



# The Ideal Resort Employee; Perspectives From Maldivian Employers

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**ARTICLE INFO****ABSTRACT**

This study explores Maldivian hiring managers' perceptions in the resort sector, investigating ideal employee attributes. A questionnaire was distributed to 144 decision-makers, examining determinants like gender, nationality, age, knowledge, and skills. Gender was not a primary consideration, but age and nationality subtly influenced preferences for youth and local candidates. Skills played a crucial role in hiring decisions, with locals excelling in specific areas. However, a disconnect between perception and practice was noted, as hiring foreigners prevailed, possibly due to biases about local work ethics. The paper highlights the need to address biases in resort hiring, emphasizing individual suitability and organizational alignment.

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**Keywords:** Hiring, Gender, Age, Nationality, Skills and Knowledge

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## Introduction

The authority to make hiring decisions rests with the individual responsible for selecting a candidate to fill a job vacancy. This decision hinges on the evaluation of the candidate's qualifications, encompassing their skills, knowledge, and other socio-economic attributes deemed essential for the job's successful execution (Kwok et al., 2011). The essential anticipation is that the chosen candidate will exhibit the capacity to perform the job's responsibilities in a manner that aligns with the organization's service quality standards, aiming to satisfy its customer base. Consequently, it is imperative for those in charge of hiring to meticulously assess the candidate's relevant knowledge, skills, and other attributes essential for delivering the product or service. Subsequently, a decision to hire the candidate possessing the requisite skills and knowledge is made, with the objective of ensuring customer satisfaction with the delivered goods or services. In essence, an organization's success is contingent upon the quality of the product or service delivered and the level of customer contentment it garners.

In an effort to expand and revamp the tourism sector, the Maldivian government, as outlined in the 2023-2027 Tourism Master Plan, is committed to implementing strategies aimed at attracting and retaining a world-class workforce within the sector. These strategies encompass various key initiatives. To encourage young individuals to pursue careers in tourism, the government intends to enhance their understanding of the industry by integrating essential skills into the national curriculum for higher secondary students. Moreover, there is a proposition to revamp the BTec Tourism program in order to more closely correspond with the distinct demands of the tourism sector (Ministry of Tourism, 2023).

The master plan also addresses the goal of increasing the participation of women in the industry. This objective is to be achieved through the introduction of flexible work hours and adaptable work platforms, which will facilitate the integration of women into the sector. Additionally, the strategies aim to augment the number of Maldivians in executive and managerial positions within the industry. This will be accomplished through various measures, including harmonizing pay structures, providing specialized training, and offering opportunities for international exposure.

Further, the capacity of the tourism industry to generate employment is consistently recognized by national governments as a primary rationale for the expansion of tourism (Salih, 2013). Notably, the sector is in a phase

of expansion, with virtually every atoll, except Gnaviyani atoll, in the Maldives hosting at least one resort, offering employment opportunities. Nonetheless, the practical situation diverges from this optimistic picture, as these employment positions within the sector are predominantly occupied by foreign nationals, leaving many Maldivians, including men, women, and the youth, without job. Clearly, the government's main goal in promoting tourism expansion is to generate job prospects for the local populace. Nevertheless, the current scenario, characterized by the substantial presence of foreign workers, contradicts this intended goal.

Moreover, the underlying narrative in strategic initiatives of the government emphasizes the importance of skilled and experienced workers within the tourism industry to effectively meet the evolving needs and expectations of modern tourists. This emphasis underscores the significance of specific competencies deemed crucial for maintaining a leading position in the market (Ministry of Tourism, 2023).

According to Shakeela et al., (2011) the tourism industry is widely recognized as a sector that offers relatively accessible employment opportunities. This accessibility can be attributed to several factors, such as the lower skill requirements, the availability of diverse job types, and the dynamic characteristics of the labor market within the industry (Baum, 2007; Varra et al., 2021). Moreover, the resort sector encompasses a broad spectrum of employment opportunities, ranging from skilled to unskilled positions, both long-term and short-term engagements, positions suitable for newcomers to the job market, as well as experienced workers, catering to various age groups. The industry's adaptability makes it a potentially significant employer for job seekers. Nevertheless, despite the prevalence of high unemployment rates in the Maldives, a substantial foreign workforce is found in the resort sector, as indicated by the 2022 census, where 70% of the resort labor force comprises foreign workers (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Notwithstanding the above, foreign labor can undoubtedly offer numerous advantages to the economy, particularly in addressing weaknesses in the domestic labor market and mitigating skill shortages (Innerhofer, et al., 2022; Lima et al., 2023; Lugosi & Ndiuini, 2022). Nevertheless, in the Maldives, where a considerable proportion of the local population is actively seeking employment, the displacement of these job prospects by foreign labor is deemed unacceptable unless the foreign workforce has substantially better skills.

