employees, and actively communicated with them, thus alleviating their anxiety and stress. " ... I think we still do a very good job of caring, and there are some counseling sessions that don't make employees feel particularly panicked..." (P6)

**Effective HR Practices:** To answer question 3 the researchers analyzed the data and came up with the appropriate themes and categories. As shown in Table 4

**Table4: Theme 3, Effective HR Practices**

Theme 3	Category
Effective HR Practices	C3.1 Organize training
	C3.2 Career development
	C3.3 Employee retention
	C3.4 Employee care
	C3.5 Employee motivation

The researchers found that in the selected four-star hotels in Yunnan province, some HR practices were effective in dealing with the HR problems caused by COVID-19 pandemic, including:

**C3.1 Organize training;** the study found that through training, employees can acquire some knowledge about epidemic prevention, and it also enables them to acquire more skills in more types of work, and to cultivate composite skills. "... If something more important, it is training. We will train our staff on some anti-epidemic measures online..." (P4) "... We conduct some online training to help staff improve their job skills..." (P12)

**C3.2 Career development;** The study found that career development plans are developed for employees to motivate them and stimulate their potential. " ... We can provide more career development programs for our employees to encourage them to acquire more skills and knowledge for their positions..." (P4)

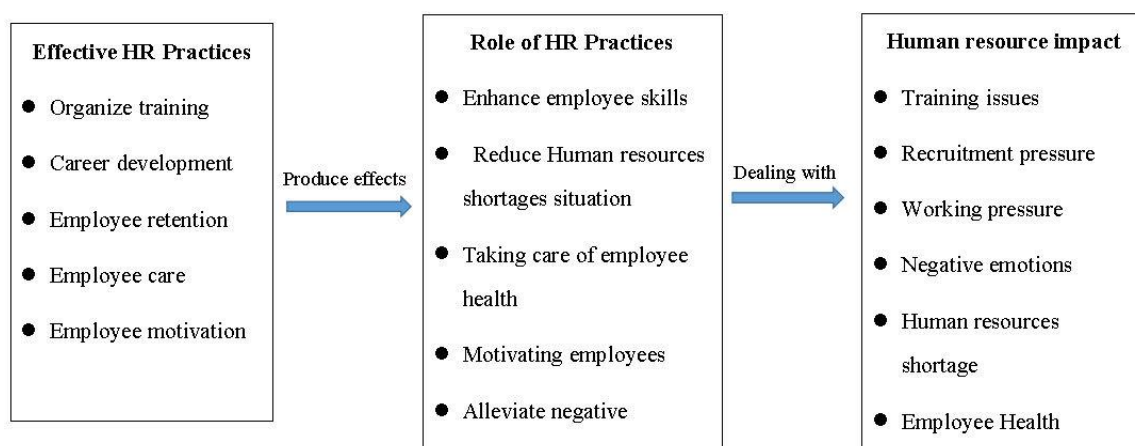
**C3.3 Employee retention;** the study found that retaining employees as much as possible reduces the loss of hotel manpower. "... Finding ways to retain them reduces our loss of manpower, which also facilitates the subsequent recovery work and resumption of work in our hotel..." (P5)

**C3.4 Employee care;** Caring for employees is important to make them feel warm, improve their welfare, and make them feel valued. " ... To improve employee welfare, prepare better food for employees, and prioritize caring for employees..." (P1)

**C3.5 Employee Motivation;** Material rewards are given to employees through some reward systems; besides material recognition, spiritual recognition is also necessary. Thus, increasing their motivation to work. " ... Prepare some incentive programs for your employees... Of course, besides material recognition, spiritual recognition is also necessary..." (P6)

**4. HR practice model:** To answer the fourth question, the researcher analyzed and identified some of the impacts of COVID-19 on human resources in the hotel industry and some of the effective human resource practices to deal with these impacts. As a result, the researcher created the following model utilizing all themes and categories. As shown in Figure 1

**Figure 1: Model of HR practice for four-star hotel in Yunnan province**



The model is based on the results of this research and consists of 3 themes and 16 categories. The model shows that during the COVID-19 pandemic period, four-star hotels in Yunnan Province took some practical human resource measures, including organize training to improve employee protection knowledge; providing career development opportunities for employees and encouraging them to develop skills for a variety of positions; employees retention in order to reduce the loss of manpower from the hotels; employee care so that employees feel valued; and employee motivation. Provide some human resource help for hotels to enhance employee skills, reduce human resource shortage situations, take care of employee health, motivate employees, and alleviate negative emotions. To address the training issues, recruitment pressure, working pressure, negative emotions, human resource shortage, and the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on employee health in human resources of four-star hotels in Yunnan Province. It is hoped that this model will be helpful for HR practitioners in the hotel industry. It also provides a reference for related research on human resource practices in the hotel industry.

## Discussion

**In response to the question "What are the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on the human resource management for the four-star hotel in Yunnan province", it includes:**

**1. Human Resource Impacts:**

**1.1 Training issues:** Due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, offline training has shifted towards online training, which poses difficulties in evaluating training effectiveness and ensuring student motivation, which is the same as the findings of Gicas et al. (2021).

**1.2 Recruitment Pressures:** Recruitment stress existed in the hotels during the recovery period is in line with the results of the study by Kaushal and Srivastava (2021). COVID-19 pandemic has brought a lot of stress to the hotel industry. The insecurity created by COVID-19 pandemic in the hotel industry can negatively affect the recruitment of hotel employees in the future (Mao et al., 2020).

**1.3 Work Pressures:** During the beginning of the outbreak and the resumption of work, the employees again faced stress due to understaffing and an increase in their workload. This is in line with Agarwal (2021) who stated in his study that COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the problem of long working hours in the hotel industry.