Building upon the preceding discussion, despite the tourism sector's reputation for encompassing a wide spectrum of competencies and offering opportunities for virtually anyone (Camilleri, 2011; Verma et al., 2022), a pressing question emerges regarding the marginalization of local job seekers. Notably, resorts are mandated to maintain a specific ratio of local to foreign workforce, yet this requirement frequently goes unmet, with foreign workers disproportionately occupying positions, disregarding the prescribed ratio (Salih, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2019; Pambreni et al., 2019; Udriyah et al., 2019).

In practice, the ultimate authority in hiring decisions rests with the employer, who plays an essential role in selecting the individuals best suited to deliver the optimal tourism product. Each job within the sector necessitates distinct abilities and skills, with certain competencies, knowledge, and attributes assuming particular significance in the service-oriented context, to which the resort sector belongs (Derco & Tometzová, 2023). Thus, comprehending the skills, knowledge, and other attributes deemed influential in the hiring decisions made by these employers is of paramount importance.

This scholarly article centers on the resort industry in the Maldives, which is a geographically extensive sector within the country. As per the International Labour Organisation (2011), tourism is known for its significant reliance on labor and serves as a major source of employment, ranking among the top creators of jobs worldwide. Moreover, the tourism industry provides a wide array of job opportunities that need various abilities, allowing for quick integration into the labor market, particularly for young people, women, and migrant workers (International Labour Organization, 2011).

Consequently, this paper aims to explore into the perspective of Maldivian employers and their criteria for ideal employees within the resort sector. It explores the socio-economic attributes, skills, and knowledge that employers consider vital in this sector, shedding light on their perceptions of which individuals possess these qualities and are likely to excel in resort-related roles.

The main aims of this study article are as follows:

- (1) To delineate the competencies, knowledge, and other socio-economic attributes that hirers in the resort sector deem significant when making hiring decisions for the industry.
- (2) To ascertain the perceptions of tourism hirers regarding which individuals possess specific skills and attributes, and who is anticipated to excel within the resort sector.

As such, the paper aims to answer the following research questions; what are the knowledge, skills and other attributes hirers consider as important when making hiring decisions in the resort sector, and whom do the

hirers regard possessing ideal knowledge and skills suited to perform better in the sector. This paper offers insights into the factors influencing hiring decisions by Maldivian hirers, addressing skills, knowledge, and socio-economic attributes. It also examines perceptions of who performs better, comparing locals and foreigners, covering skills, potential gender-related disparities, and variations related to age or experience of entrants providing valuable guidance for potential workforce.

## Literature Review

This literature review synthesizes the key dimensions considered by scholars in the context of hiring employees within the hospitality industry, with a specific emphasis on the resort sector. It encompasses factors such as knowledge, skills, and demographic attributes, notably age, gender, and nationality.

### Knowledge and Skills

The study conducted by Wakelin-Theron et al., (2018) provided clear and specific definitions for both knowledge and abilities. Knowledge is defined as the factual or theoretical information possessed by an individual in a certain field, which forms the basis for performing tasks (Siachou et al., 2021). Merely possessing information does not automatically make someone skilled at carrying out activities. Skills, however, refer to an individual's capacity to efficiently utilize their knowledge to do specific activities, in accordance with (Berntson, 2008) claim that skills are the second crucial aspect.

Various critical skills and knowledge are essential for success within the resort sector. Broadly, these encompass problem-solving abilities to identifying issues and devising effective solutions, adaptability to navigate changing needs and situations, teamwork and collaboration skills to deliver high-quality service, awareness and respect for diversity leading to cultural competence, and industry-specific knowledge such as an understanding of the products being sold and knowledge of industry standards and regulations (Yong et al., 2023; Tsitskari et al., 2017). In the context of a hotel setting, essential hard skills include basic numeracy and a grasp of food and beverage safety and hygiene for the food and beverages department, as well as laundry and cleaning skills, which are crucial for the housekeeping department (Tham et al., 2017; Rachmawati et al., 2019; Ngope, 2021). Individuals pursuing front office roles may gain competitive edge by possessing hard skills like computer proficiency and typing abilities. Additionally, front desk personnel should exhibit a range of soft skills, including language proficiency, a positive attitude, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, adaptability, effective communication, organizational aptitude, and multitasking capabilities of which some are also imperative in the housekeeping and food and beverage departments (Tanković et al., 2021; Caruana & McPherson, 2015).

Wang et al., (2013) also listed a variety of crucial skills necessary for the sector, including verbal communication, interpersonal skills, professional integrity, customer service, teamwork, self-assurance, industry knowledge, and collaborative abilities. Additionally, essential knowledge and skills include awareness of customer service, ethical behavior in the workplace, verbal communication, responsibility, meticulousness, stress management, time management abilities, and motivation (Wakelin-Theron et al., 2018).

In addition, Fajaryati et al., (2020) identified a set of essential skills demanded from employees in the contemporary workplace in 2020. Critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, judgment, cognitive flexibility, decision-making, service orientation, creativity, and negotiation were all included in this set of abilities. Furthermore, the (World Economic Forum, 2016), underscored the significance of emotional intelligence in equipping new entrants to effectively manage challenging interactions with guests. Additionally, creativity was emphasized as an essential skill in the workforce, as noted in studies by (Zhou & Hoever, 2014).

Furthermore, several critical skills are identified as relevant to the hospitality industry, including the resort sector which encompasses teamwork, multitasking, flexibility, attention to detail, industry awareness, time management, communication, problem-solving, interpersonal skills, and hazard awareness (Kumar & Sharma, 2019; Moyo & Özgit, 2022; Silva, 2022). Additional skills and knowledge required were in customer service, communication, adaptability and flexibility, language proficiency, and cultural sensitivity (Cochrane, 2010; Ramachandran et al., 2011; Tavitiyaman et al., 2023). Furthermore, soft skills like empathy and emotional intelligence, teamwork, stress management, time management, problem-solving, and strategy and innovation are essential in tourism (Fernández-Gámez et al., 2018; Chou et al., 2019; Pranić et al., 2021; Mahato et al., 2021).

In summation, various authors and organizations underscore various skills and knowledge as vital within the industry. Nevertheless, certain competencies and knowledge, such as customer service skills, communication and language proficiency, industry knowledge, teamwork skills, finance and management knowledge, and skills, emerge as recurrently cited essentials in the field of tourism (Chan, 2010).

### **Demographic Attributes**

Demographic attributes, including age, gender, and nationality, significantly shape hiring decisions in the service sector, especially within the resort industry (Baum, 2010). Traditionally, the hospitality industry has been characterized by gender-specific roles, with women often assigned duties aligned with their societal roles, often an extension of their domestic responsibilities. Consequently, women are more commonly found in roles related to in-room service or cleaning. In contrast, men are frequently tasked with physically demanding responsibilities, administrative duties, and managerial roles that require advanced skills, resulting in higher remuneration (Sayer, 2005; European Parliamentary Research Service (EPKS), 2016).

The tourism and hospitality sector, often labelled a “people business,” sees extensive employee-customer interaction (Dolničar et al., 2011; Koc, 2019). Studies reveal women’s heightened sensitivity and proficiency in tasks like recognizing facial expressions (Meyers-Levy & Loken, 2014; Reilly & Neumann, 2013), women excelling in social cognition, inferring others’ beliefs and emotions (Di Tella et al., 2020; Adenzato et al., 2017) and their multitasking abilities suit the dynamic resort environment (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2011; Stoe et al., 2013). Adaptability, conscientiousness, and reliability are further strengths (Coetzee & Harry, 2014; Chapman et al., 2007; Hub, 2023) of women, their patience, stress resilience, timeliness, and empathy contribute to effective service handling (Maznieda et al., 2022; Corbishley & Mason, 2011; Donges et al., 2012). Proficiency in communication enhances teamwork, trustworthiness, and ethical behavior, distinguishing women in the sector (Cleveland et al., 2003; Haselhuhn et al., 2015; Jaffee & Hyde, 2000) and women’s honesty, politeness, and friendliness ensure excellent service quality (Kosfeld et al., 2005; Paguio, 2010).

Historically, leadership was associated with qualities like strength, dominance, and extraversion, characteristics often attributed to men, while women were perceived as nurturing, sensitive, and submissive. As (Chizema et al., 2015) noted, this division of roles persists, with men being more likely to hold authoritative positions, and women often taking on caregiving responsibilities at home and in the workplace.

Resort sector in the Maldives is a male dominant sector, and everyday interactions in male-dominated work environments pose challenges for females to perform, as highlighted by authors (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Dewi et al., 2019; Maghfuriyah et al., 2019). It reveals that men tend to outperform women in male-dominated or culturally masculine leadership settings, while women tend to surpass men in environments that are less male-dominated and less culturally masculine (Heilman & Eagly, 2008).

From an age perspective, jobs demanding physical labor often necessitate youthful individuals with the vitality and physical stamina to excel. In contrast, roles where maturity and experience are assets might be better suited to those in more advanced age groups (International Labour Organization, 2018; Ng & Feldman, 2008). The industry’s allure may be particularly appealing to the younger generation due to the vibrant and dynamic work environment it offers.