**1.4 Negative Emotions:** hotel employees feel nervous, anxious, panicky and worried about their health and working environment. This is also confirmed by Shehata and Selem (2021) in their study. The fear of infection has become a worrying issue that not only damages the mood of hotel employees but also affects cognitive and behavioral responses.

**1.5 Human Resource Shortage:** COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated staff turnover in the hotel industry. This was proved by Xue et al. (2022), whose study indicated that COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated the problem of shortage of staff in the hotel industry.

**1.6 Employee Health:** COVID-19 pandemic jeopardizes the health of employees, especially those who provide services to guests. This is supported by the study of Chinazzi et al. (2020) who stated that various jobs in the hotel industry were particularly susceptible to the disease during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**In response to the question "How did the four-star hotel industry in Yunnan province respond to COVID-19 pandemic in the early and middle stages of the pandemic?" It includes:**

**2. Role of HR practices:**

**2.1 Enhance employee skills:** hotels are upgrading the skills of their staff through training to equip them with some protective skills and knowledge about COVID-19 pandemic. This is supported by Agarwal's (2021) study, which showed that hotel staff were less fearful after training.

**2.2 Reduce Human resources shortages:** hotels are adopting a variety of

human resource measures such as multi-tasking and flexible employment to alleviate hotel staff shortages in a short period of time. Mousa et al. (2022) agreed with this view. Multi-tasking and other competencies of hotel staff are important in COVID-19 pandemic. **2.3 Taking care of employee health:** Providing hotel employees with some necessary protective equipment and disinfection tools can provide some protection for employees' health. This is in line with the findings of Salem et al. (2021). **2.4 Motivating employees:** motivating employees to work better through pay, benefits and recognition is supported by Jeha et al. (2022) who showed that appropriate financial incentives in the context of COVID-19 pandemic can keep employees engaged and motivated. **2.5 Alleviate negative emotions:** hotels alleviate negative emotions such as anxiety and stress through training, caring for employees and creating a positive atmosphere. This is supported by Ruiz-Palomino et al. (2022) who suggest that a leader's style may play an important role in helping to minimize negative emotions among employees.

**In reply to the question " What are the HR practices of the four-star hotel industry in Yunnan province during COVID-19 pandemic?" Which includes:**

**3. Effective HR practices:** **3.1 Organized training:** organized training is very effective, which coincides with the findings of Salem et al. (2021) that during the pandemic, training hotel employees by implementing cross-training, retraining employees to take on new roles or cover multiple roles, and providing them with training and educational sessions on infection prevention was is very important. **3.2 Career development:** providing career development opportunities to employees during COVID-19 pandemic can be effective in motivating employees, developing their potential and meeting the needs of the hotel. This result is consistent with the study of Japutra and Situmorang (2021), who recommended preparing employees for similar crises in the future. Employees may need to be trained to support future hotel operations. **3.3 Employee retention:** Retaining employees as much as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic period can be effective in helping hotels to minimize losses. This result is consistent with the findings of Ineson et al. (2013), Salem et al. (2021), Hu et al. (2021) and Xue et al. (2022). They stated that employee retention and employee training are important during health-related crises, and that the cost of retaining employees is lower than the cost of letting them go. **3.4 Employee care:** Taking care of employees, and making them feel warm is an important part of coping with COVID-19 pandemic. This is the same as the

findings of Xue et al. (2022) that employees should be provided with a safe and comfortable working environment that meets their needs in work and life. **3.5 Employee Motivation:** Providing employees with material rewards and spiritual recognition through some incentive systems during COVID-19 pandemic can increase employee motivation. Ann and Blum (2020), Japutra and Situmorang (2021) and Salem et al. (2021) also provide support for this view. They argued that giving recognition and incentives to employees can increase their job satisfaction. A combination of cash and non-cash incentives may be the best option during a crisis.

**In reply to the question “What does the model of HR practice for a four-star hotel in Yunnan province look like?”**

The researcher proposed a model based on the results of this study including the three themes and 16 categories of this study. The model argues that four-star hotels in Yunnan Province have taken effective HR practices during COVID-19 pandemic, including organizational training, career development, employee retention, employee care, employee motivation, etc. They provided some HR help to employees, including enhancing employee skills, reducing HR shortages, taking care of employee health, motivating employees, and alleviating negative emotions. To cope with the human resource impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on four-star hotels in Yunnan Province. Researcher hope that this model can be helpful to HR practitioners in the hotel industry. And provide reference for the research of HR practice in the hotel industry.

**Recommendation from this research**

1. The research objective of this study is the four-star hotel in Yunnan Province, which has certain limitations. It is suggested that future research can be conducted on other countries or regions, or other star-rated hotels.
2. In future studies, researchers can conduct more detailed studies on the role of various human resource practices in the hotel industry.
3. This study mainly investigates people who work in the HR department in the hotel industry and does not involve other departments of the hotel industry, so there are certain limitations. Future research can be carried out in other departments of the hotel industry.

4. Another limitation of this study is that it mainly considers the hotel industry, which leaves an obvious gap for future research. It is necessary to consider other participants in the leisure industry, such as travel agencies, airlines, restaurants, and restrictions, which can fill the potential gap and improve scholars' and practitioners' understanding of coping with the current crisis. And minimize future impacts.

5. Quantitative research methods can be used in future studies to obtain more research data and samples, to draw a conclusion that researchers can use quantitative or mixed methods to conduct more research and obtain more research data and samples, so as to understand the role of human resource practice in the hotel industry.

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