Regarding nationality, there may be compelling reasons for considering it as a critical factor. For instance, the authentic delivery of a unique product, characteristic of the Maldives’ resort sector, might be best accomplished by a Maldivian as opposed to a foreign national.

Several studies have highlighted the relevance of personal characteristics, including gender, in enhancing employee and managerial performance (Flaxman et al., 2018; Jain, 2018; Laguna & Razmus, 2018). Research has established a strong connection between employee performance in the tourism and hospitality sector and their suitability for specific roles within these industries (Lou et al., 2019; Bellou & Andronikidis, 2017). Thus, there is a noticeable gap in the existing literature pertains to the specific skills and demographic attributes prioritized within the industry, and their subsequent influence on the differential performance of individuals within the studied demographics.

### **Methodology**

The list of items used in this study; majority was adapted from research conducted by the authors who compiled FIHRHD Model (Kwok, 2011), while some were developed through the initial engagement of the author with some Managers from the resort sector. A total of 5 interviews were carried out to identify a core set of questions that need to be carried out to understand the perception behind the managers who make the hiring decisions. Questions adapted and formulated include understanding the employer’s perception on who is more suited and who, in their opinion, would perform better in the resort environment. These aspects were evaluated based on the demographics, skills and knowledge, and also other attributes such as personality. A sample was obtained using simple random sampling method, applied to a sample frame; list of resorts obtained from the Ministry of Tourism. A selection of 103 resorts were made from the published list of resorts, 145 resort, those which were in operation by end of 2020 (Ministry of Tourism, n.d.), and sample size was decided based on the

assumption that from each selected resort, three people will be making decisions of hiring and the population for the study was considered as 309. Given the value of N to be 309, the suggested sample is 175 (Kenpro, 2016). The questionnaire was administered to 175 participants across a selection of HR Managers and HoD's in the selected resorts. The following analysis is based on the Maldivians who participated in this study, a total of 144 managers and HoD's responsible for making the hiring decisions.

The questionnaire was administered through a google form shared via email and WhatsApp. The questionnaire had over 50 plus questions of which only selected questions were utilized in this paper. Whether an acceptable analysis can be drawn and the subsequent analyses are valid depends on the quality of the initial data screening (Roni & Djajadikerta, 2021). Out of 210 questionnaires distributed, which accounted for the minimum sample size, plus the 20% non-response expected to sample surveys, 176 questionnaires were returned. 175 of the returned questionnaires were used after excluding one which had monotone responses.

The data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 26, which generates statistics and carry out quantitative analysis, namely descriptive statistics (Azam et al., 2023; Rahman & Muktadir, 2021). Descriptive statistics allows to summarize and describe the basic characteristics and perceptions of the respondents of this study. Although it does not allow the researcher to make presumptive conclusions, it directs towards the method of advanced statistical tests which are appropriate in order to infer conclusions from the data (Allen, 2017).

Researchers (Azam et al., 2021; Hajjaji et al., 2021) indicates that data analysis covers the total parts of data management which includes data reduction, tracing and summarizing, and application of appropriate statistical procedures to the data. Data interpretation and assessing, whether the data is consistent with the theory or hypothesis being tested is also included in the purview of data analysis.

### **Findings**

Prior to finding answers to the objective of this paper, it is important to understand the respondents to this study.

**Table 1: Respondents Profile**

Respondents Profile		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	124	86.11%
	Female	20	13.89%
Age	18 to 27	13	9.03%
	28 to 37	59	40.97%
	38 to 47	46	31.94%
	Above 47	26	18.06%
Marital Status	Single	27	18.75%
	Married	106	73.61%
	Divorced/Widowed	11	7.64%
Level of Education	Primary Education	7	4.86%
	Secondary and Higher Secondary Education	40	27.78%
	Undergraduate	47	32.64%
	Postgraduate and above	40	27.78%
	Professional Certification	10	6.94%
Employment Status	Owner of the Establishment	4	2.78%
	Entrepreneur	3	2.08%
	Working for the Organization	137	95.14%
Income Level	< 10,000 MVR	0	0.00%
	10,001 MVR to 20,000 MVR	35	24.31%

	20,001 MVR to 30,000 MVR	31	21.53%
	> 30,001 MVR	78	54.17%
Respondents Job level	Associate Level (Management)	11	7.64%
	Mid/Senior Level (Management)	25	17.36%
	Manager Level (Management)	51	35.42%
	Director Level (Senior Management)	25	17.36%
	Executive Level (Senior Management)	32	22.22%
Type of employment	Full-Time Staff	139	96.53%
	Contract Staff	5	3.47%
Years of experience in the establishment	< 1 year	21	14.58%
	1 to 3 years	28	19.44%
	3 to 5 years	15	10.42%
	5 to 7 years	19	13.19%
	7 to 10 years	9	6.25%
	> 10 years	52	36.11%
Years of experience in the industry	< 1 year	0	0.00%
	1 to 3 years	6	4.17%
	3 to 5 years	11	7.64%
	5 to 7 years	11	7.64%
	7 to 10 years	16	11.11%
	> 10 years	100	69.44%
Years of experience in managing people	< 1 year	3	2.08%
	1 to 3 years	14	9.72%
	3 to 5 years	14	9.72%
	5 to 7 years	25	17.36%
	7 to 10 years	21	14.58%
	> 10 years	67	46.53%

The profile of the respondent is studied in terms of demographic, socio-economic and job experience level questions. The statistics provided in Table 1 describes the respondents. Based on the table, 124 (86.1%) were male and almost two thirds of the respondents were between the age of 28 to 47 (72.9%) while less than 10% were between 18 to 27 years of age. Majority of the respondents (73.6%) were married, while 18.8% were single. As for the level of education, 60.4% of the respondents had an undergraduate level education or higher, while 32.7% of the respondents had a higher secondary level education or lower and 6.9% respondents had a professional certification relevant to the industry. Also depicted is that 95.1% of the respondents were working for the organization as opposed to 4.9% respondents who considered themselves as entrepreneurs or owner of establishment. More than half of the respondents, 54.2% earn an income of more than 30,001 MVR while the rest earned an income between 10,001 MVR and 30,000 MVR.

As indicated from the same table, 60.4% of the respondents were from the management level and majority of the respondents, 96.5% were full time staff. As for years of experience working for the establishment, 55.6% of the respondents have been working in the same establishment for more than 5 years while 14.6% of respondents

had less than 1 year experience within the establishment. As for working in the industry, 88.19% has had 5 plus years of experience working in the industry while 11.8% of the respondents had less than 5 years of experience in the industry. As for experience in managing people, 62.47% has had more than 5 years of experience managing people while there was none with less than a year of experience in managing people.

Overall, majority of the respondents were men, as it is expected in the resort sector, where living away from home for long periods of time is expected, in an isolated island where those workers are provided all the necessities such as lodging and food. Although women are in general more active in the hospitality sector around the world (Baum et al., 2016), women are scarce in the resort sector of the Maldives (Shakeela et al., 2010). The Islamic culture in the Maldives coupled with the enclave tourism approach practiced, and the expected care taker of the family responsibility on the women in the Maldives hinders them from choosing a career in the sector (Shakeela et al., 2012).

Since it is difficult to find work in majority of the islands, due to small populations and subsequent minimal business opportunities, majority of men opt to find work in the resorts, at least, this was the case a couple of years ago. Rather than engaging in physically taxing jobs such as fishing or construction, most men, once their schooling days are over, would seek opportunities in a nearby resort, and in years, reach a level where they are able to make decisions, in this case regarding hiring and firing. Maldives has a young workforce, and average age of marriage in the Maldives is 26 years for men and 23 years for women (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2015), and it is no surprise that majority of those holding these positions in the resorts are in the age band of 28 to 47, who were married and working as full-time staff in the establishment. Furthermore, Maldives can proudly announce that a well-educated workforce is at the helm of running these resorts, and due to the opportunities available to study online, even though their full-time jobs at the resorts hinder them from travelling, they are able to get a good level of education, and hence two thirds of the respondents had a tertiary or higher level of education. A little more than half of them earn above 30,001 rufiyaa as a monthly salary, which can be considered a very good salary, as the average pay in the Maldives for a public sector job is around 15,000 rufiyaa (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2022) while the minimum wage a resort worker would get is 11,966 rufiyaa (PSM News, 2021). Additionally, their food and accommodation, and their uniform costs are covered by the resort.

This sector is considered as one where people move from one establishment to another very frequently (Shakeela et al., 2012b; Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2020), however the last couple of years has been somewhat a different scenario. With Covid-19, and the layoffs in the resorts sector due to closure of resorts for a duration of around 6 months, people for the lack of better opportunities stuck with the establishments they were working in, which could be one of the reasons why more than half of the respondents has worked in the same establishment for more than 5 years. Also, the fact that once in this industry, the kind of work environment and the fact that this is the most prominent sector in the Maldives, gives a kind of a self-achievement. This could well be a reason behind more than two thirds of the respondents having more than 10 years of industry experience. Furthermore, in the service sector, managing people is the core of it. The fact that almost half of the respondents have had more than 10 years of experience in managing people shows that these respondents have had a good level of experience to inform this study.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Descriptive statistics were used in this study to analyse the mean and standard deviations of the data collected. These statistics were used to measure the level of agreement on the demographic, skills, knowledge and personality attributes which influences on the hiring decisions made by these employers in the Maldives resorts sector. A mean score determination scale of 5 levels were used with 1 – 1.80 as strongly disagree, 1.81 – 2.60 as Disagree, 2.61 – 3.40 as Neither Agree nor Disagree (Neutral), 3.41 – 4.20 as Agree, and 4.21 – 5.00 as Strongly Agree, to determine the levels of the items (Pimentel, 2010).

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for factors on hiring decision**

	Mean	SD	Level
Influencing factors			
In my opinion; gender is a very important factor considered in hiring for the tourism industry	2.46	1.152	Disagree
In my opinion; age is a very important factor considered in hiring for the tourism industry	3.13	1.148	Neutral
In my opinion; nationality is a very important factor considered in hiring for the tourism industry	2.53	1.09	Disagree
In my opinion; industry knowledge is a very important factor considered in hiring for the tourism industry	3.95	0.941	Agree

In my opinion; industry relevant skills are a very important factor considered in hiring for the tourism industry	4.04	0.835	Agree
In my opinion; soft skills is a very important factor considered in hiring for the tourism industry	4.01	0.78	Agree

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for factors that may influence hiring decisions. These measure the perception of the employer regarding the employer's choice and opinion in the factors that may make an impact in the hiring decision in the resort sector. From Table 2, it can be observed that "In my opinion; gender is a very important factor considered in hiring for the tourism industry" and "In my opinion; nationality is a very important factor considered in hiring for the tourism industry" had the lowest mean scores with 2.46 and 2.53 respectively, reflecting that respondent disagreed that gender and nationality are important factors when hiring in the resort sector.

Furthermore, "In my opinion; age is a very important factor considered in hiring for the tourism industry" also had a mean score of 3.13, indicating that respondents were indecisive as to whether it is a factor which is important to be considered in hiring.

Additionally, "In my opinion; industry knowledge is a very important factor considered in hiring for the tourism industry", "In my opinion; industry relevant skills are a very important factor considered in hiring for the tourism industry" and "In my opinion; soft skills is a very important factor considered in hiring for the tourism industry" had a mean score of 3.95, 4.04, 4.01 respectively, reflecting that respondent were in agreement that industry knowledge, industry relevant skills and soft skills are considered important factors when hiring in the resort sector.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for perception regarding age and gender better suited for the resort sector**

	Mean	SD	Level
Age			
In general, a person in their twenties and thirties will do a better job in the resort sector	3.48	1.010	Agree
General level resort jobs are more appropriate for the youth than the elderly	3.67	0.967	Agree
Gender			
In general, a man working in the resort sector will do a better job than a woman	2.65	1.156	Neutral
Men are more suited for a senior management job in the resort sector than women	2.67	1.188	Neutral
Women are more suited for a supervisory level job in the resort sector than men.	2.66	0.976	Neutral
Women are more suited for a job in the reception, to greet the customers than men	3.08	1.159	Neutral

The level of agreement on age and gender were analyzed based on the mean scores and standard deviation of individual items as given in the Table 3. From the table, it can be observed that "In general, a person in their twenties and thirties will do a better job in the resort sector", and "General level resort jobs are more appropriate for the youth than the elderly" had high mean score with 3.48 and 3.67 respectively. This shows that most respondents perceive that youth is a better fit in the industry compared to elderly. Also, it can also be observed that all the items related to gender had mean scores in the range where it is considered as neutral, reflecting that gender of the person does not make him or her a better at a senior management job, or as a supervisor or as a front staff greeting the customers.

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Nationality**

	Mean	SD	Level
Nationality			
Foreign workers tend to perform better in most resort jobs	2.34	1.078	Disagree
Maldivian workforce would deliver a better service than their foreign counterparts.	3.68	1.101	Agree
In general, an employee who is from South East Asia (Philippines/Thailand) will perform better than the rest	2.20	1.035	Disagree

In general, an employee who is from South Asia (Srilanka/India/Bangladesh/Nepal) will perform better than the rest	2.26	1.058	Disagree
In general, an employee who is from the west will perform better than the rest	2.09	0.923	Disagree

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for items related to nationality. From the table it can be observed that “Maldivian workforce would deliver a better service than their foreign counterparts” had a mean score of 3.68 which was considered high, meaning that most respondents perceive that Maldivians in general does a better job at their work than their foreign counterparts. Whether the South Asians, the South East Asians, or the western workers do a better job, compared to the rest scored between the range 1.81 – 2.60 which means that majority of the respondents disagree that foreign workers tend to perform better in the resort sector.

**Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Skills and Knowledge**

	Mean	SD	Level
<b>Skills and Knowledge</b>			
Compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has better finance knowledge	2.99	0.942	Neutral
Compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has better management knowledge	3.35	0.985	Neutral
Compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has less industry specific knowledge	2.40	0.977	Disagree
Compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has better management skills	3.31	0.95	Neutral
Compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has better critical thinking skills	3.35	0.95	Neutral
Compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has better team work and collaboration skills	3.68	0.987	Agree
Compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has better people skills	3.44	1.002	Agree

Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics for perception on skills and knowledge that a local has, compared with that of a foreign worker. The skills and knowledge discussed here were identified as some of the basic skills that is required in the sector in general. From the table it can be observed that “Compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has better team work and collaboration skills”, and “Compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has better people skills” had mean scores of 3.68, and 3.44 which determines that as per the respondents, locals were better at these skills than the foreigners. However, for the items on “Compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has better management knowledge”, and “Compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has better finance knowledge” and “Compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has better management skills” had mean scores of 3.35, 2.99, 3.35 and 3.31 respectively. This shows that most respondents were not decisive as to whether locals or foreigners had these definitive knowledge and skills. Additionally, one of the items which was disagreed by the respondents was that compared to a foreign employee, a local employee has less industry specific knowledge, which indicates that the respondents in fact perceive locals to have more industry specific knowledge.

**Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for perception regarding work experience and exposure for the resort sector**

	Mean	SD	Level
<b>Experience and Exposure</b>			
Candidates who have had resort experience will perform better in this job than a graduate joining the labour market	3.65	1.061	Agree
Those candidates with international exposure and background will perform better than new entrants into the labour market	3.60	0.998	Agree

According to Table 6, candidates who have had resort experience are believed to perform better in this job than a graduate joining the labour market, and candidates with international exposure and background are also believed to perform better than new entrants into the labour market with high mean scores of 3.60 and 3.65 respectively. This shows that most respondents perceive that person with previous industry experience and/or international exposure would be in a better position to serve in the sector.

## Discussion

As previously discussed, gender itself is not typically perceived as the key determining factor in job roles within the resort sector, nor is there a clear indication that employers make gender-based job role assignments. However, the preceding discourse does reveal that certain inherent qualities found in individuals may make them better suited for particular job roles. Women are often associated with qualities such as higher levels of empathy and proficiency in handling emotional situations (Donges et al., 2012). They are also considered to be more conscientious and diligent (Cudia, 2009; Verbree et al., 2022) reflecting traits of dependability and reliability in employees (Stock et al., 2016). Furthermore, women are believed to possess more patience and the ability to withstand stress, enabling them to better navigate critical situations (Motowidlo et al., 2013). Individuals with these qualities may excel in supervisory roles where they are required to manage situations, especially when service failures result in customer dissatisfaction.

On the other hand, men are often associated with leadership qualities, including a propensity for taking authority, physical strength, and a firm and assertive nature (Alqahtani, 2019). However, despite the evidence suggesting that certain qualities may make women better suited for roles within the resort sector, this may not hold true in the context of the Maldives. This disparity is primarily driven by preconceived notions rooted in the perception of women as homemakers who should not work outside their home island (Thashkeel, 2021). Societal constructs impose restrictions on the mobility of women for employment, emphasizing the need for their protection. Consequently, in the Maldives, where certain islands have limited job opportunities, men, who are often considered the breadwinners, tend to seek employment in resorts; 94% of resort workers are males (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2023), while their female counterparts remain at home attending to domestic responsibilities.

As for nationality, opinion wise it was disagreed upon, denoting that the employers in the resort sector did not consider nationality to be a factor that influences hiring decisions. From the above discussion based on Table 4, it was observed that most respondents perceived that Maldivians in general does a better job at their work than their foreign counterparts. For all the other items referring to foreign workforce performing better, they disagreed on whether the South Asians, the South East Asians, or the western workers do a better job, compared to locals. This suggests that nationality is a topic open to debate and not invariably considered in the hiring process.

Additionally, it is worth noting that local employers in the Maldives perceive Maldivians to be more suitable for positions within the resort sector, even with the substantial foreign workforce currently in operation. There is no doubt that a Maldivian will be able to deliver the Maldives tourism product, the authentic product better than a foreign counterpart. And yet, foreigners dominate the market. This phenomenon leads to many questions, as to why, perceiving that locals will be better at performing in the sector, we tend to hire foreigners, which is the ground reality. This leads to the question of whether it has anything to do with the locals not having the required skills.

Whether the candidate is of a certain age, when employers hire them fared the same as nationality; they were indecisive. However, the responses to the other relevant questions did reflect that age did matter in how the respondents perceived that the employees perform. Those in the age band 20 to 30 were considered to perform better in these jobs. Generally, jobs in the resorts are seen to be hard work, requiring a certain level of physical strength. Functional jobs in the resort are also more appropriate for the youth than the elderly, meaning that respondents perceive that youth is a better fit in the sector. The younger you are, the better you fit into different cultures, the more adjustable, and easy going is their nature (Concordia University, 2011). The UNICEF "Dare to Dream" campaign (Alba, 2019) enumerates several compelling reasons why younger individuals are likely to excel in a contemporary work environment. According to their publication, the youth exhibit a remarkable aptitude for adapting to sudden changes, a trait highly advantageous in today's work atmosphere characterized by its agility, rapid pace, and constant flux. Younger workers readily embrace technological advancements, having been raised in an era of ubiquitous technology. They are also inherently more inclined towards continuous learning, possessing less preconceived notions from prior experiences, rendering them malleable for employers to shape in accordance with specific needs. Moreover, young employees bring a fresh and innovative perspective to business operations. Their reservoir of energy and unwavering work enthusiasm further sets them apart, making them more open to tackling challenges, these qualities are underscored as essential (Jamon et al., 2022).

According to an article shared on Travel and Tourism Maldives website, where 5 renowned personnel from the sector discussed the reason behind the large foreign workforce in the resort sector, sector experts agree that locals are as skilled or better than the foreigners (Travel and Tourism Maldives, 2020). Although there were some specific groups of skillsets, including culinary, spa and some engineering positions that require very specific skill are hard to find in the local populace. Furthermore, the article informs the reader that the only

thing Maldivians lack, the need to change our work culture; that we need the youth to learn work ethics and let them feel the importance of work. Also highlighted in this article was the fact that sometimes locals leave the job whenever they want, putting a stereotypical label on the local employees. (Travel and Tourism Maldives, 2020).

## Conclusion

From a skills and knowledge point of view, industry knowledge, industry relevant skills and soft skills were opined as very important factors in the hiring decision of the resort sector. The skills and knowledge discussed here were identified as some of the necessary skills and knowledge required for the sector. As for who possess the knowledge and skills better, local employees were deemed to have better team work and collaboration skills, better industry knowledge, and also better people skills. Whereas, for critical thinking skills, management knowledge and skills, finance knowledge, the respondents were indecisive as to who was better. From this discussion, with the employers stand on that industry specific skills and knowledge being an important factor for hiring, the rationale dictates that locals should be hired. However, the ground reality is different, bringing us to question ourselves, whether there is in fact a proper vetting system when considering whom to hire. Although a person has an opinion that a certain aspect is an important factor in the hiring process, this may not be seen in practice. Although we perceive that the locals would do a better job, and is perceived to have a better skill set compared to their foreign counterpart, the practice in hiring is implying that there is some “hesitancy” or other factors that have a higher or bigger influence than the normal requirements.

## Implication and Future Research

The implications of this study are significant generally in understanding that the preconceived perception on lack of skills and knowledge in the local labour force is a farce. At least in the perception of Maldivian hirers. Accepting that locals are as good as or better than their foreign counterparts in general areas, and strategically engaging in building those specific skills lacking in the local labour force bears implication on the educators.

Moreover, for policy makers, the research findings strongly advocate the significance of a policy directive aimed at involving Maldivians as hirers in the recruitment process and diminishing foreign influence over hiring and selection procedures within the resorts. This could be achieved through implementation of mandatory local placements, particularly in HR manager positions.

Given the findings from this study, coupled with the above discussions from other articles and studies, it is worth further investigating whether there are any other factors that play a more significant role in the hiring decision. It is important to consider that the locals are not being hired not because of their skill levels, and foreigners are being hired not because they have better skills, which can be observed from the data obtained from the employers. It is important to conduct research to find answers to the following questions. Is the stigma of discipline issues assigned to Maldivians hindering them from being hired? Or are past experiences of some resorts where locals went on strike due to certain alleged discriminations, which interrupted the smooth running of the resorts, hindering locals from being hired? Or are foreigners being hired due to their obedient nature? Is it a possibility that the locals are being sidelined due to an inherent bias in the hiring decisions made in the resort sector?

According to human resource management, relating to hiring decisions, every job has a required skill set, hard skills as well as soft skills. Every job has a set level of physical effort as well as mental strength. Every job has its predetermined level of customer engagements. All these naturally would be assessed through the recruitment methods, prior to hiring. In addition to person job fit, there are organization fit as well. It maybe worth formulating a specific framework for the resort sector, through further research, taking into consideration the distinctness in the different categories of resorts, the requisite talent in terms of skills, knowledge and other attributes.

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